

An Anxious Generation of Athletes Too? Time to Sound the Alarm



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May 5, 2025

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Executive Summary

This paper examines a concerning trend: declining mental toughness among young athletes. The Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP), a psychological assessment tool used by professional sports teams since the 1980's and now mainstream across all levels of competition, initially revealed a 15% decline in *Mental Toughness* scores among NFL draft prospects from 2012-2019. Recent TAP scoring trends of hundreds of thousands younger athletes showed even more alarming drops in the bundle of *Mental Toughness* traits measured by the TAP.

The paper explores potential causes for this trend, drawing insights from two key books:

- ***The Anxious Generation*** by Jonathan Haidt, Ph.D.: This book highlights the rise of anxiety and mental health issues among teens due to factors like changing parenting styles and social media use.
- ***Never Enough*** by Jennifer Breheny Wallace: This book examines the pressure to excel in today's society, arguing that such pressure can contribute to anxiety and depression in young people.

We examined TAP results on the positive mental traits of *Grit*, *Confidence*, and *Decisiveness* and the data clearly showed that as athletes progress through competitive levels—from middle school into high school and from high school into college – where the pressure to succeed intensifies, these positive TAP traits actually decline. Their mindsets are not improving to meet the demands of higher competition levels as would be expected (and needed). Just the opposite. **As the athletes transition to higher levels of competition, their psychological well-being deteriorates.** *If this isn't an alarm bell for parents and coaches to intervene, nothing is.*

The declining TAP scores suggest that both general societal shifts as well as the current emphasis on achievement in youth sports might be harming athletes' mental well-being. The paper concludes with suggestions for parents and coaches to create a more supportive environment for young athletes. These suggestions include:

For Parents: Reduce screen time, encourage free play, foster a sense of mattering, engage in meaningful discussions, avoid adding pressure to achieve, balance sports with family life, and explore mindset training services.

For Coaches: Implement “no phone” rules, inject fun into practice and training, educate yourself on athlete mentality, and explore mindset tools and services for your athletes.

By following these recommendations, parents and coaches can help young athletes develop mental resilience and overall well-being.

Athletes' TAP Results Analyzed in this Paper

4,247 NFL Draft Prospects

104,858 Female Ages 13-22

166,300 Males Ages 13-22

275,405
TOTAL ATHLETES



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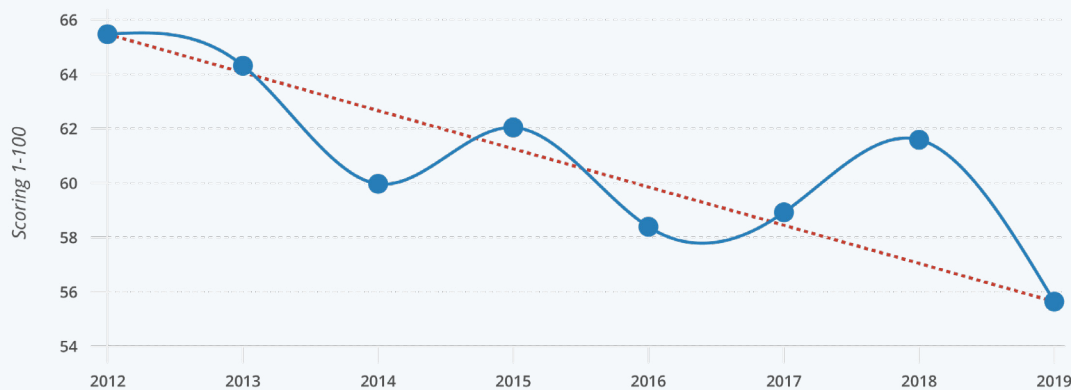
The Canary in the Coal Mine

Around a decade ago, a surprising and troubling pattern began to emerge: the *Mental Toughness* scores of incoming NFL players were declining rapidly - dropping a significant 15% from 2012-2019. *Above The Neck's* Troutwine Athletic Profile (the "TAP") – a tool used by NFL teams since the 1980s to gauge the mental fortitude of draft prospects – revealed this unsettling trend.

When we alerted our NFL team clients, they confirmed our suspicions: the new generation of players was indeed showing signs of lower mental resilience, both on and off the field. Each year's draft brought a fresh batch of physically talented players, but their mental grit seemed to be eroding, raising urgent questions on what was causing this decline.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Scoring Averages of NFL® Draft Prospects



Source: TAP results from 4,247 prospective players tested by NFL teams from 2012-2019



Mental Toughness among NFL draft prospects *dropped 15%* from 2012 to 2019.

NFL players are often considered among the most mentally tough individuals in the world. *If their mental toughness is diminishing, what about the rest of us?* At that time, the TAP database was mainly composed of professional athletes and special forces soldiers, so we couldn't confirm if this trend was occurring across the broader athlete population. Nonetheless, it certainly caught our attention.

In 2017, the TAP became widely available to amateur athletes as the importance of the mental game in athletic success began to gain prominence. The TAP's reporting expanded to include coaching and developmental guidance to meet this growing need. As data on amateur athletes started to pour in, we noticed the same troubling trends: Like the NFL prospects, scoring on the *Mental Toughness* bundle of traits measured by the TAP, for the most part, were declining for athletes at all ages and levels of competition.

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When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, we observed a continual decline in many of the TAP trait scores. To most people, this drop was attributed to the mental challenges posed by lockdowns and the extensive educational and societal changes implemented to combat the pandemic. COVID-19 became a convenient scapegoat for many of society’s problems, including the mounting mental challenges faced by athletes. While this explanation was valid in many cases, it didn’t provide the full picture.

