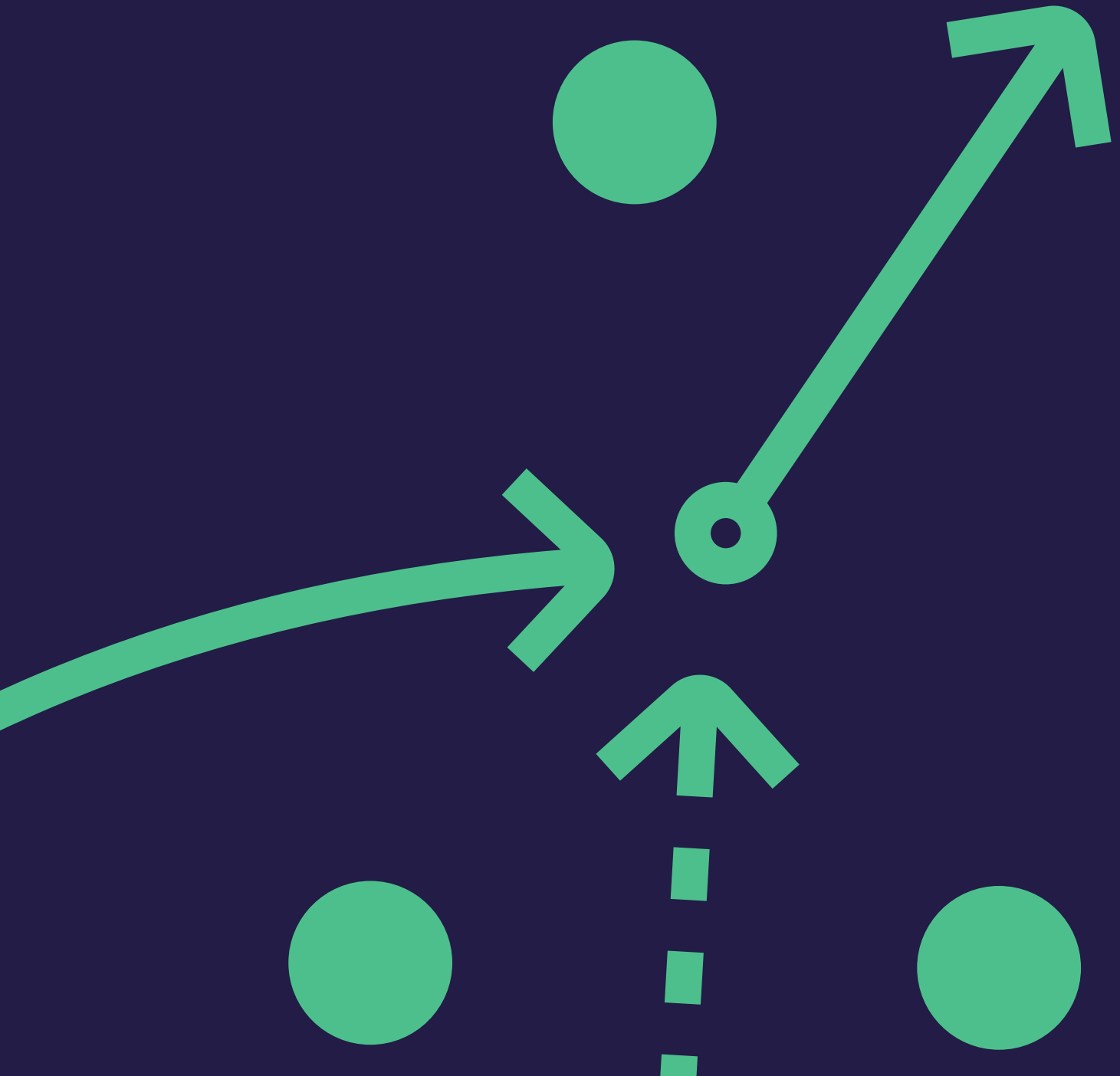


**POST-TOURNAMENT BLUES GUIDE:**

**BY THE PLAYERS, FOR THE PLAYERS**

**FIFPRO MENTAL HEALTH TASKFORCE**





## INTRODUCTION

FIFPRO is pleased to bring you the first edition of the Post-Tournament Blues Guide: by the players, for the players. Players are the most important and essential part for any successful football competition, and the development of the women's football industry is dependent on the potential of you as players being fully supported. This can only be realised under elite conditions that support the health and well-being of players.

