

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE MADNESS, BETTERHELP SPOTLIGHTED ATHLETES' REALITY

Female collegiate athletes face a mental health crisis hidden in plain sight: they receive 3x more online abuse than male athletes.

During March 2025's annual women's college basketball tournament – the biggest stage for collegiate sports and thus the peak time for online harassment – BetterHelp launched a social movement that transformed negativity into national advocacy.

Starting with teaser posts from athletes that exposed real hate comments, the campaign evolved into branded activism with custom "Stop The Madness" jackets worn throughout the tournament, culminating in free therapy for all female college athletes and inspiring ongoing WNBA mental health initiatives.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

BRAND AWARENESS ISN'T ALWAYS ENOUGH FOR AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

Despite being one of the most recognizable names in online therapy, BetterHelp faced a deeper challenge: trust in digital mental health services remained fragile. Many viewed online therapy as impersonal or transactional, reinforcing a broader cultural skepticism toward mental health brands.

At the same time, BetterHelp's core millennial audience – particularly women engaged in the cultural momentum around women's sports – was witnessing a mental health crisis in real-time. Female collegiate athletes faced relentless online harassment during their most visible moments, yet societal support was lacking.

This created a unique opportunity: BetterHelp could address both challenges simultaneously. By tapping into the growing cultural momentum around women's sports – one that resonated with their core millennial women target audience – they could address a real mental health crisis head-on.

The objective was clear: prove that accessible mental health support can show up when it matters most, transforming brand perception by demonstrating real advocacy rather than transactional healthcare marketing.

RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

THE BIGGEST STAGE, THE WORST ABUSE

Female athletes' greatest triumphs become their worst nightmares – it's the ultimate contradiction. Research reveals that 1 in 3 collegiate athletes receive abusive messages online, with female athletes experiencing three times more threats than their male counterparts.

And that abuse only gets louder during key moments in their careers. The bigger the stage, the uglier it gets. Online harassment intensifies during high-visibility sporting events, creating a mental health crisis that coincides with these athletes' biggest professional moments.

BetterHelp saw what others ignored: a cultural emergency demanding immediate intervention. The challenge was transforming this moment of peak negativity into positive change.

As the world's largest online therapy provider, we knew we had to address this alarming statistic head-on and inspire meaningful change.

STRATEGY

HIJACKING THE HATE, OWNING THE MOMENT

Our strategy centered on meeting female athletes exactly where the problem exists: in the social media spaces where harassment flourishes during the peak tournament of their season.

Rather than talking about online hate abstractly, we decided to expose it directly and transform it into a rallying cry for change. We made the problem visible to consumers where they were already engaging – turning athletes' social feeds into undeniable proof of the harassment they face.

The timing was crucial: March 2025 represented the peak moment when female collegiate athletes face maximum visibility and, unfortunately, maximum online abuse.

This moment created an authentic opportunity for mental health advocacy during the sport's biggest stage.

Our approach leveraged the cultural phenomenon of basketball's "tunnel walk" – typically a moment of athlete expression that had become a target for criticism.

By hijacking this negative space with positive messaging, we could position BetterHelp not as a therapy provider seeking customers, but as an advocate stepping up when female athletes needed support most.

EXECUTION & TACTICS

FROM VIRAL REELS TO NATIONAL COVERAGE

Stop the Madness launched with a thought-provoking reveal.

Three high-profile athletes – Kiki Rice, Zoe Brooks, and Chance Gray – posted Instagram Reels that dramatically revealed the real hate comments they regularly receive, culminating in the teaser "The madness begins...".

It immediately sparked conversation across social media.

As the tournament began, BetterHelp launched with a bold message: **Stop the Madness**. More than a fashion statement, our athletes stepped out in jackets that connected mental health and athletic performance with a call to visit StopTheMadness.org. They wore these throughout the tournament, ensuring every tunnel walk, interview, and photo captured the message.

The jackets transformed routine basketball coverage into mental health advocacy moments. StopTheMadness.org served as the campaign's action center, educating visitors about online harassment while offering immediate support: **one month of free BetterHelp therapy for any student athlete**.

EFFECTIVENESS & RESULTS

FROM COURT TO CULTURE: A MOVEMENT THAT STUCK

What started as an on-court movement became national news, generating coverage across ESPN, USA Today, Barstool Sports, Winsidr, iHeart Radio, and Psychology Today.

The campaign achieved immediate social impact: 86% of comments on partnered athletes' posts and BetterHelp's owned content remaining positive. It was a remarkable shift during a tournament typically marked by increased harassment.

StopTheMadness.org attracted significant organic traffic without media spend, demonstrating genuine audience engagement with the mental health message.

87% of media and social coverage specifically mentioned online hate facing female athletes, proving the campaign successfully elevated this critical mental health issue to national conversation.

Stop the Madness even led Betterhelp to join forces with three WNBA powerhouse teams, announcing multi-year partnerships with the New York Liberty, Las Vegas Aces and Dallas Wings.

We created lasting impact beyond the tournament and positioned BetterHelp as a leading voice in athlete mental health support.

PROJECT TEAM CREDIT

BetterHelp

- Sara Brooks, Chief Growth Officer
- Megan Garner, Senior Manager

- Caitlin Kramon, Senior Manager
- Kate Keparutis, Creative Director
- Olivier Sinson, Senior Director

Golin

- Ron D’Innocenzo, CCO
- Ryan Durr, ECD
- Tiffany Giraudon, ACD
- Caroline Hix, ACD
- Cori McKeever, President, North America
- Casey Carpenter, SVP, Strategy
- Steven Glynias, SVP, Account
- Karly Kledzik, Senior Manager, Account
- Marla Saret, EVP, Sports
- Matt Smith, VP, Sports
- Virginia Lewis, SVP, Digital
- Ann Bartolotta, Director, Digital
- Ryan Richert, EVP, Earned Media
- Rey Perez, Director, Earned Media
- Bri Santiago, Senior Manager, Earned Media
- Angelina Ruiz, Associate, Earned Media
- Nicole Tsynman, VP, Analytics
- Ashley Mason, Director, Analytics
- Melanie Decelles, Senior Manager, Analytics
- Tim Scudds, Senior Manager, Video