

Cali Werner, Ph.D., LCSW-S, CMPC

Platform Statement | Alliance of Social Workers in Sports | VP Nomination

As both a former Division I athlete and a clinical social worker specializing in anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), I bring a unique perspective to the intersection of mental health and sport. My passion for sport social work is rooted in both personal experience and professional dedication to improving mental health care for athletes.

During my collegiate running career at Rice University, I earned nine conference titles and Honorable Mention All-American recognition in the 10,000 meters while navigating my own experiences with OCD. I later competed in the 2020 U.S. Olympic Trials Marathon. These experiences shaped my understanding of the unique psychological demands athletes face and inspired my commitment to ensuring athletes have access to effective, specialized mental health treatment.

Professionally, I am a licensed clinical social worker, Certified Mental Performance Consultant, and Ph.D. graduate of Baylor University, where my research focused on mental health in elite sport. As part of my doctoral research, I interviewed 20 Olympians to explore their mental health experiences, including the psychological challenges of competing at the highest level and navigating life beyond the Olympic Games. My research also examined barriers to mental health treatment among Division I collegiate athletes, and opportunities to develop targeted interventions for athletes. Through my private practice, Athlete Rising, LLC, I specialize in treating anxiety, OCD, and related mental health challenges in athletes, integrating evidence-based clinical approaches and sport psychology. I am also passionate about education, advocacy, and increasing mental health literacy through professional presentations, community outreach, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

My vision for the Alliance is to help advance the conversation beyond general mental health awareness toward a deeper understanding of effective, individualized treatment. While increasing awareness and reducing stigma remain essential, we must also recognize that mental health conditions are not interchangeable, and neither are their treatments. An athlete experiencing OCD may require a fundamentally different therapeutic approach than an athlete struggling with depression, trauma, or performance-related anxiety. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health care, and specialized, evidence-based treatment is critical to meaningful outcomes.

I hope to support the Alliance in expanding education about evidence-based treatment modalities, strengthening connections between sport social workers and specialized clinical resources, and advocating for appropriate, accessible mental health care across all levels of sport.

Ultimately, I believe the Alliance has an important opportunity to lead the way in ensuring that athletes receive not just mental health support, but the right support for their specific needs. I would be honored to contribute my clinical experience, research background, and passion for advocacy to help advance that mission in the role on the executive board as vice president.