Former Canadian international Stephanie Labbé approached FIFPRO in February 2022 to discuss her post-tournament mental health experiences. To develop further understanding, FIFPRO brought a group of international players together to share their experiences around 'post-tournament blues'. It became apparent that players were going through similar experiences without the necessary support mechanisms in place. With five international tournaments taking place, July 2022 provided FIFPRO with an opportunity to provide information and support around post-tournament blues.

*"Winning Olympic Gold wasn't enough to overcome my mental health challenges."*

*- Stephanie Labbé (Canada)*



## PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to:

- ▶ DEFINE POST-TOURNAMENT BLUES
- ▶ PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE THIS
- ▶ DEFINE POTENTIAL TRIGGERS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES
- ▶ HOW TO OFFER SUPPORT TO TEAM-MATES RETURNING FROM INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION
- ▶ SHIFT THE NARRATIVE AND NORMALISE THE DISCUSSION AROUND MENTAL HEALTH
- ▶ SHOW HOW IT CAN BE USED AS A PERFORMANCE TOOL

All examples provided below are experiences of current or former international players.



## DEFINITION OF

# POST-TOURNAMENT BLUES

Post-tournament blues is often described as “the emotional drop that happens after a big competition, when you haven’t had the opportunity to fully process your experiences” (IOC). In the post-tournament period, players may feel that they are not given the opportunity or timeframe to decompress emotions and feelings which can lead to negative sensations.

It is entirely normal to feel like this for a period of time. Unfortunately, there is no established timeframe as to when this will occur or disappear, and each individual will experience it differently. Please note, these experiences are not limited to post-tournament, they can also occur at the end of the season, or cup competition.

## HOW MIGHT YOU FEEL?

During this time, you may feel a wave of various overlapping emotions and feelings. It is important to know that this is normal. Examples include but are not limited to:

- ▶ EMPTINESS - LACK OF PURPOSE OR MEANING.
- ▶ DISCONNECTION AND DETACHMENT - SWITCHING OFF FROM FOOTBALL
- ▶ FEELING OF BEING LOST AND CONFUSED - ‘WHAT WAS THAT?’ ‘DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?’
- ▶ UNCERTAINTY AROUND HOW TO RETURN TO A DIFFERENT ROUTINE - ‘WHAT IS NORMAL LIFE?’
- ▶ LACK OF MOTIVATION - ‘I DON’T FEEL LIKE GETTING BACK INTO TRAINING’
- ▶ LACK OF FOCUS - FEELING DISTRACTED
- ▶ UNCERTAINTY ABOUT POTENTIAL POST-TOURNAMENT TRANSITIONS
- ▶ PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL FATIGUE



*“I remember going into my first major international tournament with so much excitement and then we were eliminated after three matches. I felt lost, confused and kept on asking myself “What was that?”.*

*- Shannon Lynn (Scotland) on feeling lost and confused*



## WHAT MIGHT TRIGGER

## POST-TOURNAMENT BLUES?

External events that may produce uncomfortable emotional, physical, physiological or psychological responses might trigger post-tournament blues.

Reacting to triggers is normal and recognising them can be important because it can alert us to our own mental health and help us become more aware.

