SBJ BEST PLACES TO WORK IN SPORTS 2023 NOMINATE

TECHNOLOGY

OnBalance's mental health care management platform aims to support athletes

OnBalance is a SaaS model with an annual subscription tailored for college and professional sports organizations.

7.27.2023

STARTUPS

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ONBALANCE

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Our Startups series looks at companies and founders who are innovating in the fields of athlete performance, fan engagement, team/league operations and other high-impact areas in sports. If you'd like to be considered for this series, tell us about your mission.

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World's shortest elevator pitch: "OnBalance is a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive mental health care and performance management software platform for both collegiate athletic departments and professional sports organizations."

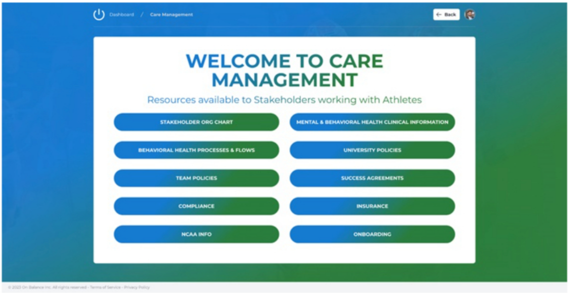
Company: OnBalance

Location: North Palm Beach, Florida

Year founded: 2022

Website: https://www.onbalancehealth.com/

Funding round to date: “We finished a Series A.”



WELCOME TO CARE MANAGEMENT

Resources available to Stakeholders working with Athletes

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ONBALANCE

Who are your investors? “They are individual, high-net-worth people that have invested with me in the past in my businesses. They are a mix between guys who run PE funds, CEOs of health-care businesses and technology CEOs. We’re going out with a Series B in the fall. At that point, we will probably bring in fund or professional money.”

Are you looking for more investment? “No.”

Tell us about yourself, founder & CEO Walt Norley: “I have founded and built five companies and two in which I pivoted to other solutions. I started my first company at 28 and I’ve been doing it since then. I’m 61. This is my last build. I sold a company, OnLink, to a Fortune 90 company in 2019. That was a performance management software platform for anything managed outside, such as agriculture, golf courses, sports fields – anything that had professional labor, water, chemicals, equipment, etc. We put everything into one place and came up with performance metrics that provided insights on what was excellent, good and poor on a real-time basis. I started this for the purpose of trying to solve a problem. Mental health care is a real problem and it escalated significantly during the pandemic. I’m a former collegiate athlete. I played quarterback at **Ohio State** and Georgia. I’m also bipolar and it was diagnosed when I was 25. I was looking for a way to give back. I’ve had success in my previous builds and there is a great need for what we’re doing. We have the altruistic side and the business side, the collegiate and professional sports sides. Collegiately, we’re dealing with every sport in every athletic department and 25-30% of collegiate athletes are suffering from depression and anxiety and only 10% come forward. Our platform helps that care team improve data, knowledge, insights, communications, efficiency and we put a performance metric system together to see how the individual is progressing with different levels of severity. I enjoy this. I love putting a team together. We have a good board of directors and advisory board and the operating team is being built out. We just finished Gen 1 in collaboration with the University of Alabama and their director of behavioral medicine. Alabama has the best mental health, behavioral health program in the **NCAA**. We have a good pilot partner we developed this with who helped us de-risk what we are doing and their brand is significant.”

Who are your co-founders/partners? “I do not have any co-founders. My partners, if you will, are my advisors and board of directors. On the board of directors, there’s a variety of backgrounds. You have Dr. Anthony Coletta, who’s an experienced and well-known surgeon in the Philadelphia community for 30 years. He’s a successful entrepreneur in health-care technology and a former executive with one of the largest Independence Blue Cross companies in the country. Julian Geiger, who built Aeropostale, a $2-3 billion company, is a dynamite business guy. He was on my previous board. Ned Moore, who was also on my previous board at OnLink, is a successful technology software entrepreneur. He’s done it in health care and is doing it in the retail world now. Jack Nicklaus Jr. was on a previous board of mine in the early 2000s. We go way back. He was president of Nicklaus Companies for a long time and a successful golf course designer and also is very involved with Nicklaus Children's Health Care Foundation, which has done a lot of great things for the health and welfare of children. He has a strong knowledge of and network within this sports industry. I have this great group of advisors, a mix of financial people to marketing people to health-care people to sports data with Meg Brossy, a risk management person."

