

[IMAGE]

Let Your Kids Play (as Many Sports as They Want)

By Editorial Staff

We're thick in an era of sports specialization, and it's working its way all the way down to the grade-school level. Increasingly, children are specializing in single sports, with parents doing everything in their power to ensure Little Johnny becomes the next LeBron James, Peyton Manning or Landon Donovan. But at what cost? In terms of their chances of reaching the elite level, research suggests focusing on only one sport too early may not lead to success.

A U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) report based on a survey of nearly 2,000 Olympic athletes reveals that "multi-sport athleticism" is important, valuable not only to coaches, but also a common characteristic of most Olympians surveyed. In fact, according to the survey, most Olympians did not specialize in their sport until their teens, with many continuing to play multiple sports even after focusing on one sport as the priority.

It's also important to understand that anyone, be it a child or an adult, has a higher risk of burnout / disenchantment with a sport if that's the only thing they're doing – every day, every week, all year round. Pushing too hard toward a single sport, especially too soon, could push your children away, rather than grow their love of the game. The USOC survey supports this premise, with love of the sport listed frequently by athletes.

You may want your child to be the next great soccer player, but as this survey suggests, they might have a better chance if soccer's not the all-consuming, be-all, end-all of your child's existence. So teach them to love being active and to dedicate themselves to excellence; *those* are the traits that will bring them success in whichever sport they eventually choose.

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