Jonathan Haidt, Ph.D. released his thought-provoking book *The Anxious Generation*¹ in 2024, shedding new light on our findings. Everything we observed in our TAP data, particularly the trends predating COVID-19, suddenly made more sense. The insights from Haidt’s book offered a comprehensive explanation of the underlying factors contributing to the erosion of mental toughness we were seeing among athletes, revealing a deeper, more complex issue at play.

The Anxious Generation Book

As the title might suggest, today’s teens are experiencing an epidemic of anxiety and mental illness as a result of what Haidt describes as the “great rewiring of childhood” that is occurring in modern society. The book gained national and international attention, and the author has been featured on numerous news shows and podcasts.

Fittingly, Disney Pixar’s wildly popular 2024 movie *Inside Out 2* introduces a new emotion, “Anxiety,” into the mind of the now 13-year-old main character, Riley Anderson. Reflecting the real lives of many teens, Anxiety becomes the antagonist of the movie, highlighting the pervasive and challenging nature of this emotion during adolescence as pointed out by Haidt.

Drawing on extensive research and data, Haidt makes several key claims in his book:

- **Rising Anxiety Levels:** Haidt reveals a significant increase in anxiety disorders among younger generations over the past few decades. He attributes this trend to various societal and cultural shifts.
- **Impact of Smartphones/Social Media:** The book highlights how smartphones as well as social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat have profoundly influenced the way young people interact, communicate, and engage with the world around them, exacerbating anxiety.
- **Decline in Resilience:** Haidt points to a decline in resilience among young people, which he links to overprotective parenting and a lack of exposure to risk and failure. This overprotection hampers their ability to cope with stress and adversity.

The book also offers a broad array of disturbing statistics² relating to teen mental states and behaviors since 2010 as illustrated in the table.

In the latter part of the book, Haidt offers conclusions, including suggestions for addressing and reversing the trends of higher anxiety and lower resilience we are seeing in our younger generation:

- **Promote Face-to-Face Interaction:** Haidt advocates for reducing screen time and encouraging more face-to-face interaction, which he believes can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and social isolation.
- **Teach Emotional Resilience:** He suggests incorporating emotional resilience training into school curriculums, equipping young people with the skills to manage stress and setbacks effectively.
- **Encourage Outdoor Activities:** Haidt recommends promoting outdoor activities and experiences that involve risk-taking and physical exertion, as these can help build resilience and improve overall well-being.

The Anxious Generation
Key Statistics Since 2010²

	Boys	Girls
Anorexia	up 100%*	up 100%*
Anxiety	up 134%*	up 134%*
Depression	up 161%	up 145%
Emergency Room Visits for Self Harm	up 48%	up 188%
Suicide	up 91%	up 167%

*Statistics combine Boys and Girls together

1 Haidt, J. (2024). *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Random House.
2 Ibid. https://assets.ctfassets.net/o6e8cqq8kv0k/6L4QN8LaCTebT4VhzzVWvM/22dd378286e98a0a8bb9d9ff65c0eebf/Anxious_Generation_Figures.pdf

These suggestions aim to tackle the root causes of anxiety and cultivate environments that support the mental health and flourishing of young people.

Based on Haidt's suggestions, it might be assumed that young people involved in sports would be somewhat protected from these trends. The rationale is that practice and games disconnect them from devices, involve them in real-world activities, facilitate face-to-face interaction, and offer chances to build and test their resilience through competition.

However, as we examine the TAP scoring trends in the sections that follow, you will see that the athletes we tested are not immune from the mental symptoms seen across the broader community of teens.

About the Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP)

To better understand the TAP data, it is helpful to first review the history and purpose of our psychological assessment.

The Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP) is a psychological assessment tool designed to evaluate personality traits, behavioral tendencies, and mental skills relevant to athletic performance. Developed in the early 1980s by Dr. Robert Troutwine, a psychologist with a deep interest in the mental aspects of athletic performance, the TAP was created to help sports teams and organizations better understand the psychological makeup of athletes. This understanding provides insights that can be used for athlete development, team building, and performance optimization. With four decades of research and application, the TAP today boasts several important features, including:

The Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP) is a psychological assessment tool designed to evaluate personality traits, behavioral tendencies, and mental skills relevant to athletic performance.

- **Comprehensive Personality Assessment:** The TAP evaluates a wide range of personality traits that are pertinent to sports performance, such as competitiveness, resilience, leadership, confidence, focus, and emotional control. It generates detailed reports that include individual scores on various psychological dimensions, along with interpretations and recommendations for coaches and team managers.
- **Tailored to Athletes:** Unlike general personality tests, the TAP is specifically designed for the context of sports, making its insights highly relevant for athletes, coaches, and sports organizations.
- **Extensive Use in Sports:** Since its inception in 1984, the TAP has been widely adopted by professional teams in various sports, including the NFL, NBA, MLB, MLS, and NHL. College programs more recently adopted the TAP system, followed by high school and youth sports. Today, the TAP database consists of over 500,000 athlete profiles, making it the largest database of its kind on the planet.
- **Predictive Validity:** The TAP provides valuable predictive insights into an athlete's potential for success, not just in terms of physical performance but also in their ability to handle the psychological demands of high-level competition. Predicted outcomes have ranged from general success in the NFL to more granular metrics such as net yards per attempt for NFL quarterbacks. The TAP can also project the likelihood of hitting success for baseball prospects at the MLB level and predict which candidates are most likely to make it through the rigorous BUD/S training to become a Navy SEAL.

In summary, the TAP stands out as a specialized tool that provides deep insights into the psychological makeup of athletes. Its extensive history of use among elite sports teams and its focus on traits that directly impact athletic performance make it a valuable resource for enhancing both individual and team success in competitive environments.

TAP Data Trends Among Amateur Athletes

Next, we will dive deeper into the recent TAP scoring data to explore the relationship between the findings of *The Anxious Generation* and TAP scoring trends among this up-and-coming generation of athletes.

