

The Single-Minded Parent – What's A Kid To Do?

By Dave James

As parents, we are trained to focus our child on success as we seek out activities or sports that drive and recognize our child's personal sense of accomplishment in "what he is good at". But once we realize ours is not a versed "super-decathlete", we'll focus on a sport in which our child seems to do well, and then, quite naturally, push her to excel in that sport. Often, we see the immediate gratification and improved self-esteem. While this may seem a laudable goal, this pursuit leads to practice, practice, practice, as the way to get better at that sport and our children become specialists.

Why limit a child to a single athletic path? Youth sports have seen a rapid increase in its athletes specializing in one sport. Sports specialization is when a child picks a sport and trains in that sport virtually year round. While a singular focus may seem like a good idea on the surface, there are several risks.

By diversifying sports activities, parents can avoid two of the biggest pitfalls of sports specialization: burnout and injury. Burnout happens when a highly committed athlete loses interest and motivation in their particular sport. It can occur in hard working, hard training athletes, who become emotionally, psychologically and/or physically exhausted.

As parents, we also need to realize that when a child participates in different sports, certain skills carry over. The girl who plays basketball in the winter will likely have greater hand-eye coordination for spring softball, or better power and balance for gymnastics. The boy who runs track in the spring is likely

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to be faster on the field when football season starts in early Fall. To be competitive at an early age in one sport is fine, as long as it is not year round.

Cross-training decreases repetitive joint-impact forces and repetitive movements associated with major single sports such as arm-torque in baseball, high-impact movements in football, or quick-turns in soccer, cross training will allow a pre-adolescent child to condition different muscle groups and to vary body stressors and improve their cardiovascular system, particularly important as their bodies continue to grow and mature.

By striving to ensure lasting fitness and a variety of suitable athletic choices as they grow into young adults, our children – be they the next Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods in disguise – are prepared to thrive. When a terrific coach infuses a little fun along the way the experiences are all that more enjoyable!

