

Youth sports

[Life, Adolescence](#)



According to the Center for Kids First, there are more than 40 million youth athletes that play sports in America today. These youth athletes have a plethora of organizations they can pursue. From super competitive programs like the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) which includes sports like baseball/softball, basketball, soccer and volleyball to the supposedly fun programs like PAL, POP Warner, and Little League Baseball/Softball there is a league for anyone regardless of their skill level or competitive fire.

The big question is do playing youth sports affect the athlete in the long run? There are many factors involved in the competition of youth sports that in the long run may push the athlete away from sports all together. Not only is it the athlete that is involved in this process, the coaches, parents, and fellow competitors play a huge role in the affect youth athletics have on its athletes. As we go along we are going to talk about some of the problems associated with youth athletics, and try to find solutions to these problems.

The first thing that comes to mind when you think about problems in youth sport would be the overzealous parents. The parent that goes above and beyond to push their child to his/her limits. A study conducted by the Citizens Through Sports Alliance gave what they call a "report card" showing the results of how parents effect youth sports (Emmons). This panel of experts essentially based their results on youth sports programs with ages ranging from 6-14(Emmons). Parents received low grades in the areas of a win at all costs mentality and overall parent behavior.

Executive director for the Positive Coaching Alliance, Jim Thompson said," We really hope this is a wake-up call. This is such an important part of kid's lives and if there is something wrong with youth sports, then we ought to

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start thinking about the ways we can change it. "(Emmons) The parent's role in a child's youth sport experience could range from being the driver to and from practices and games all the way to being the coach of the team and officiating the game itself for that matter (Hedstrom/Gould). But what is really going on?

Early studies have shown that the role of the parents in youth sports has become more of a problem as time has passed. Results show that the five biggest problems that parents have involving their child in youth sports include; overemphasis on winning, unrealistic expectations, coaching their own child, criticizing, and pampering their child too much (Hedstrom/Gould). There have been documented accounts of parents arguing with coaches, confronting referees, and even unforeseen altercations while attending a youth sporting event. So how do we attempt to remedy this situation?

One approach would be for the parents to fully immerse themselves into the culture of the league. Do some reading, attend informative sessions, and talk to other parents involved in the league to try and get a full sense of the philosophy and goals of the organization (Emmons). Doing this will allow for the parent to get a scope of how the league operates and see what values and goals the league holds true. It is important that the parent be involved in the children's experience in youth sport, but it's more important that they don't pressure the child before, during, and after a contest.

Just being there attending games, driving to away games, and joining in team celebrations will show a strong support for the child and enhance their experience in youth sports (Hedstrom/Gould). One final approach that I personally like would be at the very beginning of the season before you even

have your first practice, the coach of the team should call a team meeting and have all the parents of the players attend. The purpose of this meeting would be to discuss the main objectives of the season and make sure that everyone is on the same page (Hedstrom/Gould).

While running this meeting it is important to stress the roles of everyone involved and stress good sportsmanship. Burnout is said to be one of the biggest factors that attributes to youth athletes quitting. What is burnout? The definition from the text of the book social issues in sport tells us that burnout is the exhaustion of physical or emotional strength as a result of prolonged stress that causes athletes to discontinue competitive sports. Studies have told us that an estimated 73% of athletes drop out of sports by the age of 13 (Adkins).

This is a staggering figure that as time has passed continues to grow. Not only is it the fact that the athlete may be getting burned out by playing one sport, they may just give up and quit playing organized sports all together (Adkins). There are a few main explanations that can be attributed to athlete burnout. The first suggestion is the excessive stress and pressure put on the athlete. These days there is such an emphasis on winning and being the best that we see at a younger and younger age that athletes are pressured to win at all costs (Masterson).

They are pushed above and beyond what their comfort level may be and exposed to excessive stress and pressure by parents, coaches, and fellow teammates (Adkins). A second theory suggests that the athlete experience what is called entrapment. They invest all this time into their sport but is not seeing any of the rewards or benefits of all the work they have put in.