Participants: For this analysis, we examined TAP assessments taken between the years 2017-2024 of athletes aged 13-22 that comprised the high school graduating classes between the years 2020 and 2027. The totals include 104,858 females and 166,300 males for a grand total of 271,158 athlete TAPs analyzed.

It is important to note that our data largely represents athletes that have taken the TAP one or perhaps two times. As of now, we do not have a large sampling of longitudinal data tracking individual athletes over time. Consequently then, this analysis is a cross-sectional look at the data.

Measures: This investigation will focus on 3 TAP-measured traits that relate to metrics reported by Haidt in *The Anxious Generation: Grit, Confidence and Decisiveness*. Collectively, these traits can be thought of as the opposite of anxiety, doubt, worry, hopelessness, depression, etc., as well as contributing to one's overall mental toughness.

Past research has shown the relationships between *Grit*, *Confidence* and *Decisiveness* produce correlations in the moderate range ($r=+.35$ to $+.45$) and all three have been correlated with a variety of metrics across many sports relating to athletic performance and success. Accordingly, these 3 traits will guide us in providing a high-level analysis of the psychological well-being of athletes in this paper.

Here are the short definitions of these key traits measured by the TAP:

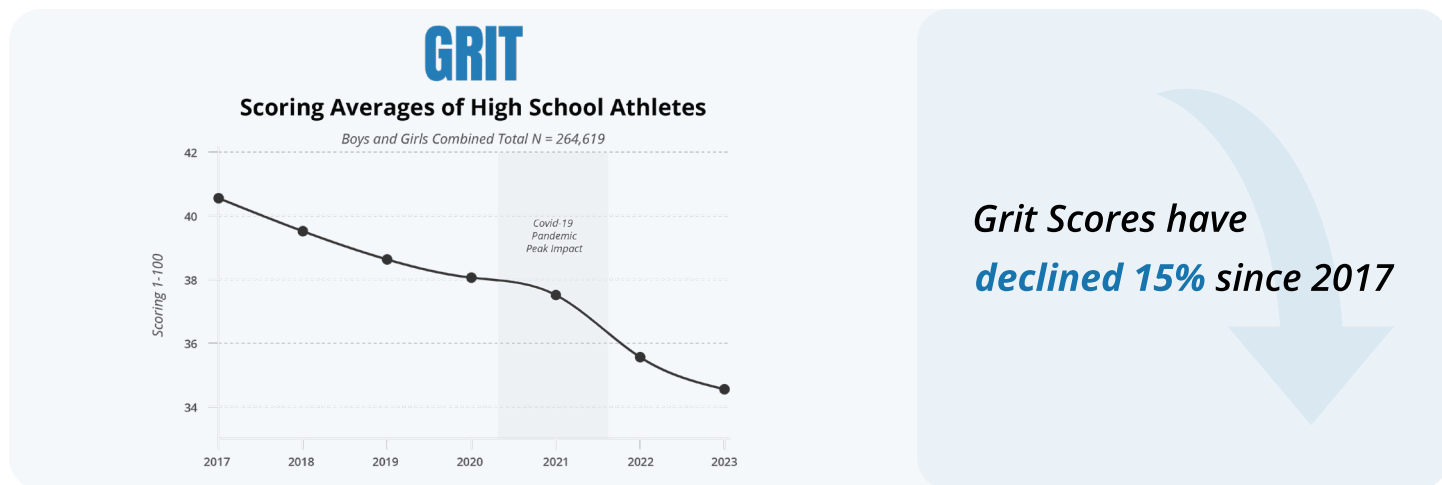
- **Grit** is a combination of resilience and psychological stamina and can be thought of like a “battery meter” for the mind.
- **Confidence** encompasses self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-assurance.
- **Decisiveness** is one's natural ability and desire to make quick decisions without hesitation. In a sports context, it plays out in the individual's ability to react vs. hesitate in pressure situations.

Grit Scoring Trends

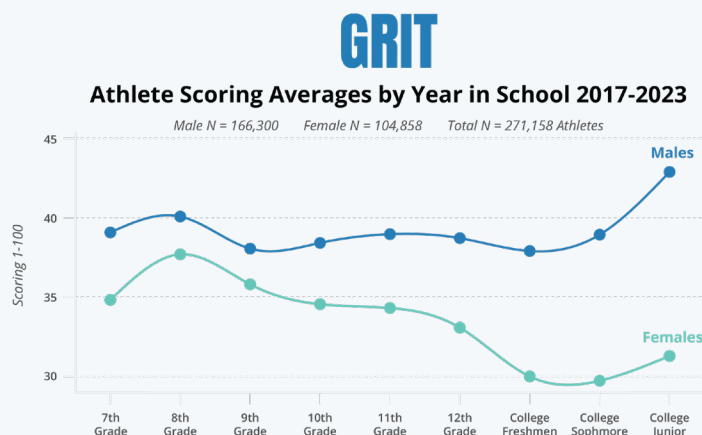
The TAP's *Grit* score derives from a multi-year project with the US Navy SEALs that used the TAP assessment results on Navy SEAL teams 5 and 6 to “reverse engineer” what it takes mentally to become a SEAL. Like all TAP traits, the scoring is scaled 1-100. Based upon our joint study, a score of 76 or higher gives one a 92% chance of passing BUD/S training and becoming a SEAL. Historically, BUD/S training maintained only around a 20% pass rate so the TAP's *Grit* score is highly predictive in identifying potential SEALs.

With this scale originally designed for Navy SEALs, it is understandable that the average scores of civilian athletes in *Grit* are on the lower side of the 1-100 scale. As an example, high school athletes averaged a score of 34 out of 100 in *Grit* in 2024.