How does your platform work? "It's a comprehensive mental health care platform for college and professional sports organizations. We put everything into one place, which we call Care In One Place. We have four pillars. One is your player profile, which is illness management that has a scoring system. We have care management, which is a repository for everything in sports medicine and the care team for regulations, policies, **NFL** Players Association, NCAA compliance. We have a knowledge center with an athlete interface. We have an insight hub, where they are educated in a graphical, video manner, so relatable stories for athletes from every sport. Going through depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, suicidal ideations, there's about eight major disorders athletes suffer from. We have a program with relatable stories sorted by the disorder and illness and the sport. I'm proud of it and that is relatable to the student or professional athlete in any age bracket. We have a podcast program, Athletes OnBalance.

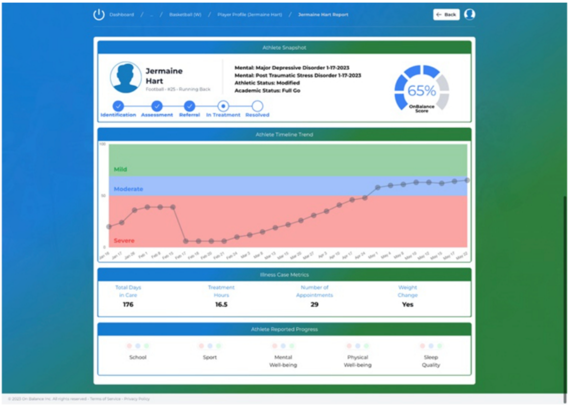
Athletes OnBalance - Nick Saban
THLETES ONBALANCE
PODCAST
SPECIAL GUEST
NICK SABAN
HEAD COACH
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA FOOTBALL

We just finished a podcast with **Nick Saban** from Alabama and before that the Director, Behavioral Medicine at Alabama, Dr. Ginger Gilmore. We're having mental health-care experts, coaches and athletes. The third podcast is with a former Alabama player. The objective is to talk openly about people who have struggled with issues, how you have dealt with it and how you achieve outcomes and minimize or ideally eliminate the stigma that's always been associated with mental health issues, specifically with athletes because of the perception and sometimes reality of mental strength, physical strength and talent and ability to compete and persevere. The reality is, especially with this generation, there are more challenges. Social media has a lot to do with that. Everybody's iPhone or Android phone has something to do with it. The increased awareness has come and more people are talking about it. We're taking it to another level. We want to be the face and voice behind mental health-care education and knowledge for athletics. We're starting collegiately and professionally but I could see us going to the high school level. Performance optimization is our last pillar. That really is our drive. Our drive is to get enough data for the trending and predictions and ultimately the intersection between mental behavior data and physical athletic data and you're looking at optimization for the athletes and coaches, and on the mental health side we're driving that toward preventives. If we start seeing signs because of the trends and the predictive modeling, we can see someone is heading into a deep depression and the care team can see that data and the alarm can be triggered so we prevent that person from going into whatever that situation is from anxiety to depression to substance abuse. Performance optimization is ultimately our main objective after we've gotten everything into one place, which is what we're doing now. The starting program is all care for behavioral, mental health in one place for the athletic department and professional organization."

What problem is your company solving? "There is a great need for improved mental health care for collegiate and professional athletic programs. We're solving that problem with insights and real information and it's not anecdotal. We're organizing everything for a care team to manage an illness case. So, identification to assessment to diagnosis to treatment to resolution. That's our thread of activity within our software and then we put a scoring program together so the caregiving teams can start to understand what is high-quality, efficient care to average care and poor care. When you have that, like any other management tool, you drill it down to solve why something didn't happen at least at the good stage if not the excellent stage. The demand for improved mental health care and education for mental health care is the problem we're solving."

