

Broken Trust: Athlete Abuse Exposed

[Transcript]

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

“Unconscious, awake, a stranger, a friend. These are the stories we must defend. Far too often we make excuses for these offenders. But anytime you force sexual activity, you are a contender.”

Text

“Each year, hundreds of athletes are sexually and emotionally abused by coaches and authority figures. These are some of their stories.”

Title

Broken Trust: Athlete Abuse Exposed

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

When I was five I started gymnastics. My mother was a coach, or taught at the local YMCA. And they had a trampoline. I was a teeny, tiny little person and I had huge quad muscles, I remember. And I was really good at the trampoline. And I loved jumping and it felt like flying. I loved being upside down. I loved flipping. I loved, you know, sort of trying new thing. I was fearless.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

I began skating at the age of five. The story that’s told to me because I don’t remember back that far is from my mother, is that she took me to the doctor. I had feet that were turned in. And so the doctor said to her, “you need to put him into activities that turned his legs out. And if you keep him in those activities, by doing that, and since he’s so young, that’ll fix his problem.” So that’s what I’m told is how I got into ice skating.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

I started gymnastics when I was three. My mom used to be a gymnast when she was growing up, and so she said I used to do cartwheels in her womb. But as soon as she put me in, I fell in love with the sport. She was coaching at the time, and cleaning, so she had a key to the gym. And I’d just come in and just flip constantly. And go home and flip some more, and play with toys upside down, flip over the couch and climb up walls. So, there was really like no stopping for me once I got in.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

My first swimming experience when I was like, probably like four or five, my family left me alone in the swimming pool, which everybody says you should never ever do. But it was an oval shaped pool, and so I taught myself to kind of keep going further and further until I sort of taught myself how to swim.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

My earliest recollections of gymnastics are about the competitions. I loved the competition. I loved being out there. We had new leotards. We put our hair in ribbons. We were part of a team. We got to meet other gymnasts and travel. And that was all very exciting to me. I loved that. I remember being good and people telling me, “oh, you could be really good. You have talent. You could be one of the best.” And that was encouraging to hear at that age and it really got me motivated.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

When you're good at something, and you devote your entire life to it, there are these moments of mastery, of beauty, of strength, of a competence and a power that I have yet to find in other places.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

I love the daily grind of the sport. I love the sense of pride and self-esteem that you get from inside of you. Not from somebody telling you you're great. But from you feeling it yourself. Because there's a thousand failures for every one success. I love the amount of determination, the amount of courage it takes to step out on the ice in front of hundreds or maybe thousands of people and perform. I just love everything about it.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

My first coaches were quite strict. But in a very healthy way and we respected them. They wanted us to perform to the best of our capability. But they were not, they weren't pushing us in any way that was unnatural or unkind. We had a healthy level of fear and respect for them. The way you do for a teacher, or a parent, that wants you to be your best.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

I had several skating coaches growing up. I had one when I was a young boy until I was maybe 10 or 11. Then I went to a different coach. I honestly don't know why. I think it's because I upgraded quality. And then I switched to Richard Callaghan, who was my coach from the time I was 13 until I retired when I was 24.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

When I was a gymnast, there were no requirements for coaching. There was a very low barrier to entry, that coaches came and went. We had many, many coaches throughout my career. And some were as young as 19. So, when you have a 19-year-old male who's in charge of a team of girls, aging nine to 14, and you're spending so much time with them, it's potential for abuse. And it's a potential for really a lot of grooming. So the grooming techniques that a pedophile uses, or a sex offender uses, it's a perfect opportunity.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

I was probably 70 pounds, 14 years old, and started hearing comments about my body. Things like, "oh, you should look like her," or things like, "it looks like you swallowed an elephant," "you look like a pig," "you look like an airhead," comments that really start knocking you down. And as impressionable young athletes and girls, those comments really stay with us.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

I think part of it is that, as an adolescent girl, you're going through some changes with your body and your thoughts about your sexuality. And a young male coach, in my situation, he wasn't a lot older than I was, and he would say things to me that were manipulative. He told me once that he wanted me to wear a bra. And I didn't need a bra. But he told me I needed a bra. I came home and I told my mother that we had to go to the mall that very night to get a bra. And my mother was confused and she said, "oh, honey, we'll get one this weekend." And I said, "no, we have to get one tonight." And she took me to the mall and got me one. But I felt so uncomfortable that he was going to make comments about my breasts under my leotard that it made me do that.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

The abuse, I think, is less about the actual sexual gratification, although I do think that that is part of it. But more about controlling your every movement and your every thought. And centering those thoughts towards the coach so they could push your buttons. As a coach, you want to learn about your athlete so you can get them to perform on command, maybe, so to speak. And this is just some sick, twisted way to get your athletes to perform on command.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

