

How early should I have my athlete specialize in a single sport?

The topic on early on sport specialization in youth athletes has been a hot topic for some time. Each year it seems that youth sports seem to become more and more competitive. Parents who recognize this and who desire their son/daughter to excel at sports have a tendency to expose their son or daughter to a specific sport early on in their childhood. Parents believe that this early on exposure will lead to an improvement in the athletes abilities compared to other athletes of the same age. What most people do not take into account is that more is not always better and may be detrimental to the long term development of the athlete.

Early on Specialization can be detrimental to athlete's long term development in many ways. There are numerous research articles on the topic of participating in sports competitively at the high school, college or professional level. The majority of the research conducted has found that athletes who excel in their sports during high school and beyond were exposed to multiple sports during the developmental years (7-14) as an adolescent. Participation in multiple sports during critical time provides the added stimulus that can heighten an athlete's ability later in life.

Early on Specialization in a specific sport has the potential to be detrimental to an athlete's mental and psychological development also. Early on specialization can introduce the athlete to unnecessary expectations and pressures that may lead to sport participation burn out all together. Once an athlete begins to have show signs of burn out, he or she may lose interest in sports participation all together, due to the negative association that he/she has acquired from pressure and time spent practicing. Early on specialization may lead to athlete's losing the fun in sport participation long-term. Research has also found that specializing in a specific sport early on (7-11yrs old) may lead to a peak in performance ability at the ages of 15-16 years of age. Research has proven that participating in multiple sports up to the ages of 15-16 has shown to increase athletic potential and can lead to a greater peak in sports performance once an athlete begins to specialize in one specific sport (ages 15-17). Many successful professional athletes were interviewed a specific study regarding at what age did they begin specializing in their sport. This study found that most high level professional athlete's played multiple sports up to the ages of 15-17 yrs old and then they began specializing in one particular sport.

The developmental years of an adolescent is a critical time period for optimal development of a youth athlete. During this time it is important that youth be exposed to the correct and proper stimulus for optimal athletic development. During this time, it is important that the athlete associate training and practice as fun and enjoyable. Pelot Performance does not focus on sport specific skills, but sport specific movements. Tim's Philosophy is all about teaching and coaching s athletes of all ages and ability levels the fundamentals of athleticism. Athletes and parents have been focusing their time and effort trying to develop the sport specific skills when an athlete may be lacking raw athleticism. Parents and athletes have traditionally relied solely

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upon genetic ability to gauge one's athleticism, for movements that are often over looked by trying to attain sport specific skill improvements. Coach Pelot teaches athletes how to be more athletic and more efficient, more efficient at running, jumping, changing direction and strength training. These skills help provide a foundation that will promote a more successful athletic career. These skills compliment all sports and can help further an athlete's ability to learn the specific skills that their sport demands.