### CHANGE OF ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ SUDDEN ISOLATION AFTER BEING WITH TEAM-MATES FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD
- ▶ WEEKS OF HYPERFOCUS AND ANTICIPATION TO NOTHING
- ▶ INCREASED OR LACK OF ATTENTION FROM TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA COMPARED TO PRE-TOURNAMENT

### FOOTBALL PERFORMANCE AND SCHEDULING

- ▶ INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM PERFORMANCE DURING TOURNAMENT (WHETHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE)
- ▶ DIP IN PERFORMANCE POST-TOURNAMENT
- ▶ LACK OF CONSISTENT TOURNAMENTS – LONG WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT ONE
- ▶ SHIFT IN VALUE FOR PLAYER – DIFFERENCE IN ROLES FROM NATIONAL TEAM TO CLUB

### INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EXPECTATIONS

- ▶ EXPECTATION FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO BE HAPPY, AVAILABLE AND RESPONSIVE TO MESSAGES
- ▶ INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURE TO APPEAR RESILIENT AND TOUGH
- ▶ PRESSURE FROM CLUB TO INTEGRATE BACK INTO CLUB FOOTBALL IMMEDIATELY AT HIGH PERFORMANCE LEVELS
- ▶ PERCEIVED LACK OF SUPPORT BY CLUB, TEAM-MATES AND FAMILY



***"After the Rio Olympics, I received constant requests from my friends and family to bring my medal. Everything was about the medal, not me, and I began to feel empty inside."***

***- Stephanie Labbé (Canada) on detachment***



## POTENTIAL

# MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Whilst the post-tournament blues may affect you, there are ways to potentially mitigate these feelings and offer support to yourself and team-mates.

- ▶ RECOGNISE IT IS OKAY TO EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND SPEAK UP ABOUT IT
- ▶ SEEK PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT [VIA YOUR UNION](#), CLUB OR EXTERNALLY
- ▶ MANAGE EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS, FOR EXAMPLE BY SETTING SOCIAL MEDIA BOUNDARIES
- ▶ TAKE A BREAK FROM FOOTBALL AND FOCUS ON YOUR RECOVERY AND REGENERATION
- ▶ TO RECOVER AND REGENERATE, ALLOW YOURSELF TO DECOMPRESS A FEW DAYS AFTER THE TOURNAMENT BEFORE A LONGER PERIOD OF COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT FROM FOOTBALL
- ▶ PLAN YOUR POST-TOURNAMENT RECOVERY AND REGENERATION BEFORE GOING INTO THE TOURNAMENT AND INFORM YOUR COACH THAT YOU WILL NEED TIME OFF
- ▶ ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER TEAM-MATES TO EXPLORE EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS SURROUNDING THE TOURNAMENT/SEASON
- ▶ SET GOALS BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS



***“When mental health support was given to me and then taken away, I found that difficult to deal with, but football helped me through my most difficult time’***

*- Lucy Staniforth (England) on inconsistent mental health support*



# HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT TEAM-MATES EXPERIENCING POST-TOURNAMENT BLUES?

- ▶ ADVOCATE FOR THEM TO SPEAK UP ABOUT IT, TAKE MORE TIME OFF, AND SUPPORT THEM IF THEY DO
- ▶ ASK QUESTIONS, LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT AND BE SUPPORTIVE. SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH MENTAL HEALTH MAY RESONATE WITH YOUR TEAM-MATES AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO OPEN UP
- ▶ LET THEM OWN THEIR NARRATIVE - DON'T ASSUME THE TOURNAMENT WAS GREAT BECAUSE OF THEIR COLLECTIVE OR INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS
- ▶ DON'T IMPOSE YOUR OWN DECOMPRESSION STRATEGY - LET TEAM-MATES FIGURE OUT HOW BEST TO SUPPORT/ MITIGATE TO THE BEST VERSION OF THEMSELVES



*"I've seen team-mates returning from international tournaments looking drained and disjointed. As a team-mate, the best thing you can do is to listen and be supportive. Don't presume that international duty was amazing for them - let them take the narrative."*

*- Aoife Mannion (England) on being a supportive team-mate*

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The next edition of this guide will be published at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 and your feedback is crucial. FIFPRO invites you to contribute by leaving your feedback [via this link](#) and sharing your experiences by reaching out to us at [players@fifpro.org](mailto:players@fifpro.org)



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