The chart below demonstrates that high school athletes' (boys and girls combined) *Grit* scores have declined 15% since 2017.



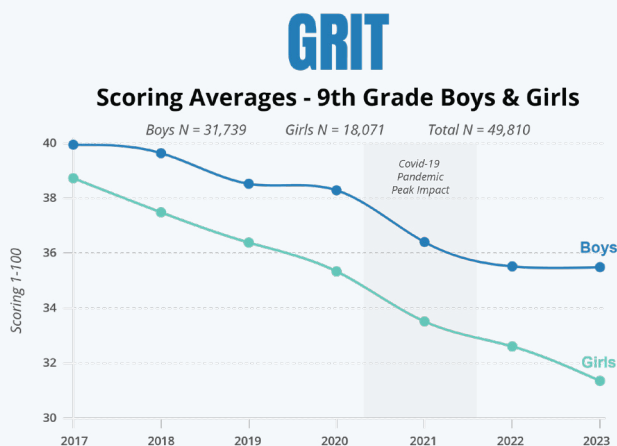
The next chart displays the *Grit* scoring averages by year in school on TAPs taken by athletes from 2017-2023. For all athletes, we see sharp declines in *Grit* scoring at the transition from 8th grade to high school and again from 12th grade to college, with the Girls' declines more pronounced. Interestingly, the *Grit* scores of Girls peak in 8th grade, never recovering. The Boys' *Grit* scores likewise peak in 8th grade only to finally exceed those middle school levels in their junior year in college.



Girls' Grit peaks in 8th grade, with steep dips when transitioning into high school and college, never recovering.

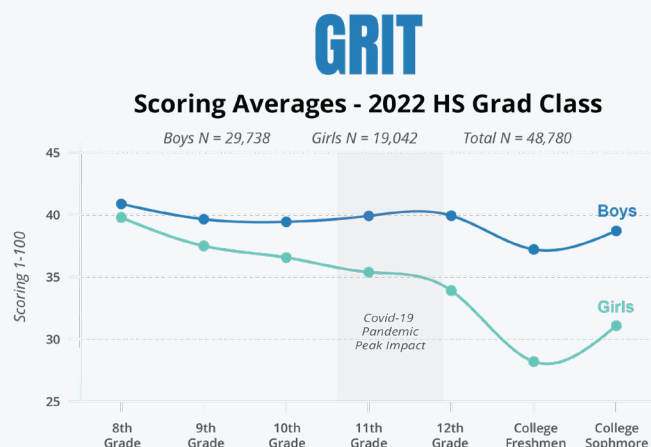
Boys' Grit peaks in 8th grade and doesn't recover again until their junior year in college.

The chart below tracks the average *Grit* scores of 9th graders year-over-year. Since 2017, Girls' *Grit* scores dropped an astounding 19% whereas Boys' *Grit* scores declined 11%. To show the impact of a 19% decline, let's compare it to softball pitch speed. If 9th graders threw 60 mph in 2017, a 19% drop means they'd throw only 48.6 mph in 2023.



9th grade Girls' Grit scores plummeted 19% since 2017, compared to an 11% decline in Boys, accelerating during Covid.

This chart tracks the average *Grit* scores of the high school graduating class of 2022. It is interesting that the larger scoring dips were not during the Covid pandemic, but instead at the transitions from 8th grade to high school (occurred pre-Covid) and from 12th grade to college (occurred post-Covid).

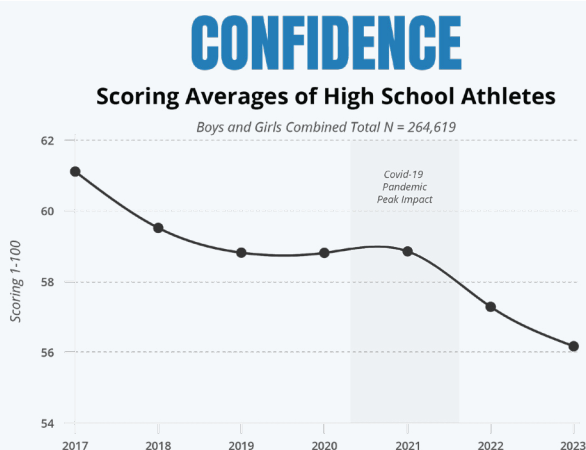


Larger Grit scoring dips occurred at the transitions into high school and college than during the Covid years.

Confidence Scoring Trends

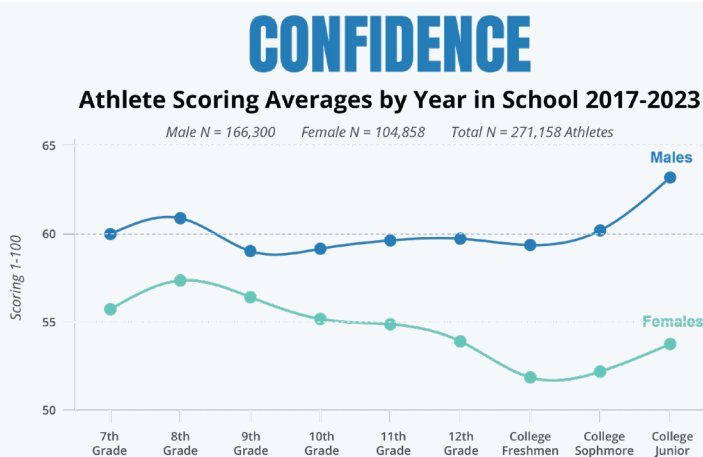
While confidence is commonly understood as a singular trait, the TAP's *Confidence* measure encompasses a broader spectrum, including self-confidence in specific situations, overall self-esteem, and performance-based self-assurance.

