

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

# MVP PARENT

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# Mission

**MVP PARENT** is committed to providing a credible resource that educates and supports the parents of youth athletes. **MVP PARENT** gives parents the information they need to keep youth athletes performing at the highest level physically, mentally, and emotionally. MVP Parent takes a holistic and evidence-based approach to injury prevention, skill development, nutrition, and sports psychology.

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# FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY RICHARD B. DUBIN



**I** am a father of four (two boys and two girls) and have been involved in youth sports for over 22 years. I have coached them all at one point or another, and now I am coaching my youngest. I have seen a lot – some good, some bad.

I grew up in New York City as the only child of a single mom. As a kid, I played stickball, football and basketball, but playing sports then was so much different than it is today. At the youth level, sports were less structured, and parents often were much less involved. As engaged parents of youth athletes to-day, we can't necessarily follow an example set by our own parents – and many of us feel we have a lot to learn.

Kids benefit from playing sports in so many ways. There are health benefits, of course, but sports also teach valuable life lessons about commitment, dedication, teamwork, time management, hard work, success and failure. The learning curve for some is steeper than for others.

There's also a learning curve to being the parent of a youth athlete, as well as opportunities to grow as parents, coaches and friends. We may think we have all the answers, but if we are open there is so much we can learn. MVP Parent will become that missing link between what we think we know and how much more information is out there that can help improve the youth sports experience for us and our children. If we remain open and teachable, there is always room for growth.

My oldest son is 25. He graduated from Bentley University with a degree in marketing. He is living and working in Boston. He played youth sports from the age of 3. He played lacrosse, soccer and basketball as a kid, and still plays basketball as an adult. My other son is 21 and just graduated from Roger Williams University and is also very active in sports. As a kid, he also played soccer, basketball and lacrosse. My first daughter is 17 and a high school senior. She has also been playing sports from the age of 3 and has participated in soccer, lacrosse, dance, gymnastics and basketball. She has been playing varsity basketball since freshman year as well as AAU basketball and will be playing basketball in college. My youngest daughter is 12. She has participated in dance, gymnastics and soccer, and now is playing basketball.

I have experienced a lot, and I am still in it.

I have been thinking about the concept of creating a resource for parents of youth athletes for a long time. I have been involved in magazine publishing since 1991, and am currently the founder and publisher of Lower Extremity Review. LER is an evidence-based clinical magazine that educates many different medical professionals about the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of injuries. We have the most amazing team of editors and writers with an incredible wealth of knowledge and experience related to youth sports, and their contributions to this project are without parallel.

MVP Parent magazine will be the credible resource that parents can trust when it comes to their kids. We will be working with key opinion leaders and leading researchers in the fields of training, sports medicine, orthopedics, physical therapy and psychology. We will give you the tools to make the most of the youth sports experience for you and your children. I look forward to learning right along with you.





# Concussed kid?

## GET THEM TO SPEAK UP

..... PARENTS CAN HELP CHANGE THE  
..... ATTITUDES YOUTH ATHLETES HOLD  
..... SURROUNDING HEAD INJURIES

BY GREG GARGIULO

**W**hen Katherine Price Snedaker received a call from her son Charlie's school telling her to pick him up and take him to the doctor, she wasn't entirely sure what to think.

"They said he might have a concussion from being hit with a soccer ball on the sidelines during recess, and I was confused that something like this could happen when he wasn't even playing," she said. "We found out it was a concussion, and it turned out to be the first of many. He was out of school for three and a half months, and that's when I started my journey to try to figure out what was actually going on."

This was back in 2008. Since then, knowledge and awareness of the dangers of concussions in youth athletes have become significantly more widespread thanks to the ongoing efforts of researchers, clinicians and parents. But too often, young athletes still fail to report all potential concussion symptoms and receive proper treatment.

Concussions are one type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) that usually result from a blow or jolt to the head, which causes the brain to shift rapidly and possibly collide against the skull. Concussions are classified as mild TBIs, but their impact can be very serious.

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**Returning to play too soon after a concussion—especially in high-risk sports like football and soccer—can lead to delayed healing, increased odds of additional concussions, and long-term mental and physical effects.**

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## WE NEED TO MAKE SURE ALL ADULTS WHO ARE SUPERVISING OUR KIDS ARE PROPERLY EDUCATED ON THE RISK FACTORS AND SIGNS OF CONCUSSIONS.