When I started out as an elite gymnast, that was the first time I really experienced unhappiness. And it was kind of like I was doing gymnastics for everyone around me. And it never came from myself. I was never asked how I felt about things, and where I saw myself down the line, and what my goals were. It was kind of like, here are your goals, and this is what you're going to accomplish, and this is what is expected of you.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

Abuse, it doesn't happen overnight. There's a period where the coach is gaining your trust, and there's a grooming process. And my experience was very much that way with my coach. At first he was very supportive of me and paid a lot of attention to me and made me feel good about myself. And that later became manipulative. And I felt uncomfortable because I wanted his praise, I wanted his attention, and I wanted to be good. I wanted to be successful. And he made me feel that he was the coach that could make me win. And I was willing to put up with it.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

So to win gold medals and to compete until your body couldn't go anymore was something that everyone was doing around you. And it wasn't ever questioned. And if we tried speaking up, it was normally unheard, so we just learned to go silent. Cover all our emotions that we're feeling and compartmentalize. So anything's going on around us, we block it all out and we're fine. And then things started piling up and I wasn't okay.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

When I was 13 years old, I began being coached by Richard Callaghan. Before I was 14, or maybe by the time I was 14, I have memories of going into his office and spending large amount of times in his office where he would show me pornographic magazines, asked me questions about whether I masturbated, showed me how to masturbate, asked me the next day when he'd bring me in the office if I had masturbated since the last time I saw him. To me, that's sexual abuse right there.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

I did tell my best friend at the time. And we were 13, 14, and she didn't think, she thought it was odd, but she didn't think to say anything to authorities or parents. It was just a secret that girls shared with each other.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

As the years went on, it graduated to oral sex, it graduated to anal sex, it graduated to – well, there's no graduation after that, I guess, right? But the abuse then occurred hundreds of times, at competitions, in his office, in his car, at his house. We'd go to bars together by the time I was 16 and get drunk and do whatever it is on that spectrum.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

I was always aware that there was an amount of sexual abuse. But I felt a lot of shame. And I felt a role, that I had played a role in this, and that it was my fault. And that I had in some ways encouraged the behavior and allowed it to happen. Eventually I saw him move from me, putting his attention and interest in me to a younger gymnast on my team. And that was when I came forward and I said that I needed to move to another coach. And at that time, I remember that I did get another coach, and I did refuse to work with this coach. But it wasn't clear to, perhaps in the way I communicated this, I don't think anybody really acknowledged that it was sexual abuse. The understanding at the time was that I just had a personality conflict with this coach and that I needed to have a different coach.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

It's not that I didn't love gymnastics. I was just emotionally, physically, and mentally broken. I heard all the things that my coaches told me growing up. Like, "someone's always better than you." Like, you're basically unworthy and you're not enough. You have to continue striving to get all these medals to be enough, to feel enough, and that's not the way it works.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

I can't think of a moment in my life where I would call myself safe. Or away from it. It was part of my everyday regimen.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

Looking back, people have come up to me and said, "oh, it must have been this coach." And it makes me think, how did you know it was that coach? You must have known something.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Florida, Athletes & Sexual Abuse Hearing

How could this have happened to these young athletes? They gave their all to pursue the dream of winning Olympic gold, and they put their trust in their coaches, in their trainers, in their physicians, in their staff, and in return were abused.

John Hoberman, PhD, Sports historian Univ. Of Texas

Why is there such a pervasive problem in elite sport with serious misconduct by coaches? This is overwhelmingly a male population. For one thing, many coaches have found it necessary to establish authoritarian relationships with their athletes. I mean, this is anybody who pays attention to the sports world over any period of time is going to come across this. That this young person has to be molded and shaped and brainwashed in a certain way, and enter into what is often a very, sometimes dangerously dependent relationship with a male authority figure, who, in any number of cases, is just going to get high on that kind of authority.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

Just as you don't know anything different when you're raised in a dysfunctional or toxic family, in the athletic world you don't know anything other than what your coach tells you. And when you're a 14-year-old girl and this is your life, and you're spending 30-40 hours a week in the gym, you don't have any frame of reference. You don't know what is abusive.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

We ask our athletes to trust us 100%. Without that trust or that commitment from the athletes doing what the coach asks them to do, it's very, very difficult to get the success that you have in mind for that athlete.

If an athlete truly wants to be as great as they say they do, they have to trust 100% what the coach has to say.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

I never really opened myself up enough to trust a coach, and no coach ever really tried to get me to or care to, because you don't have to have trust within coaching an elite gymnast. You just tell them what to do, and that's how it goes.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

There's an expression that not every coach is a pedophile, but every pedophile wants to be a coach. Because they have access to kids. They have very little oversight. They pretty much get to do whatever they want to do.