What does your product cost and who is your target customer? "We're a SaaS model with an annual subscription that is originally priced at the $90,000 per year level. The subscriber is the athletic department at the university and the organizations - NFL, **MLB**, **NHL** teams - every sports organization, men and women, in the United States.”

How are you marketing your product? “We’ve got a great marketing team. We’re doing it with a podcast program and creating awareness. It’s not an advertisement. I’m doing the podcast by myself. We use social media with the different podcasts, announcing our team and Gen 1. We have a direct target market program that we’re getting ready to launch. But mainly it’s been social media as we get into the market after our development over the last year, where we’re narrowing that down to the selected market I just mentioned.”



Mental: Major Depressive Disorder 1-17-2023
Mental: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 1-17-2023
Athletic Status: Modified
Academic Status: Full Go

Total Days in Care	Treatment Hours	Number of Appointments	Weight Change
176	16.5	29	Yes

ONBALANCE

How do you scale, and what is your targeted level of growth? “We scale by getting 10 right users at the collegiate level as well as a mix within the professional level. Those first 10, 20 subscriber users are proof of usage, high value and concept. From there, we scale in two ways. One from credible entities in those two different segments and the second one is we intend to go to the associations and the conferences themselves. Hypothetically, it would be getting an endorsement from the **SEC** in collegiate athletics. The same would apply within the professional world with the NFL Players Association. It’s a little bit of a bottoms-up approach on a brick-by-brick basis, as well as through the conferences in the professional leagues. I’ve had some success in my career with channel partnerships. I’m a big fan of channel partnerships to scale. At this point in time, I don’t see one. That might change in the next year and if it does that will be something strategically we’ll evaluate. In the interim, in some ways, I look at what I just described as a strategic partnership. When you have a conference, that’s a channel. They’re not the subscriber. The subscribers are the entities within their conferences or professional sports organizations. I like to drive to cash-flow positive within a two-year window and from there focus on faster growth scaling.”

Who are your competitors, and what makes you different? “We don’t have a competitor at this moment. We’re a first-market mover and we’re comprehensive. The comprehensiveness of what we’re doing, as well as the drive to performance optimization with built-up data is what makes us unique. There are some companies doing elements of what we are doing, but not nearly as comprehensively as what we are doing.”

What’s the unfair advantage that separates your company? “It’s the proprietary nature. This is a large platform. It’s not an app. It’s not a single solution. That’s why we call it a platform because it's an operating platform. The other element is we put together a proprietary scoring platform that no one has seen in the industry. The scoring program is for mental health care, which is unique beyond athletics.”

What milestone have you recently hit or will soon hit? “Our Gen 1 is a major milestone. We’ve developed this in collaboration with Alabama’s director of behavioral medicine and they are the gold standard within the collegiate world. We’ve built a program that will scale out. It’s not a situation where we built it on our own and hopefully the market likes it. We’ve co-developed it at our expense with the premier program in college athletics and that transcends into professional sports. It's not unique to college, there's just some nomenclature changes to the software that separates it from pro to collegiate. The next milestone is getting this in the hands of the next 5-10 users."

What are the values that are core to your brand? "Improved health care through tracking severity levels and scoring the lifecycle of those severity levels. The severity levels in mental health care are mild, moderate and severe. We have a program that allows the care team, which sits under the umbrella of sports medicine programs, both college and professional, to be given insights. We create notifications, alerts and alarms for the ecosystem of the stakeholder group that's part of that. That stakeholder group is from the treatment care team to the coaches to the advisors to the institutions in the university world. A significant piece of this is the value of compliance, risk-management. Universities are very exposed to when there's not essentially a detailed tracking program on the mental health care of the student athletes of the university. There are well-documented lawsuits across the country and a lot of universities have been sued over the last five or six years where a student athlete committed suicide and there's no data trail to how they were treated to get to that point. Institutional accountability is a key value to the program. Performance optimization, the ability to take our data from these illness management cases and put them into trends, so the ability to see 17 sports at a university and when are the illness cases that happen from team to team and sport to sport. Are they preseason? In-season? Postseason? When you see the percentage and the numbers deviate from sport to sport, as an operating program and management tool, you drill down into the why and you find there's greater anxiety and hypothetically on the crew team because in the offseason, pre and post, because of the nature of that sport. We've started to see with our one user these trends that lead to predictions that go beyond. It's going to disrupt the way they look at athletics, especially with the intersection of behavioral, mental and physical athletics."