Although about 90% of concussions heal on their own within 7-10 days, longer periods of rest are often needed for children and adolescents because their brains are still developing. Returning to play too soon after a concussion—especially in high-risk sports like football and soccer—can lead to delayed healing, increased odds of additional concussions, and long-term mental and physical effects. Additionally, a rare yet often fatal condition called Second Impact Syndrome (SIS) may also develop when an athlete sustains a second concussion before the first one has completely healed.

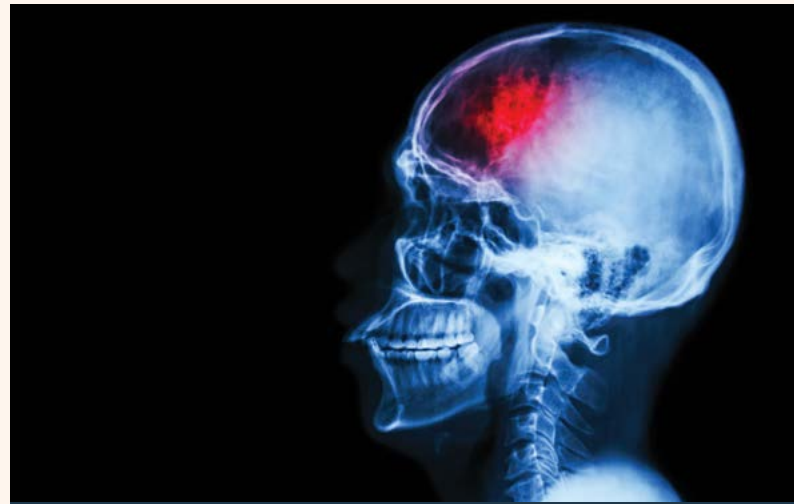
But research suggests many young athletes are hesitant to tell a coach or parent about lingering headaches or other potential concussion symptoms. In a May 2016 study published in the *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*, only about half of the high school football players surveyed said they would report such symptoms to a coach.

Though increasing knowledge is essential to encouraging young athletes to be more open, several recent studies have found that young athletes' knowledge about concussions has less of an effect on their willingness to disclose symptoms than their attitudes. A July 2016 *CJSM* study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that these attitudes tend to be even worse in young athletes who have had multiple concussions.

"It seems that attitudes are more linked to kids' reporting behaviors than their actual knowledge," said the lead author, Johna K. Register-Mihalik, PhD, LAT, an assistant professor in the university's Department of Exercise and Sport Science. "Pressure from teammates, parents, or fans likely affects these behaviors."

Bart Peterson, a certified athletic trainer (ATC) and educator at Palo Verde High School in Tucson, Ariz., who's also on the board of directors of the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA), has asked classrooms of students why athletes might not report concussion symptoms.

"Many said because they don't want to be seen as weak, which can mean getting taunted by their teammates or coaches," he said.



### CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS CAN INCLUDE:

- ▶ Dizziness or "seeing stars"
- ▶ Headache or pressure in the head
- ▶ Delayed response to questions
- ▶ Confusion or feeling as if in a fog
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Slurred speech
- ▶ Appearing dazed
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Temporary loss of consciousness
- ▶ Amnesia about the traumatic event
- ▶ Ringing in the ears

The fact that a concussion is less visible than other injuries can also be a factor, Peterson said. "Athletes may be treated differently than if they sprained their ankle," he said. "This can also cause kids to hold back from reporting."

Getting young athletes to become more open about reporting concussion symptoms requires action from parents, coaches and school administrators. For parents, it's a matter of becoming familiar with the symptoms and the importance of disclosing them.

"I think parents definitely have to be very proactive as their children play sports," said Zachary Y. Kerr, PhD, MPH, also an assistant professor in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "It's not just about being that team mom on the sideline, but also about doing the research prior to enrolling their child into a league or sport and asking questions about the concussion knowledge of the coach, if there's an athletic trainer onsite



for immediate care, and is there an action plan in place for concussions.”

Today, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws on concussions in youth sports, which includes high school sports, with mandatory protocols designed to increase awareness and prevent long-term issues.

“In Arizona, if an athlete has a collision, there are 23 symptoms we keep an eye out for,” Peterson said. “In addition to more common ones like headaches, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and noise, dizziness, and balance issues, there are also some hidden ones that parents should look for like trouble falling asleep or staying awake, being tired or slow all the time, feeling ‘foggy,’ and changes in personality.”

