



Two-Sport Athletes

The following is an article I received concerning two-sport athletes. Multi-sport athletes, the pros and cons, have been heavily debated over the last ten years. This is a scholastic and interesting perspective:

Fairfield (Ohio) High School athletic director Mark Harden knows all too well the debate on sport specialization. Not only is Harden in charge of the athletic department at one of the largest high schools in

Harden said. "Again, my son is eight."

The family decided to push back the traveling baseball for a year and he is playing basketball this winter – making it a total of three sports this year.

Harden said the Fairfield athletic department has gone out of its way to promote the three-sport athlete and there is a special award that goes to any senior who plays three

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Ohio, but he's experienced first-hand the pressure of making an athletics-based decision as a parent.

"Just this year, my 8-year-old was asked to play on a traveling baseball team that trained year-round and he had to decide whether he wanted to do that or continue to play football and basketball,"

varsity sports their senior year.

In fact, Fairfield – located north of Cincinnati – started to waive the pay-to-participate fees this year for students who participate in a third sport during the year.

"I've always thought that kids benefit from playing multiple sports over specialization,"

Upcoming events



Thursday, 1/22

G JV/V vs. Springs Valley, 6 p.m.

Friday, 1/23

B JV/V vs. Borden, 6 p.m.

Monday, 1/26

G V vs. Medora, 6 p.m.

Harden said. “Unfortunately, at a school our size there is a pressure to focus on just one sport in order to ‘make a team’ or ‘be a success’ at that particular sport. What is driving this even further is the availability to play sports or train for them year-round.”

That availability in a single sport can have its perils from a physical standpoint, says Dr. Angie Pellant, a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations Sports Medicine Advisory Committee.

“Parents often feel that an athletic scholarship is the only way their child will be able to attend college,” Pellant said. “I hope we can educate our athletes and their support system about the many benefits of appropriate recovery time and multi-sport participation.”

Pellant has seen an overall increase in tendinitis of the upper and lower extremities in high school athletes. Other common overuse injuries include shoulder and elbow usage with throwing sports. One study estimates overuse injuries account for 50 percent of all injuries in middle school and high school, according to StopSportsInjuries.org.

Playing multiple sports generally allows for less concern about overuse injuries when athletes involve different joints and soft tissues, Pellant said.

“Increased speed, agility (and) flexibility are a few of the benefits a multi-sport athlete may gain,” said Pellant, who is based in Idaho. “Decreased recovery time, myalgia (muscle pain) and stiffness are also benefits of not specializing in any one sport.”

The question then begs how much rest is needed versus year-round participation in high school athletics for teenagers.

“How much rest is a challenging question,” Pellant said. “Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of scientific evidence in regard to this. I try to (educate) parents about the importance of good quality sleep, nutrition and understanding how recovery time can actually make the student-athlete perform better and stay healthy in the long term.”

Dr. Tim Kremchek, in his 19th season as the Cincinnati Reds medical director and chief orthopaedic surgeon, agrees with that balanced approach.

Kremchek is also the director of Beacon Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine/The Christ Hospital Health Network Sports Medicine Outreach Program, which also treats student-athletes and communities. He’s not only seen overuse injuries the past 10 years in high school athletes, but he’s noticed more burnout too during a particular season.

“It used to be kids couldn’t wait to play – now all of a sudden they can’t wait for it to be over,” Kremchek said. “They want a break.”

Dr. Chris Stankovich, a sports psychologist from Columbus, Ohio, recently wrote about the trend of athletes playing one sanctioned school sport while also playing on a travel or club team.

Stankovich said the sport specialist has been around since the 1990s but the two-sport, same-season student-athlete appears to be picking up steam. Those student-athletes must learn quickly about time management skills along with multi-tasking and discipline, Stankovich said, and some are at risk for burnout or stress-related issues. He’s only seen this trend emerging for the past few years so the jury is still out

on its full impact or what the next trend will be. "I can only suspect youth/interscholastic sports will continue to model and mirror big-time college and pro sports – more games, more intensity, etc." Stankovich said.

Lake Nona (Orlando, Florida) High School Athletic Director Andy Chiles said a significant issue is the misinformation out there for families about the need to dwell on one sport early in a high school career. As the athletic director of one of the largest schools in Florida, Chiles is also the 2014 president of the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association. He understands the pressures of obtaining a college scholarship, but said student-athletes must also have time to enjoy their high school experience before it's too late. "Specializing has become the rule rather than the exception," said Iowa City (Iowa) High School basketball coach Don Showalter, who is also a highly

successful USA Basketball coach.

"Athletes get an inflated view of what they are able to do in a sport based on information that people surrounding them say which has no basis. As a result, the athlete will specialize thinking this will lead them to a professional contract, which rarely happens."

In fact, Kings Mills (Ohio) Kings athletic director Phil Poggi said coaches are looking for versatile players who are well-rounded.

"Anytime I have the opportunity to discuss potential specialization with an athlete and his or her parents, I always steer them to the question: 'What will I lose if I give up said sport?' instead of 'what will I gain?'" Poggi said.

"My goal is always to point out the 'burnout' and 'overuse' risk as well as to highlight how playing for different coaches and learning to use a different set of skills/muscles can

benefit an athlete in the long run who aspires to play in college."

Cincinnati Wyoming athletic director Jan Wilking said in her 11 years as athletic director and 10 years as a varsity coach, she has yet to see a scenario where not playing another sport increased a student-athlete's college scholarship opportunity.

"About one percent of the student-athletes across the United States earn a college scholarship," said Chris Hart, athletic director at Kettering (Ohio) Alter High School. "That is such a small number and I think parents don't realize that or they believe their son/daughter will fall into that one percent. We had an athlete last year who signed to play a sport at the college level and their scholarship only covers the cost of their books. I don't think parents understand the reality of the scholarship situation in certain sports."