What does success ultimately look like for your company? "That we've saved lives and improved mental health care throughout our target markets and we're using data to accomplish that and we've also eliminated or greatly reduced the stigma that is associated with mental health, specifically to athletes."

What should investors or customers know about you — the person, your life experiences — that shows they can believe in you? "I've done it before. I have a track record and it's not in mental health care but in performance optimization data. Taking data and turning it into insights is what I've done for the last 20-plus years with two separate businesses. I can walk the talk as a former student athlete playing at a high level and being associated with a lot of athletic programs collegiately and on the professional side that I know from a personal level. This is very important to me. Four decades of managing bipolar and having the ability to function at the level I've been able to function, I'm proud of that. It's very difficult but I'm proud of where I am at this stage of my life and all the things I've accomplished and achieved. That translates into competitive athletes that suffer in silence because of the stigma or the organization they're under, college or pro, that there's not enough attention and organization around providing that care and once it's provided, having metrics to improve that care. I understand all that on a personal level and I understand taking data into insights that can disrupt industries."

How would OnBalance have helped you during your collegiate days? "It would have helped a lot and would have helped a lot of other people. A lot of this stuff can be environmentally produced like the loss of a loved one. It's common for athletes to go through a level of depression after a surgery or a significant injury and they're not participating and competing, may have lost a starting job or are being pushed down the depth chart. Everyone in that world identifies themselves, rightfully or wrongfully, as that lacrosse player or that swimmer, that's their identity. When they're not out there competing or practicing, they face a little bit of an identity crisis. It certainly happens when the playing days are over. It would have helped but you have to have a care team first. The organization or athletic department has to understand there's a need. That's happening now. Everybody is taking mental health very seriously. It's been a dynamic that's happened the last five years. Alabama has been doing it for 17 years, that's how progressive Nick Saban is. They're taking it seriously and understand the intersection between mental health and physical performance and if you're taking care of the knees and shoulders and all that, you have to take care of what's between the ears. That's happening. It may have been there when I was there. It would have helped me and lots of other athletes."

PREVIOUS

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PODCASTS

SBJ Morning Buzzcast: September 27, 2023

September 27, 2023

The smooth succession at CBS Sports; Why the Warriors ownership is perfect for the W and Thunder arena to go before voters in December

00:00 10:24

SBJ I Factor: Amy Latimer

LISTEN

September 26, 2023

SBJ I Factor presented by Allied Sports features an interview with Amy Latimer. Latimer was recently promoted to Executive Vice President and COO of Delaware North -- a role she will assume in mid-October. Before she takes over her new role, the current president of TD Garden and member of the inaugural SBJ Game Changers class in 2011 sat down with SBJ's Austin Karp to talk about her career path, passion for sports and what her eventual biography would be titled. SBJ I Factor is a monthly podcast offering interviews with sports executives who have been recipients of one of the magazine's awards, such as Forty Under 40, Game Changers and others.

SBJ Spotlight: Toledo's Strategic Plan

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September 7, 2023

SBJ TV

Up and down: David Berson, Rick Cordella, David Preschlack, and NFL Monday doubleheaders

5 MINS

Marchand and Ourand, Ep. 106: MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred, and Sean McManus's big goodbye

56 MINS

SBJ I Factor: Amy Latimer, presented by Allied Sports

13 MINS

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