

Global Sport Institute investment in athlete mental health continues as the Timeout app wins Global Sport Venture Challenge

Timeout was one of four funded ventures at the annual Global Sport Venture Challenge in 2021.

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Facing the end of her volleyball career and the loss of a close friend, Maya McClendon in 2018 took a meeting with Global Sport Institute leadership to discuss a new idea. The idea was for athletes to have better, more personalized access to mental health resources. That way, McClendon hoped, nobody would have to struggle like she and her Arizona State University teammates had struggled.

McClendon then applied to join the Venture Devils program at ASU, slowly developing the idea for the Timeout app, which creates “personalized, adaptive mental health programming to improve athlete well being, help seeking and engagement with CBT inspired resources,” according to its website. Years after taking that meeting, McClendon became the top prize winner at this year’s Global Sport Venture Challenge.

“With the \$15,000 prize, we will be able to further validate Timeout as we go to market and get our product into the hands of our customers,” says McClendon. “With our first sale in January and the completion of our beta testing, we can now invest in conducting research behind our machine learning technology.”

In continued partnership with the J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute, the 2021 Global Sport Venture Challenge provided sports related startups the opportunity for support needed to raise their ideas to the next level. After receiving applications from more than 140 fledgling firms for the fall funding track, the panelists cut that list in half, inviting about 75 to pitch at the in-person Demo Day on Dec. 7.

Onstage at SkySong, entrepreneurs from early-stage companies in the sport industry pitched their ideas to a panel of judges from across the world. This year’s judges included Karina Bohn, Global Sport Institute COO; Sterling Douglas, program director at R/GA Ventures; and Davyeon Ross, entrepreneur in residence at Coalition Venture Studios. More than \$90,000 was awarded to sport-related ventures out of \$192,000 total across all tracks.

“It’s inspiring to see how many founders are willing to bet on themselves and pursue their ideas,” says Jeff Kunowski, the associate director of innovation programs at the Global Sport Institute. “I always leave our demo day activations feeling excited about the future. Our judges have the added benefit of visualizing how each concept could fit within their respective organizations.”

[The Timeout app](#) was not only the top prize winner of this year’s Global Sport Venture Challenge, going home with \$15,000, but was also a continuation of the type of work the Global Sport Institute has championed throughout its history. Mental health solutions are not limited to the field of sport, but as athletes like Naomi Osaka and Kevin Love have become more vocal about their psychological trials, an app like Timeout can maximize its impact in athletics. The mobile app company will also receive follow-on mentorship from Global Sport Institute partners adidas and R/GA. Without this funding, McClendon says, the company would most likely not have been able to hit its sales goals for 2021. Now, Timeout can take aim at partnerships with 12 schools and with the PAC 12, ACC and Big Ten Alliance to address their public service announcements on mental health.

Other funding winners included [Conscious Gear](#), a big-and-tall athletic and outdoor wear brand; [Gifted](#), a social media sponsorship platform; and [VBAmerica](#), a volleyball lifestyle brand.

“I’m always fascinated by the variety of ideas that reach us through the Global Sport Venture Challenge,” says Karina Bohn, Global Sport Institute COO. “From mental health apps to performance gear to everything in between, everyone has approached sports entrepreneurship from their own unique perspective and offered a compelling solution for how to address a pressing need.”

The eighth Global Sport Venture Challenge (and 10th overall) brought back the tangible excitement of in-person pitches and connection through innovation while continuing to fund and empower the next great idea in sport.

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