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SPORTS PERFORMANCE

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THREE MISTAKES IN TRAINING YOUNG ATHLETES

Concern #1: Excessive Caution in Athletic Training for Children
Many parents harbor apprehensions about potential injuries, impeding their child's growth, or the prospect of overtraining. These concerns are valid; nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the pivotal role the ages of 6 to 16 play in the athletic development of a child.

This decade is when a child acquires and refines motor skills, which are integral to their future sporting endeavors. Missing out on this developmental phase could mean not fully realizing their athletic capabilities, as supported by developmental science.

During this period, children experience significant advances in locomotor, manipulative, stability, muscular, and coordination skills. Their nervous system is highly responsive to the activities they engage in, whether sedentary or physically demanding. The body's adaptability means it will conform to the nature of the stimuli it receives.

A sedentary lifestyle can lead to the body conditioning itself to low activity levels. Conversely, participation in a structured program focusing on agility, reaction, and stability will stimulate the body to develop accordingly.

Solution: Initiate Appropriate Training at an Early Stage

It is imperative to start children on the right training regimen early, providing them with varied challenges that will shape their physical development and enhance their future athletic performance.

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Mistake #2: Specializing too Early

On the opposite end of the scale, some parents push their children into focusing on a single sport too soon.

Consider the tale of a promising young baseball pitcher from the neighborhood. At 14, he was hailed as a rising star locally.

By 16, he was over it—suffering from injuries, exhaustion, and a faded interest in baseball.

The reason? He was pushed into specializing prematurely.

Eager to boost their son's pitching arm, his parents enlisted a strength coach to design an intensive training regimen. The teen attended pitching sessions multiple times a week, participated in club games, and competed in tournaments most weekends during the off-season from school. The constant strain and repetitive motions took a toll on his body, culminating in the need for arm surgery.

This scenario is all too common, though it's baffling why it repeats when research clearly indicates the risks of early specialization for young athletes—risks that can compromise their long-term career.

For instance,

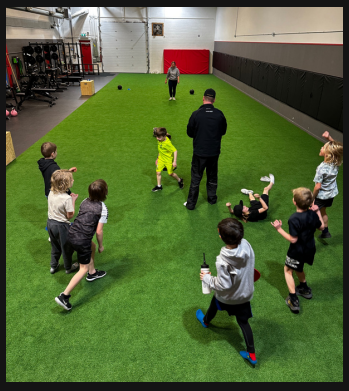
A 2018 study analyzing injuries among NBA first-round draft picks from 2008 to 2015 discovered that those who played only one sport in high school were nearly twice as likely to experience a serious injury compared to their multi-sport counterparts.

The same research indicated that high school single-sport athletes were over three times more likely to have shorter careers than those who played multiple sports.

Additionally, research on the 2018 NFL Draft Class showed that a whopping 88% of the drafted players were multi-sport athletes during their high school years.

Moreover, a 2016 study on MLB players linked early specialization with a higher frequency of arm and shoulder injuries, as well as a reduced number of games played in the major leagues.

The takeaway? Pushing your child to specialize early can be a significant handicap. It may not only increase the risk of injury but also:



It could result in burnout and a diminishing passion for the sport they play.

The Solution: Focus on developing overall athleticism until the age of 18, after which a young athlete can start to concentrate on a specific sport.

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Mistake #3

If your approach to preseason training was like mine, it began with endurance runs around the neighborhood for conditioning.

By your mid-teens, weightlifting became the norm.

And if your experiences were anything like mine as a youngster, you were probably guilty of overloading the barbell with more weight than you should have. You adhered to the conventional trinity: squats, bench presses, and deadlifts… And rarely ventured beyond these staples.
Fast forward to the present, and it's possible you're passing on similar guidance to your offspring. This well-meant advice might actually be diminishing their athletic potential.
Here's why: each individual has a unique composition of fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscle fibers. Fast-twitch fibers generate the power needed for quick, explosive actions like sprinting, jumping, or lifting a heavy weight just once.

Slow-twitch fibers, on the other hand, are crucial for endurance and sustained activities.
Naturally, athletes in most team sports covet a higher proportion of fast-twitch fibers to outperform their rivals — to leap higher, sprint quicker, and overpower the opponent.

However, the activities your child engages in from ages 6-16 can significantly influence their muscle fiber development.

If their time is largely spent playing video games, watching TV, jogging leisurely, or weightlifting without quickness, they're more likely to develop a dominance of slow-twitch fibers.

This isn't an issue if they aspire to endurance sports like marathon running or cycling.

But for young athletes drawn to fast-paced sports such as hockey, baseball, basketball, football, tennis, or wrestling, a predominance of fast-twitch fibers is advantageous.

The implication is clear: their training should focus on FAST, EXPLOSIVE movements. The Solution: Emphasize SPEED in training.

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