

Increase in tommy john surgery amongst young athletes

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In order to keep up with the competition, athletes must constantly look for a competitive advantage. There are many ways to do this, both good and bad, legal and illegal. The hottest trend in today's society is very unique and out of the ordinary.

Young athletes have been turning to a procedure called Tommy John surgery in order to get a boost in athletic performance. This surgery has been sought out by these young athletes even when not injured, and this has outraged many professionals and doctors around the world. This growing trend has been highly debated and will continue to be until some sort of guidelines are set. Tommy John surgery is reconstructive surgery of the ulnar collateral ligament in the elbow. This surgery has been common amongst college and professional athletes over the last few decades, most notably baseball players. The surgery was first performed in 1974 on former Major League Baseball star Tommy John by Doctor Frank Jobe. The surgery was so revolutionary, Doctor Jobe decided to name the surgery after his first patient.

The process for Tommy John surgery is a quite simple process that has evolved over time. Basically, when ulnar collateral ligament in the elbow becomes damaged, a tendon needs to be taken from another part of the body in order to replace the damaged one. The new tendon is carefully woven into a figure eight pattern in the elbow bone. There is a slight risk of damage to the ulnar nerve, but if done carefully, the process is pretty routine these days. One of the key reasons why young athletes are opting for this surgery is the rising success rate ever since it has been in existence. When it was first discovered and performed, the surgery was given a 1 in 100

success rate by surgeon Frank Jobe. The success rate as of 2009 is an astonishing 85-92 percent.

The time it takes to recover depends on the sport, and the position played in that sport. On average, it takes between 6 and 12 months to fully recover, with baseball pitchers taking the longest. The causes for this surgery can be a variety of situations. Through the repetitivestressof the throwing motion, the ulnar collateral ligament can become stretched, frayed, or torn severely. In pitchers, the total number of pitches thrown is the best way to monitor elbow issues. The type of pitch thrown, such as a curveball or a slider, also has an effect but not quite as much of one as the number of pitches thrown. Children these days are beind overworked more than ever, thus causing a dramatic increase in elbow issues in young athletes.

The growing concern with this surgery as of late has been the urge of these teenagers who want to get this surgery even when they are not injured. The reason for this is because since so many athletes come back from this surgery playing at a much higher level than pre-surgery, these young kids figure that they might as well get the surgery before they can get hurt. Parents are also at fault here as well because there are many cases where the parent is the initiator as well. Beau Wycoff, a freshman baseball player for his hometown high school Toms River North, is facing this same issue. His father believes that he should get Tommy John surgery because he doesn't throw as hard as the other boys on the team. He isn't looked at as a top player, and his father believes that this will make him stronger and throw

much harder. Beau is not on the same page and is very torn about this situation.

" I want to be the team's top pitcher, but having this surgery when I'm not hurt is something I am not sure about," Beau said. This is just an example of what goes on all over the country with young athletes and their decisions to achieve a competitive advantage. In an e-mail response from the Center for Sports Parenting, they simply are irate about this situation. They believe that there should be a significant medical issue with the elbow for someone to legally go through with the surgery. Also mentioned was pressure from parents in order to get this surgery is a huge concern in dealing with this topic. The Center believes that operating on a perfectly healthy elbow in order to get some kind of advantage is an unnecessary risk for a young athlete. Situations like these make Tommy John surgery look like it's a bad thing, and that certainly is not the case.

It should only be seen as a bad thing when it is abused by people who truly do not need it. This surgery has been proven by many studies to be very positive. In one study where a questionnaire was sent out to 743 patients who had the surgery, 94.5 percent were baseball players and the other 5.5 percent were track, football, and other. Out of these people questioned, 622 patients or 83 percent, returned to their previous level of play or higher. The average recovery time of these patients was 11.

6 months. Also recorded was that only 10 percent of these patients had complications, which were mostly minor. Guisto Salicetti has been a baseball pitcher since he was 7 years old. He came to St. Peter's College on a

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baseball scholarship after dominating the high school ranks for 4 years. After arriving at school he soon had elbow troubles and found out he needed Tommy John surgery. The surgery went well and he is currently lightly throwing and should be able to pitch in a game in no time.

" The surgery was a very positive for me and even though the recovery has been a lot of hard work, hopeful it will all be worth it in the end," Guisto said. Tommy John surgery has become a phenomenon in the last couple of years. If done for the right reasons, the procedure is a great innovation in surgical medicine. There are some circumstances where this surgery can be abused and mistreated. This needs to be addressed in the near future because young athletes and parents are taking this too far. Tommy John surgery should be all about success stories and revitalizing careers, not about controversy and potentially ruining a young teenager's promising athletic experience.