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SPORTS MEDICINE MONTHLY

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Surgical & Non-Surgical Care. Sports Medicine. Physical Therapy.

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SUMMERTIME AND ATHLETICS

For most high school athletes and their families, the end of the school year usually correlates to the beginning of a summer sports season. Whether it's summer baseball, soccer, volleyball, or football, summer practices and league play are just around the corner. Regardless of whatever sports you may play, it is no surprise that sports and competition today literally go year-round. However, while year-round athletic participation in several sports can be exceedingly beneficial to the growth and development of the adolescent mind and body, year-round competition in the same sport can likewise be quite destructive to both as well. So the real question that should be asked is:

WHEN IS YOUR OFF-SEASON?

In the truest definition of the word, Merriam-Webster defines an off-season as "a time of suspended or reduced activity; especially: the time during which an athlete is not training or competing." In today's high school athletic culture, the off-season seems to be a thing of the past. Year-round baseball, softball, tennis, etc… have all managed to change they way we see our respective sports. The problem with such training however is the fact that rest from competition and training can be just as beneficial, if not more so, then the competition and training itself. Because, the off-season is designed to encourage the athlete to participate in a sport of a different focus or just participate on a recreational basis, the off-season allows both the body and the mind to simply escape the physical and psychological demands and rigor that comes with an organized training regiment. In other words, the benefits of an off-season from a particular sport is just that; time off.

Best Overall Outcomes: Cross-Training or Sport Specialization at an early age?

Just after the conclusion of Super Bowl XLIX, ESPN published an article entitled: QB Survey: Cross-Training only helps. As a summary, ESPN surveyed 128 professional football quarterbacks; 73 active and 55 retired, to determine if they specialized in one sport in high school or not. Of the respondents, 70% played three or more sports in high school. Conversely, there where only 5 backup quarterbacks who reported specializing in only one sport in high school; less than 4% of the total sample size. The story went on to quote Hall of Fame NFL Coach Bill Walsh: "Don't mistake activity for productivity. More practice doesn't always mean more success."

With a growing trend towards sports specialization at an early age, many sports medicine clinicians are beginning to see a trend of their own; a dramatic increases in overuse injuries. In fact, the #1 injury reported most often to orthopedic and sports medicine clinics in adolescent athletes today: overuse.

Contrary to popular belief:
"Diversified sports training during early and middle adolescence may be a more effective strategy in ultimately developing elite-level skills in the primary sport due to a positive transfer of skills. Consideration should be given to delaying intensive, specialized training until late adolescents, rather than a specific age, to optimize skill development in most sports."
Overuse Injuries and Burnout in Youth Sports:
A Position Statement from the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine, January 2014

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Best Overall Outcomes cont...

In other words, we are beginning to see that a primary focus on neurological development in the young athlete is actually more beneficial to overall athletic success than focusing purely on skill development.

Simply stated, the ability of the eyes to track a moving baseball can actually develop more efficiently and effectively when the eyes practice tracking a variety of moving objects: kickball, tennis ball, basketball, etc... Additionally, because the adolescent athlete who is going through a puberty growth spurt will usually see a temporary decline in balance and coordination, by training balance, coordination, and body control in a variety of different sports and movements, most athletes will usually demonstrate improved total body balance and control when compared to those who specialized to only one particular sport or set of movements. And finally, overall motor skill development also seems to occur more rapidly and more efficiently in adolescents who are training their bodies in a variety of sports. In other words, cross-training only helps.

Consider the concluding quotes from the previously mentioned ESPN article.

"Athletes who played in three sports during their early teen years were significantly more likely to compete at a national...standard...than those who practiced only one sport."

Steve Clarkson, Youth Quarterback Personal Trainer was quoted as saying he "*isn't a big fan of soccer, but I love the movement it gives my quarterbacks with their feet."*

"I'm a big believer that participating in other sports is really helpful to anyone who wants to play quarterback. It's a hard position. Learning other movements and reading other defenses helps you play quarterback." Andrew Luck, Indianapolis Colts

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General Guidelines

Common Risk Factors:
-Early age single-sport specialization
-Prior Injury
-Intense competition during growth spurts
-A history of amenorrhea (i.e. absent menstrual period)
-Over-scheduling of events

Sports Readiness:
-Correctly matching a child's level of growth and development with the tasks/demands of the sport greatly decreases the risk for injury.
-Chronological age is not a good indicator on which to base sports participation as motor, cognitive, and social skills progress at a different rate and independent of age.

Sport Specialization:
-Early sport specialization may increase rates of overuse injury and burnout
-Diversified sports training during early and middle adolescence may be more effective in developing elite-level skills in a the primary sport due to skill transfer.

Burnout in Athletics:
-Defined: A chronic stress that causes a young athlete to cease participation in a previously enjoyable activity; usually due to overtraining and over reaching.
-Data suggests that athletes who had early specialized training withdrew from their sport either due to injury or burnout from their sport.

Prevention:
-Limited weekly and yearly participation times
-Purposely scheduled rest periods
-Reduce workout loads during pubertal growth spurts
-Pre-season conditioning programs
-Focus on skill development rather than competition

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