High school athlete *Confidence* dropped 8% since 2017, accelerating during Covid.



High school athlete *Confidence* **dropped 8%** since 2017, **accelerating during Covid.**

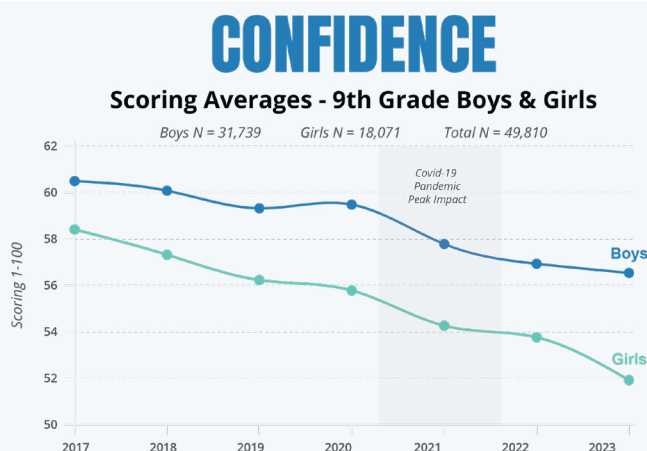
In reviewing year in school averages, we see similar patterns in the *Confidence* trait scoring to those of *Grit*, although less pronounced.



Girls' *Confidence* **declines 10%** from 8th grade to college.

Boys' *Confidence* **declines from 8th to 9th grade and increases upon reaching college.**

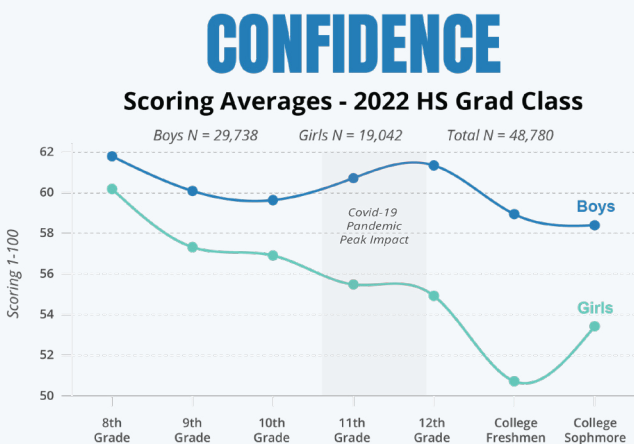
Among 9th graders is where we see the most pronounced trends: Girls scored a steady 11% decline in *Confidence* whereas the Boys scored a more modest 7% decrease in *Confidence*.



9th grade *Girls* experienced **a steeper decline in Confidence (11%)** compared to Boys (7%).

The *Confidence* scores of the high school graduating class of 2022 provide a similar path of *Grit* scoring in that scoring dips are observed at the transitions from 8th grade to high school and again from 12th grade to college.

Interestingly, the Boys' *Confidence* rose during the Covid pandemic where the Girls saw a slight decline. Like the Girls, the Boys saw a significant decline in scoring at the transition to college.



Both Boys' and Girls' Confidence showed significant drops at the transitions into high school and college.

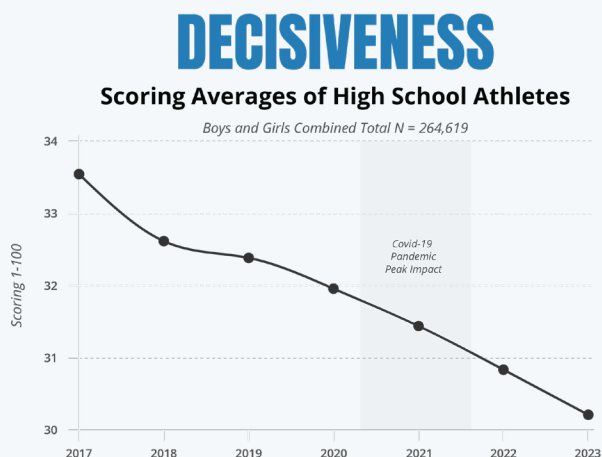
Interestingly, Boys' Confidence increased during Covid.

Decisiveness Scoring Trends

As a trait, *Decisiveness* is perhaps the most intriguing yet least understood of the TAP traits to the outside world. This measurement is highly sport-specific. For example, a low score may be advantageous for a golfer carefully lining up a putt but detrimental for an Olympic goalie who needs to make split-second decisions.

Theoretically, *Decisiveness* may be less related to mental health than traits like *Grit* and *Confidence*, yet it provides significant insight into one's coping ability. When faced with a decision, especially an urgent and important one, humans find uncertainty, ambiguity, and a lack of options extremely stressful. No one likes to feel boxed in or forced to act without a clear path to a favorable outcome – leading to the paralyzing thought, “*I don't know what to do.*” In life, as in sports, paralysis by analysis is rarely a good coping strategy.

Among high school athletes since 2017, *Decisiveness* steadily declined 9%.

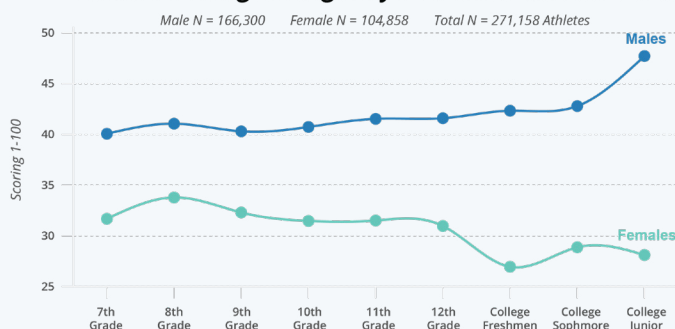


Among high school athletes since 2017, Decisiveness steadily declined 9%.

