

Busting 6 myths about sports specialization

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People often do counterproductive things despite good intentions.

One example is the growing modern trend of young athletes specializing in a single sport as early as 9 and 10 years old – sometimes even younger.

Scott Sailor, the president of the National Athletic Trainers' Association, recently addressed six myths about sports specialization on HuffingtonPost.com, emphasizing that cross training and rest are more critical to short- and long-term goals than working year-round on single-sport-specific skill sets.

NATA is one of nearly three dozen medical and sport organizations that endorse USA Football's Heads Up Football program.

Here are some of the myths that parents often cite after deciding to focus their child's athletic activities on a single sport.

Most college athletes specialized in one sport as a child

According to a 2012 American Medical Society for Sports Medicine report, 88 percent of college athletes surveyed participated in more than one sport as a child.

The only way for a child to be good enough for college athletics is to focus specifically on one sport early in life

Recent studies published by the University of Edinburgh and the Journal of Sport Sciences suggest just the opposite.

Children who play multiple sports are more developed than those who specialized in a single sport during childhood and adolescence.

Children need to play their sport year-round to avoid getting out of shape, which could lead to injury

According to a study by Dr. Neeru Jayanthi of Loyola University, early sport specialization is one of the strongest predictors of child injury. Athletes in the study who specialized in one sport were 70 to 93 percent more likely to get hurt, including overuse injuries.

Girls who specialize in one sport early in life are found to have a higher risk of anterior knee pain disorders, including a higher rate of ACL tears.

Kids who spend their time learning one sport as a child are more likely to stay active throughout their lives

Many studies on this matter show the exact opposite to be true, including one conducted by UCLA. Children who specialize in one sport early in life are more often inactive as an adult because after burning out in one sport they have no experience in another to turn to.

The only way to develop skills in a sport is to adopt that sport early and spend time training to be better in that specific sport

Numerous studies disagree with this stance, including one by the Integrated Soldier System Project in Canada.

Playing multiple sports statistically produces longer playing careers, better confidence, motivation, motor control and athletic development, plus the ability to transfer these skills to other sports more easily.

The only way to learn to love a sport is to specialize early and focus on getting better in that sport

Again, early specialization has shown to lead to a greater risk for burnout due to stress, decreased motivation and lack of enjoyment.