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basically what is happening is that the costs are outweighing the benefits which over the long run is causing the athlete to burnout (Masterson). So how do we stop athletes from burning out and eventually dropping out of youth sports all together?

In my opinion, it boils down to the factor of specialization. If at a young age you push your child to just play one sport year round your child over time is going to grow tired and bored of doing the same thing every single day. I feel that it is important for the parent to encourage their child to participate in multiple sports. This will not only keep them active all year round but it will keep their mind fresh and will allow for them to find different things to do with their time. Another suggestion would be for the parent of the child to not force anything on their child, especially at a young age.

In youth sport, if the parent pushes their child to compete in a sport they are not willing or wanting to compete in this will only speed up the process of burnout and more than likely cause a disconnect in the relationship between the athlete and parent (Hill). This leads me into my next problem with youth sports which is the concept of specialization in sport. At younger and younger ages children are beginning to play sports and more and more the parents are pushing their child to focus on just one sport.

Specialization is defined as an athlete limiting their athletic participation to one sport which is practiced, trained for, and competed in throughout the year (Hill). There are many arguments for and against specialization in sport. Sport specialization lives by a basic philosophy, if you start them early you can narrow their focus and concentrate on one sport (Hill). With the competitive nature of sports today and the overemphasis on winning, <https://assignbuster.com/youth-sports/>

parents and coaches are beginning to feel that sport specialization is needed for athletes to keep up with one another.

Especially at the collegiate level where there is such a spot light on athletes they may feel driven to specialize in one sport to enhance their chances of getting a collegescholarship. In youth sports, with the overabundance of competitive leagues children can play in year round coaches feel that if you specialize in one sport overtime you will more effectively refine your skills and master your craft through increased practice time in that sport. These are some great arguments that support the sport specialization agenda, but I feel that there are more disadvantages to sport specialization than there are advantages.

Bottom line is that a young age no one is 100% positive on what their child is going to be good at when they get older. So it is important that in youth sports children diversify their experience and try many different sports. Some of the disadvantages involved in specialization include psychological burn out which we touched on in the previous section. In some cases, when an athlete specializes in one sport they miss the opportunity to play other sports which may cause them to miss the sport they are best at. So, I feel that at a young age when kids get involved in youth sports that they should try everything (Hill).

For example, when I was 6 I attempted to play little league soccer and after the first week of practice I decided to retire because I felt that it just wasn't the best sport for me. When parents emphasize specialization on their children the child could possibly miss the sport that they are fit to play (Adkins). One of the main problems associated with specialization in youth

sport is that if the athlete is playing the same sport year round and using the same muscles throughout the year, those muscles are bound to break down (Masterson).

This is one reason why I am a true believer in sport diversification. Athletes who diversify their experience in youth sport are regularly using different muscle groups and have a reduced risk of overuse injury. Sport diversification also does a lot of other positive things to help youth athletes (Masterson). Sport sampling, especially at a young age in youth sports provides them with a variety of options for later sport activity. They are using different skill variations that may transfer from sport to sport.

There is a cushion against failure knowing that when one sport ends that another one will be starting up soon (Hill). All these factors of sport diversification are great ways in which children can stay active and fit, stay involved in youth sport, and not get burned out too quickly. Youth sports are definitely a huge force in America today. But, if we were not careful the negative aspects that have been mentioned throughout this paper are going to not only drive kids out of playing sports all together, they are going to hurt high school and eventually college athletics.

Sport specialization is a huge force behind youth sports burnout and by age 13 you're seeing more and more kids drop out of youth sports all together. We need to diversify the experience children are having in youth sports and get them to play different sports year round. The trend of overzealous parents is an easy fix if we just sit down with them and clarify exactly what we are looking for at the beginning of the season and continue to stress sportsmanship. We know that there are going to be those parents that can't

be controlled but maybe if we use this method we will reduce the number of outburst and control the overzealous parent.

Youth sport is and always was meant to be a fun experience for children to go out play a great game and have fun with their friends. Let's get back to those days and rebuild our youth sports programs to the fun loving carefree atmosphere they once were.

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