In reviewing year in school averages, we see *Decisiveness* is mostly flat for males with females following the same pattern as *Grit* and *Confidence*, seeing dips at the transitions to high school and college, which accounts for a significant 20% total drop in *Decisiveness* from 8th grade to college.

DECISIVENESS

Athlete Scoring Averages by Year in School 2017-2023



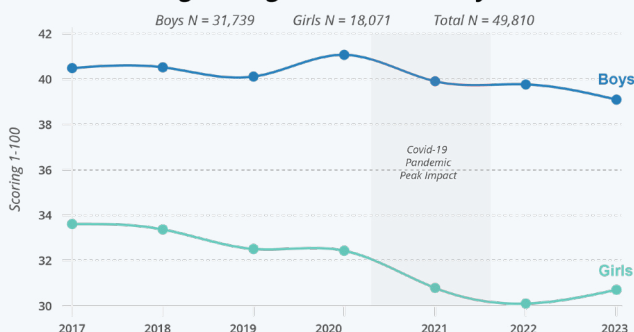
Decisiveness is **mostly flat** for **Boys**.

Decisiveness **drops 20% for Girls** between 8th grade and college.

Among 9th graders, we see a similar story to the year in school averages. The Boys are somewhat flat whereas the Girls' *Decisiveness* scores drop 10% from 2017-2022 before rebounding slightly in 2023.

DECISIVENESS

Scoring Averages - 9th Grade Boys & Girls



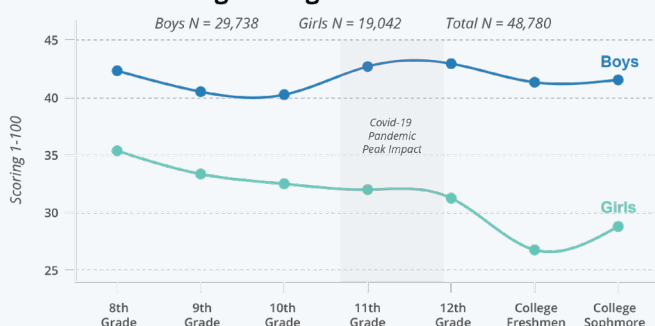
Decisiveness in 9th grade **Boys** is **mostly flat**.

Decisiveness in 9th grade **Girls** **declined 10%** from 2017-2022 before rebounding somewhat in 2023.

The *Decisiveness* scores of the high school graduating class of 2022 again demonstrate the variation between males and females in this trait. Girls follow the same pattern as *Grit* and *Confidence* with a steady decline from 8th grade and the steepest dips occurring at the transitions into high school and college. Similar to what we saw with *Confidence*, the 2022 Boys' *Decisiveness* scores rose during the Covid pandemic and then declined again at the transition to college.

DECISIVENESS

Scoring Averages - 2022 HS Grad Class



Both Boys' and Girls' *Decisiveness* showed declines at the transitions into high school and college.

Interestingly, **Boys' *Decisiveness* increased somewhat during Covid**.

Discussion

Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* offers crucial insights that help us interpret the Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP) data trends, suggesting that the erosion of mental toughness in athletes may be part of a broader societal issue affecting today's teens.

TAP results reveal a clear decline in positive mindset attributes among young athletes. This trend mirrors Haidt's findings and shows that involvement in sports does not shield these youngsters from the challenges highlighted in *The Anxious Generation*.

Haidt attributes the rise in anxiety among this new generation primarily to changing parenting styles and the pervasive influence of smartphones and social media. While his arguments are compelling, we must ask: *Are these factors also responsible for the trends observed in our study of athletes, or are there additional reasons at play?*

In today's hyper-competitive world, the pressure to excel has infiltrated nearly every aspect of life, particularly for young athletes. Jennifer Breheny Wallace's book, *Never Enough*³, delves into the often-overlooked dark side of our relentless pursuit of success. Wallace explores how society's obsession with achievement creates unrealistic expectations for teens. She argues that the constant pressure to perform and excel academically, socially, and athletically can lead to significant mental health issues because our kids are absorbing the idea that their worth is contingent on their performance - not for who they are deep at their core. They feel they only matter to others if they are successful.

For teen athletes, this culture often manifests in an intense focus on winning, securing college scholarships, and ultimately achieving professional sports careers. Wallace highlights that while "healthy competition" from athletics can be beneficial, the "hypercompetitive" environment often prevalent in youth sports can lead to depression, anxiety, stress, and self-harm. This pressure to achieve in athletics is intensifying rapidly in this new era of Name, Image, & Likeness (NIL) compensation and the increasing "professionalization" of college (and even younger) athletics.

Wallace's insights in *Never Enough* provide a deeper explanation of the TAP trends observed in young athletes than those given by Haidt in *The Anxious Generation*. Beyond evolving parenting styles and the impact of smartphones, the growing pressure to achieve in athletics likely also contributes to the mental challenges faced by athletes.

The TAP data clearly shows that as athletes progress through competitive levels—from middle school into high school and from high school into college – where the pressure to succeed intensifies, key positive TAP traits actually decline. Their mindsets are not improving to meet the demands of higher competition levels as would be expected (and needed). Just the opposite. **As the athletes transition to higher levels of competition, their psychological well-being deteriorates.** *If this isn't an alarm bell for parents and coaches to intervene, nothing is.*

To illustrate this point, in all three of the TAP traits examined in this article – *Grit*, *Confidence*, and *Decisiveness* – 8th grade girls score higher than their high school and college counterparts. According to our TAP data on over 100,000 female athletes between the ages of 13-22, 8th graders exhibit higher psychological well-being than high school and college females. For males, we see a similar story: It is not until their third year as college athletes that the average *Grit* and *Confidence* scores exceed the scores of 8th graders.