In addition to being watchful, it’s also essential for parents to keep an open dialogue with their kids. “You should talk with your children, especially younger children, to explain that coming out of play with a head injury is not the same as quitting,” Register-Mihalik said.

Often, it comes down to positive reinforcement, Kerr said. “It’s a child hearing, when he/she or a teammate reports a concussion, that everyone involved is saying it was the right thing to do,” he said.



## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

[SportsCAPP.com](https://SportsCAPP.com)  
[PinkConcussion.com](https://PinkConcussion.com)

If a parent has concerns that their child is returning to play too early, that’s definitely something that needs to be discussed with a coach, or a higher-up administrator if the coach is not responsive, Kerr said.

Snedaker’s journey as a parent to learn more about concussions led her to found two websites for concussion activism ([SportsCAPP.com](https://SportsCAPP.com) and [PinkConcussions.com](https://PinkConcussions.com))

In her eyes, it’s the responsibility of each parent to make a proper assessment before letting their child play a sport.

“We need to make sure all adults who are supervising our kids are properly educated on the risk factors and signs of concussions,” she said. ■

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**“YOU SHOULD TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY YOUNGER CHILDREN, TO EXPLAIN THAT COMING OUT OF PLAY WITH A HEAD INJURY IS NOT THE SAME AS QUITTING.”**





# MISBEHAVING PARENTS CAN BE A DISTRACTION

PLAYER'S FOCUS SHOULD BE ON THEIR COACH AND THE GAME

BY P.K. DANIEL

**T**o the horror of his son and the surprise of the surrounding spectators, a frustrated parent descended the stands and came onto the court during a basketball game between 10- and 11-year-olds in Marietta, GA., last year, to inform the coach that he wasn't doing a good job.

Probably not the best tact to take. It led to the humiliation of the child and the disdain of other parents.

This type of behavior has led some youth sports teams or leagues to require parents to sign code-of-conduct contracts, attend sports etiquette classes and to post signs at sports fields encouraging good behavior.

A quick Google search of keywords "parents behaving badly at sporting events" yielded nearly 200,000 results, including many in graphic living color. One hit described how two parents were accused of attacking high school officials after a hockey game in Vancouver earlier this year. In a separate incident, five parents were banned after allegedly verbally abusing referees and opposing hockey players.

It doesn't take a child psychologist, a coach, or even a player to understand the negative effect parents can have on the very participants whose best interests they're supposed to have in

mind when they become better known for their sideline antics than their support of their aspiring athlete.


But the reactions in the Georgia gym did result in the parent realizing his major misstep.

"The response of everybody in the audience as well as his child made him realize that was a bad decision," said John Thomas, a former Division I basketball player and parent of an AAU boys basketball player. "He got caught up into wanting to win. Parents have to understand that it's not about the parents. It's really about the kid."

Officials, coaches, opposing parents and even opposing players have been on the receiving end of unruly parents' ire for years. However, most parents' misbehavior doesn't involve nose-to-nose confrontations, fisticuffs or handcuffs. It's usually a lot subtler, although the effect can still be negative, resulting in an adverse sporting experience. To complain about playing time or to question the coach's lineup or play-calling, or to blurt out directions to your kid is a distraction to the player and an annoyance to the coach.

When a player flubs a groundball at short and immediately looks at his dad and not the coach, then there's a problem.





**YOUTH SPORTS, AS A WHOLE,  
SHOULD BE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE.  
YOU START LEARNING LIFE LESSONS  
THROUGH THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN  
REAL TIME DURING THE GAME.**

Steve Dagostino, owner of Dags Basketball, is a former two-time NCAA Division II All-American who played for five years professionally in Europe. Through his East Coast camps, clinics and workouts he has worked extensively with players, coaches and parents.

“For our parents, we don’t ever want them to be in a situation where they’re hindering their player’s performance,” said Dagostino. “They might think that they’re helping in the stands when they’re yelling at their kid to do this or to do that, but ... that becomes a distraction.”

Kids are taught early on to ignore and not engage with hecklers, because to do so takes the player’s focus off the game. That’s the same thing with parents, said Dagostino.

“The player shouldn’t have to be looking up at his (parent) in the stands, which happens a lot,” he said. “That means they’re not focusing on the game. Furthermore, there should be only one voice in that player’s ear and that’s the coach.”

Dagostino said the parent effect becomes very apparent when a parent misses an AAU tournament and their kid ends up having the best game of their life. “We’ve had parents recognize their impact and have subsequently toned it down,” said Dagostino.