John Hoberman, PhD, Sports historian Univ. Of Texas

When one looks at the number of elite coaches who have been caught and, in some cases, disciplined for engaging in this sort of predatory behavior, you realize that the young elite female athletic population is a kind of a sexual candy store for a lot of people.

Pam Boteler, Sprint canoe racer, WomenCAN International

There are still, unfortunately, men that say that men shouldn't be coaching women. That if you have an athletic woman that's wearing revealing clothing, and that's her athletic outfit, and they're doing moves that are very distracting, that men, really, that that's not a good place to be.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

What can make a coach vulnerable? Well, that's something that's going on inside the coach. I mean, they have something wrong psychologically themselves for there to be any possibility for them to become vulnerable. Coaching is an honorable profession. And coaches should treat that with respect and honor the fact that they're given this privilege to be able to mold and shape young athletes' bodies and minds. And if they feel like there's vulnerabilities associated with that, then there's something wrong with them.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

My last coach ever. I went out to California. And I knew when I was going out to this coach, his name was Mitch Ivey, he had a reputation as wanting to date his younger swimmers. And I thought, well, it's not going to affect me because I'm out of his age range. I was 21. So I went out there sort of with my eyes open, but thinking it's not going to be a problem, and he was molesting my teammate. And it caused a tremendous amount of harm.

Eva Rodansky, Former elite speed skater

When a coach is sleeping with an athlete, it doesn't just affect that athlete. It causes toxicity within the dynamic of the entire team. Other people are affected. That skater's rivals are affected. In speed skating, even the men on the sprint team were affected during the time that one of my teammates was involved in a relationship with the coach.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

What was unique about Mitch Ivey was that Mitch didn't try to hide it. Most people who were molesting young girls hide it. But they roomed together. They traveled together. She came to workout with him. There

was no cultural expectation that this was prohibited. Not just because it's illegal, right? But coaches dated their athletes.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

The abuse that occurred to me was perceived by the skaters around me, the parents around me at the time, that I was a favorite. That I was my coach's favorite, because he spent the most time with me. I think that because of that, I did not have a lot of friends around me in the rink. It's not a fun team environment because they're mad at you or they're jealous of the relationship that you're having with your coach.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

When sexual abuse is revealed, when it comes to light, 100% of the time, somebody tells me and I'm like, I can tell you the end of the story. The team and other coaches will rally around him. And they'll make all kinds of things, "she threw herself at him." All these other athletes have staked their athletic careers on this coach, and so they want her to leave. And they want him to stay. So, even coaches who are in criminal court and are admitting to child sexual abuse will have the bleachers full of their swimmers and other coaching friends who will be supportive of him and really leaving the victim out in the cold. That has to change.

ABC News story

Sexual assault charges are rocking the gymnastics world. Larry Nassar was Team USA's doctor in four Olympics, treating the sport's biggest stars. And now the former Michigan State doctor is being called a monster and could spend the rest of his life behind bars.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

When I first started hearing about Larry Nassar and the girls that had suffered abuse under his guise of medical treatment, I felt very devastated that this is still continuing. And it's a very long story. My abuse happened many years ago, and to see these women, these young women, talking about this and processing it and fighting and making change, it feels exciting that something could happen. But I also worry that it may never change.

Pam Boteler, Sprint canoe racer, WomenCAN International

Everybody that's speaking out, they've all been speaking very alone. Nobody's supporting them. But we're actually a community of survivors, whatever that surviving is from. So the power of hearing those stories, even if you're watching a YouTube video or reading a story, you're reading your own story. But it's just maybe another context, another situation. But it's essentially the very same story.

John Hoberman, PhD, Sports historian Univ. Of Texas

How can a generation pass while the sports federations are simply ignoring what could be known if they chose to know it?

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

There are a lot of people that think that the Larry Nassar situation just had to do with him. And if you get rid of him and the people that enabled him, the people that actually knew, and the whole system is fine. And that's not true. The system enabled somebody to be able to keep athletes quiet, made them subservient and obedient. And that's what needs to change. To have it be an organization that actually represents the interest of athletes.

Eva Rodansky, Former elite speed skater

I have been involved in the push to expose sexual abuse in Olympic sports since about 2013 when I testified to the first Congressional investigation on sexual abuse in sports. When I testified, it turned out that I was one of only three victims that they interviewed. And the Congressional investigation that was initiated at the time ended up going nowhere.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

Our success is tied, in many ways, to the success of our athletes. If we have an athlete that achieves an Olympic gold medal, we're considered a better coach. So it's not the easiest thing in the world to be able to put your athlete first and do what's best for them, because that may not be in line with what's best for your career.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

Of course, USA wants to produce medals and results and all these things, but who's going to have the athletes' best interest in mind? At the end of the day, that's the most important. And if we're strong and healthy mentally, imagine where we can be.