This data clearly indicates that today's achievement culture in athletics might play an even greater role in eroding our athletes' mindset and mental well-being than is currently understood.

TAP data on over 100,000 female athletes aged 13-22, shows that 8th graders have a higher psychological well-being than their high school and college counterparts!



3 Wallace, J. B. (2023). *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic and What We Can Do About It*. Penguin.

What about the implications to athletes? The implications discussed in *The Anxious Generation*, such as the skyrocketing rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide, also apply to athletes. In fact, our data suggests that these issues may be even more pronounced among athletes. While a comprehensive analysis of the impact of lower mental well-being on athletes is beyond the scope of this paper, several key points warrant attention:

- **Athlete Burnout** Athlete burnout is a significant issue, contributing to a high dropout rate in youth sports. According to World Metrics⁴:
 - 25% of young athletes quit sports each year due to burnout.
 - Up to 15% of young athletes exhibit clinical levels of depression, often attributed to sports burnout.
- **Mental Health of College Athletes** College athletes are experiencing chronic mental health issues. Recent NCAA surveys⁵ reveal:
 - 39% of female athletes and 22% of male athletes consistently feel “mentally exhausted.”
 - 29% of female athletes and 12% of male athletes regularly experience “overwhelming anxiety.”
- **Turnover Rates in College Sports** The turnover rates among college athletes and staff are at an all-time high, with mental well-being, among other factors, likely playing a role. For instance:
 - 12% of NCAA Division I athletes entered the transfer portal in 2023 including 25% of FBS football players⁶.
 - NCAA Division I athletic department coaches/staff experienced an average turnover rate of 48% over a recent two-year period, nearly double the expected turnover rate in corporate and higher education sectors⁷.

The convergence of our findings with those from Haidt and Wallace underscores the urgent need for parents and coaches to reassess the environments in which young athletes are developing. Addressing these pressures and fostering a more balanced approach to competition could be key to reversing the troubling trends observed in TAP data and promoting healthier, more resilient young athletes.

Suggestions

This leads us to the crucial question: What now?

We know young people are more anxious, and teens involved in athletics are showing alarming trends, as highlighted in this analysis. It is evident that organized sports likely contribute to heightened anxiety due to the pressures associated with today’s ultra-competitive, achievement-centric environment. However, this does not necessarily mean that parents should steer their children away from competitive sports. We firmly believe that participation in athletics fosters positive characteristics and life skills that benefit young people, not only during their athletic and academic pursuits, but throughout their entire lives.

Below are some suggestions for parents and coaches to help neutralize and perhaps even reverse the negative trends highlighted in this paper.

Suggestions from *The Anxious Generation*:

1. Reduce Screen Time:

- Collaborate with other parents to delay and limit phone usage among children, e.g., in the same friend group.
- Implement “no phone” events and time frames, such as no phones at the dinner table and phones away by 9pm.
- Delay access to and limit social media usage (e.g., no Snapchat until age 16, *Instagram* limited to 20 minutes per day). The US Surgeon General recently issued an advisory on this topic!
- Model good behaviors by limiting your own phone usage in front of your children.

4 Lindner, J. (2024, June 17). Burnout In Youth Sports Statistics • WorldMetrics.org. *WorldMetrics*.
<https://worldmetrics.org/burnout-in-youth-sports-statistics/>

5 NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being Study, NCAA Sport Science Institute, NCAA Research, NCAA Sport Science Institute, & NCAA's Division I, II and III Student-Athlete Advisory Committees. (2022). *NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being Study*.
https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/other/2020/2022RES_NCAA-SA-Well-BeingSurvey.pdf?trk=public_post_comment-text

6 Gist. (2024, June 30). Everything you need to know about the NCAA transfer portal. *The GIST*.
<https://www.thegistsports.com/article/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-ncaa-transfer-portal/>

7 Huml, M. (2022, September 14). Sportico.com. *Sportico.com*.
<https://www.sportico.com/leagues/college-sports/2022/why-employees-are-leaving-college-athletics-1234687903/>

2. Encourage Free Play:

- Give your children more responsibility and free play in the real world.
- Promote outdoor activities and exploration.
- Help organize pick-up games without referees or coaches.

Suggestions from *Never Enough*:

1. Foster a Sense of Mattering:

- Teach skills of healthy interdependence, emphasizing that they matter to others.
- Make chores and volunteering mandatory to reinforce their value to their household and community.
- Expand their circle of concern and caring, encouraging them to make a difference in the world.

2. Engage in Meaningful Discussions:

- Use neutral conversation starters, such as “*What did you have for lunch today?*” instead of achievement-centric questions.
- Discuss values regularly to reinforce them.
- Normalize failure by sharing personal failure stories.
- Acknowledge when they add value to others, e.g., “*I see how you helped your sister today.*”

Our Suggestions for Parents:

1. Allow Your Children to Experience Discomfort:

- Have them make their own appointments and handle personal tasks independently.
- Avoid rescuing them every time they forget something.
- Encourage them to handle their own conversations with teachers, coaches, and friends and to do so in person or through voice/video calls and not by texting – it has been scientifically proven that voice communications are superior to the human experience than texting.
- Assign household chores, tasks and errands, especially related to their sport.

2. Avoid Adding to the Pressure to Achieve:

- Parents who desire clout from their child’s accomplishments or are living their sports dreams vicariously through their child usually provide more pressure than support.
- Express pride in their efforts and resilience, not just their accomplishments.
- The best thing to say after a competition is “*I love to watch you play.*”
- Develop a plan to help them handle competitive disappointment and defeat.

