



Scribe Photos/KATIE CARMON

**PRACTICE RUN.** New football coach Isaiah Spivey works with his team during an after-school practice. Spivey came to Kingsport from Hawkins County, where he also coached football and baseball.

BY KATIE CARMON

Isaiah Spivey has recently become the football coach at Sevier Middle, as well as a new eighth-grade math teacher.

Spivey grew up in a small community in Gate City, Virginia called Manville.

"It's just a little community; you probably won't see it on many maps," he said. "I'm just a small-town guy."

Growing up in a small town meant Spivey became a fan of football early on.

"I grew up playing football in a football town and it saved my life," he said.

Spivey has been playing football almost all of his life. He started playing when he was about five years old.

Spivey went through most of his life playing football, from middle school all the way until he played at Carson Newman University.

He also played other sports throughout his school years.

"I played all sports through middle school, high school and

college," he said. "I was involved in everything. I played football, of course, baseball, basketball, played a lot of travel basketball and even went on to run track a little bit."

In addition to coaching football, Spivey also has baseball coaching experience.

"I coached at Holston Valley Middle School in Sullivan County, which is a little south of Bristol, and then I've been in Hawkins County for the last seven or eight years," he said. "Everywhere I've been, I've coached baseball and football. I just always tried to stay around the game."

In addition to Spivey's love of football, he also enjoys math.

"I've loved math my whole life," he said. "Math kind of came naturally to me. I had a

great math teacher in high school that really contributed to my love of mathematics and my passion for mathematics. So, I just thought the next best thing is, you know, be a math teacher."

Balancing coaching and planning math lessons can be challenging.

"You've just got to be organized," Spivey said. "You've got to be willing to sacrifice a little of your personal life for preparation, but as long as you're organized, and as long as you're willing to do that, and it's something that you love to do, it's really not that bad."

Spivey is very passionate about coaching football and has high expectations for his players.

"I'm hard on my kids because I have high expectations," he said. "I always tell the guys, if I

stop coaching you, and I stop coaching you hard, that means I've given up. I am loud. I am, but that's more of a passion, not anger."

Of course, students who play football have to be fast, tough, and strong, but Spivey looks for other qualities in his players.

"I would take a guy that hustles and gives everything he's got over a kid with talent any day," he said. "The main important quality that I look for is a desire in the heart. Do they give everything they have? Kids have got to be able to work together, they've got to be disciplined, they have to be fundamentally sound."

Spivey encourages all kids to pick up one or more sports throughout their school years.

"I think sports just teach you

so many important qualities: discipline, toughness, having a competitive spirit, being able to work together as a team, and getting up when you get knocked down," he said.

Sports, to Spivey, help prepare students for the real world.

"I feel it's important that kids get out and compete, because in the real world, you've got to compete," Spivey said. "You've got to go out there and you've got to work, you've got to get a job, and if you don't get a job, somebody else beats you out for that job."

Spivey wants to help kids succeed in life and teach his students and players important skills and character traits for their future.

"I'm just an old, long-haired country boy from Gate City, Virginia that loves to play football [and] likes to help kids get better," he said. "Sometimes I can come off as abrasive, but I'm really not. I'm a tender-hearted guy."

## SPORTS COMMENTARY

### Simon Biles calls attention to athletes' mental health issues



BY SADIE BLALOCK

Recently, athlete Simone Biles had to drop out of several events at the Tokyo Olympics because of her mental health. Most people thought the reason Biles was dropping out of the competition was because she was just too nervous to perform and couldn't handle the pressure. However, she dropped out because her mental health was suffering severely.

Lots of athletes have mental health issues. The reasons the mental health of athletes suffers include pressure to perform, injuries and drastic mistakes.

At the Olympics, Biles was suffering from a disconnect between her body and her mind. Her body was capable of doing more than her mind knew. She was aware that if her mind held her back, it could be very dangerous and cause her to get severely injured. Gymnasts call this mental block the twisties.

That is why she made the

decision to not participate in many of her events. She did not want to hold her teammates back and cause her team to lose. She wanted what was best for the team.

People were critical of Biles because they thought she was being selfish, but she was actually doing what was best for America in the long run.

A physical injury seems to be easier to understand for many people than mental health troubles. People often think physical injuries are worse than mental health issues, but usually it is the opposite.

The public was in general way too harsh on Biles. Athletes at the Olympic level have so much pressure to be the best in the world that it can cause them to have mental issues.

Michael Phelps is a champion swimmer who has been very open about his struggles with depression and mental health. He feels that making people more aware of the problem will

help them understand it. He was very supportive of Biles and tried to make people aware of what she was going through.

Naomi Osaka is an elite tennis player who withdrew from high level competitions in order to focus on her mental health. She simply had to step back to protect herself. If she hadn't withdrawn and taken care of herself, she might have faced lifelong issues. Just like Biles, she prioritized her mental health.

Some of the stress on athletes in Tokyo probably came from COVID-19 and all of the cases in the city at the time. COVID added yet another stress level for the athletes to deal with.

They had already worked so hard and were prepared for 2020, but the Olympics were delayed, which ruined what they had worked for the past 4 years. This year, they knew that getting COVID could mean the end of their Olympic ca-

reers.

Biles has explained to the media that for an athlete, physical health is mental health. She felt she had no control over her body, how or where she would land after a flip and no knowledge of where she was in the air. Because of this mental block her body was unable to perform physically.

No one can quite understand how dangerous Biles's situation was unless they have experienced it. Her mind simply refused to do what her body was capable of.

Mental health issues can be very serious not just for elite Olympic athletes, but other athletes, too. Many athletes around the world, elite or not, struggle with mental illness. High profile athletes like Biles, who are willing to talk about mental illness, help these athletes know that someone understands and that someone is on their side.

Some people feel as though the athletes who suffer from

mental health problems are not trying their hardest and are being selfish. That's simply not true. They are trying to help their countries win at the Olympics and be successful, which is a lot of pressure. These athletes can't just stop having mental health issues.

Sometimes they need therapy. This can take time, and often they will not participate in the Olympics again. The public just does not realize how excruciatingly difficult dealing with mental health issues can be for athletes.

Biles had a difficult run at the Olympics this year, but by making the difficult choice to talk about what she was going through, she helped many people begin to understand the seriousness and dangers of mental illness.

Thanks to Simone Biles, most people now know that good mental health is as important as good physical health for athletes.