PBS News Hour

Former gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar was sentenced to life in prison yesterday. But as the hearing ended, the judge and a number of women who testified said it is crucial now to focus on what needs to change moving forward.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

What I would like to see is coaches embracing the problems instead of getting defensive and saying, "I didn't do anything wrong. Why should I have to pay for the crimes of these other people that may have done terrible things?" You know, many of these coaches have been coaching for decades. And when they hear that now they have to travel with another adult, and they can't be alone in a vehicle when they rent a car, that feels burdensome to them. And unfortunately, that's the only way to move forward is to have these safeguards in place.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

I think most parents, they don't do background checks on the teachers that teach their kids. They just presume that the school has done that. And they also don't do background checks on their coaches when they're in a club system that's apart from the school. And the truth is that they need to be the ones to make sure that all this has happened. Really, a lot of sports fought very, very hard not to have to do background checks. They only cost between \$10-\$30 bucks, and still that was seen as too much money to spend for child safety.

John Hoberman, PhD, Sports historian Univ. Of Texas

It wasn't that many years ago that US Swimming fired a hundred coaches for sexual abuse. Think about that. A hundred coaches. Did they leave no record of their abusive behaviors? Did nobody speak out and not be heard by the people in positions of responsibility?

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

Part of the reason that predators are allowed to exist is that they operate behind the scenes. And people don't like to ruffle feathers. They don't like to make a scene or cause trouble. But if we talk about this more,

and we educate people more on the signs, and we give them a space or a forum to be able to speak, to be able to talk without feeling repercussions, this will make it more difficult.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

Historically, even now, coaches have been and continue to be able to just jump from club to club. And because that happens a lot for non-sexual abuse reasons, it doesn't usually raise this huge red flag.

Eva Rodansky, Former elite speed skater

That's what happens. These predatory coaches are just fired and then picked up by other sports federations. Maybe in other countries, maybe in other clubs. Mike Crowe coached and was later promoted to team director in Canada. And about 10 years after he was first hired in Canada, he was investigated and eventually fired for similar misconduct to what he was doing in the US.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

We don't want to be an exporter of sexual abusers. There has to be an international remedy. The International Olympic Committee has to take this as seriously as it takes doping.

John Hoberman, PhD, Sports historian Univ. Of Texas

Unless there is real, and this will mean radical reform within the sports federations, then making the right statements to Congress and others and claiming that you are going to take care of this problem, is simply going to be rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

I made my original complaint in 1999 to US Figure Skating, and it took them 19 years to finally get Richard Callaghan banned from coaching in figure skating.

Jessica Armstrong, JD, Former elite gymnast

My story of sexual abuse didn't feel important until my daughter joined the same gym and started the sport. And at that point, I realized that this was not appropriate and I wanted to protect her. I wanted to make sure that her experience in the sport was better than mine. I wanted to make a difference in a positive way. So I didn't want to come forward and say, this happened to me. I wanted to come forward and say, here's what you can do to prevent this from happening. And Jennifer and I crafted proposals to the USA Gymnastics bylaws. And they were to tighten up the rules and to put protections in place so that coaches had background screening, training, there was an opportunity for gymnasts to come forward and report coaches that had been sexually abusive. And those proposals were ignored by USA Gymnastics. They were unanswered. And that was devastating.

Craig Maurizi, Ice skating coach

Even when I'm sitting here today, I can tell myself that it happened, that it happened to me. But even today, I can't actually tell you that I feel like I've been sexually abused. I know that sounds bizarre, but because it was so inextricably woven into my life, and it's the only life I know, that to me it feels, normal is the word I'm going to use, but I don't want to make it sound like what happened was normal. But it's all I know.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

Me personally, my healing came from taking ownership of my life. Because I felt like I had no control over anything. And a lot of times when we're abused, you don't have any control. You know, we can sit here and be victims to our abuse or we can become survivors of abuse.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD, Former Olympic swimmer/Civil rights attorney

My message to all the Larry Nassar survivors and anybody else who's experienced sexual abuse is that you can heal, that you will get to a new normal, that whatever you want for your life, you really can still have. I have right now what I've always wanted. I got a great hubby, and I love my kids more than anything in the world, and I get to do really meaningful work that I'm really proud of. And I live in a great community that I can really make a difference in.

Eva Rodansky, Former elite speed skater

I spoke what I felt was the truth, and I stood up for what I believed was right. And I'm not sorry.

Katelyn Ohashi, Former elite gymnast

"We're stronger than you now, and we're fighting harder. There will be change. This is just a starter. At what point will you realize it wasn't yours to take because clearly it didn't matter that it was our life that was at stake."

[End]