3. Tie the concept of excessive screen time to its opportunity cost / negative outcomes:

- Use this axiom to make the point in sports: “*If your screen time exceeds your practice time, you have no reason to complain about your playing time.*”
- Explore the concept that excessive screen time might cause poor results in school or other activities when those opportunities arise.

4. Balance Sports with Family Life:

- Unfortunately, sports have become like a religion in many families - taking over weekends, holidays and vacations.
- Prioritize family time over sports commitments occasionally to reclaim family balance.
- Provide downtime away from their main sport to avoid burnout, possibly involving different activities or sports.

5. Provide Access to Mindset-Enriching Tools and Services:

- Utilize online resources such as [Positive Coaching Alliance](#) and [Anxiety Canada's](#) free Mindshift app.
- Read “[The Emotional Lives of Teenagers](#)” by Lisa Damour and recommend books like “[Kick Anxiety's Ass](#)” by Bhrett McCabe, PhD., and “[Playing in the Box](#)” by Dr. Pete Temple.
- Consider engaging a mental performance coach or sports psychologist for more specialized support.
- The authors created [Above The Neck, Inc.](#) a comprehensive mental performance platform that equips athletes and teams with essential psychological skills to excel in today’s intensely competitive environment.

Our Suggestions for Coaches:

1. Implement “No Phone” Rules:

- Prohibit phones during certain team activities, such as on the bench or at team meals.

2. Inject Fun into Training:

- Include more scrimmages, theme days, player-led practices, and rewards for practice success.
- Encourage team bonding by discussing daily topics during stretching/warm-ups.

3. Educate Yourself on Youth Mentality:

- Explore online resources such as [Positive Coaching Alliance](#) and read relevant books such as [Grit](#) by Angela Duckworth, PhD, and the works of [Haidt](#) and [Wallace](#) featured above.

4. Explore Mental Performance and Well-Being Services for your Athletes:

- For Anxiety, steer your athletes to [Anxiety Canada's](#) free Mindshift app.
- For improved mental performance & better team cohesion consider services from [platforms like ours](#).

By following these suggestions, parents and coaches can create a more balanced and supportive environment for young athletes, helping to reverse negative trends and promote mental resilience and overall well-being.

A Call to Action: Reimagining the Landscape for Young Athletes

The data presented in this paper paints a concerning picture: a generation of young athletes facing growing mental health challenges. However, this situation is not without hope. By acknowledging the root causes of this decline and taking proactive steps, parents and coaches can become powerful allies in fostering a healthier and more supportive environment for young athletes.

The time to act is now. By working together, parents, coaches, and sports organizations can create a more positive and nurturing landscape for young athletes, ensuring that participation in sports fosters not just physical development, but also mental well-being and a lifelong love for the game.

This call to action emphasizes the collaborative effort required to address the issue and offers a hopeful and actionable message for parents and coaches. It also reinforces the paper's central message: that a more supportive environment is essential for the well-being of young athletes.

Appendix

Author Bios:

Dr. Robert Troutwine

Dr. Robert Troutwine (Bob) is the Chief Sports Psychologist and co-founder of Above The Neck, Inc. A pioneering figure in sports psychology, he has spent over four decades applying cutting-edge scientific research in talent selection and performance development for elite organizations worldwide. Dr. Troutwine developed the Troutwine Athletic Profile (TAP), the gold standard psychological assessment that has contributed to 11 Super Bowl championships and numerous other professional sports titles.

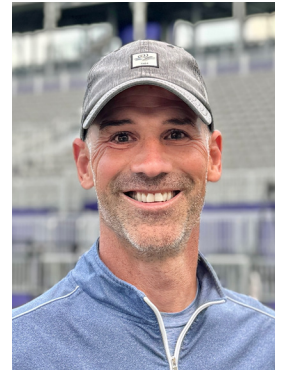
His validated assessment methodologies have been implemented by organizations including the New England Patriots, Ford Motor Company, and the U.S. Navy SEALs to predict performance outcomes with remarkable accuracy. Dr. Troutwine is Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Psychology Department at William Jewell College. He resides in Lake Winnebago, MO with his wife Nancy and enjoys time with his three adult children and six grandchildren.



Rob Pike, JD

Rob Pike transitioned from a successful career as an attorney to become a visionary in sports technology and performance analytics. Leveraging his experience as a collegiate athlete, Rob recognized the transformative potential of merging advanced software analytics with Dr. Troutwine's groundbreaking TAP assessment system.

Their innovative mental performance platform, which has served hundreds of thousands of athletes over the years, is now available through their newly founded company, Above The Neck, Inc., enhanced with AI and multi-language capabilities to serve a global athletic market. Rob's clients include teams in the NFL, MLB, MLS, NBA, NHL, NCAA and more. His innovative approach combines legal analytical precision with athletic performance expertise to unlock the mental aspects of athletic excellence. Rob's expertise has consistently contributed to his clients' success, winning 5 Super Bowls, 2 World Series', and numerous other championships. Rob lives in the Chicago area with his wife Amy and has a daughter Carson.



Recommended Resources

General Online

- **Positive Coaching Alliance:** <https://positivecoach.org/resource-zone/>
- **Anxiety Canada & Free Mindshift App:** <https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/>

Books

- *[Grit](#)* by Angela Duckworth, PhD
- *[Kick Anxiety's Ass](#)* by Bhrett McCabe, PhD
- *[Never Enough](#)* by Jennifer Breheny Wallace
- *[Playing in the Box](#)* by Dr. Pete Temple
- *[The Anxious Generation](#)* by Jonathan Haidt
- *[The Emotional Lives of Teenagers](#)* by Lisa Damour

Mental Performance Platform

- **Serving both Athletes & Teams:** abovetheneck.ai

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Adam Datema and Ryan Luke for helping us aggregate and analyze the TAP data and Raul Medina for the graphic design of the charts and layout of this paper.