Dagostino addresses with parents the purpose of youth sports from a development standpoint. “Youth sports, as a whole, should be about the experience,” he said. When Dagostino was

growing up he learned how to deal with a ref making a bad call or being benched after making a mistake. “You start learning life lessons through things that happen in real time during the game. But what happens nowadays is the player makes a bad play, the coach sits him and the coach is an idiot. The ref makes a bad call – a charge, not a block – the ref’s an idiot. Everybody is getting blamed. Instead, the kids should be saying: ‘I threw a bad pass and I didn’t get back on defense. I need to do better,’ not ‘Coach Joe shouldn’t have taken me out.’”

Today’s youth athletes, Dagostino said, are getting shortchanged of that experience to grow as a person and a player.

Dagostino often asks parents and players why they’re playing youth sports. “If you’re playing youth sports to get a scholarship for college, you’ve already lost,” he said. “If you’re playing AAU basketball for exposure, you’ve already lost.” His goal is to help players develop better physically and mentally – to become a better, stronger person.

He said one of the problems with parents is that a lot of times they are also coaches or former coaches so they have a hard time putting the proverbially clipboard away. Thomas had first-hand experience with that issue.

He is the father of a 13-year-old AAU player. After identifying a blurred line between father and coach from the perspective of his son, Thomas decided to become just his father. He then went out to find a new coach but someone similar in his skill level and



approach. “It worked out well,” he said. “Now I can be his dad and co-sign a lot of things that the coaches say.”

Thomas runs The 411 Brand, an Atlanta-based nonprofit youth development company that teaches the fundamentals about sports – lacrosse, golf, soccer, track and field, dance and basketball. “We teach life skills through the sports,” he said. Over the course of the past 25 years, close to 25,000 kids have gone through Thomas’ programs.

He said that, by design, he decided his company wouldn’t be involved with coaching teams, thereby eliminating the obstacle parents can present. “A lot of parents try to live through their kids, which is unfair to the child,” he said.

Thomas has observed parents chasing after the top AAU teams in the hope that their child will travel to many tournaments and be seen by a lot of college scouts. But that’s not typically what happens, he said. “A lot of those kids may not get a chance to play if they’re not the top five or the top seven on the team. Saying you’re on a No. 1 AAU team doesn’t translate into a scholarship.”


Parents need to sit down with their children and have a realistic discussion about their goals and their future. Thomas said he notices today that a lot of the kids aren’t willing to put in the work on a daily basis. And they don’t have the passion. Aside from the many distractions that today’s kids have, part of that may be because this isn’t their goal but rather their parent’s goal. Even with Thomas’ own son he realized playing basketball “had to be more important to him than to me. Sometimes if we’re in the way, it becomes blurred.”

When Thomas was growing up it wasn’t about being seen. “It was just trying to get better,” he said. “Where a lot of kids now want to be seen first.”

He also echoes Dagostino about the purpose of youth sports being the journey not the destination. “It’s really about the work and the talent on the journey and through that you can build a great kid in understanding everything that sports has to offer,” said Thomas. “Put more emphasis on the journey, not so much the destination.” ■

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*P.K. Daniel is a veteran journalist based in Southern California. Her journalism journey includes a stint at the Los Angeles Daily News as a sports desk editor followed by 15 years at the San Diego Union-Tribune as senior news editor and reporter, as well as contributions to Baseball America, SB Nation, CBS Sports Digital, Lower Extremity Review and Allergy & Asthma Today.*



Put more emphasis  
on the journey, not so  
much the destination.

# MONITORING *Pitch Counts* challenging but necessary

DESPITE AN INCREASE  
IN ARM INJURIES, ONLY  
ABOUT HALF OF YOUTH  
BASEBALL ORGANIZATIONS  
MONITOR PITCH COUNTS

BY CHRIS KLINGENBERG





**I**n 2014, Greg Parson nearly saw his all-star baseball team's season come to an abrupt end in an attempt to save one of his ace pitchers for a potential future game.

Throughout the multiday Massachusetts Little League district tournament, Parson relied heavily on two kids to pitch for Leominster. In a game against a team from Quabbin, one of those key pitchers was unavailable due to pitch-count restrictions; the other started. But when Parson's team of 11-year-olds took a big lead after three innings, he decided to lift the starting pitcher and call on his bullpen. Parson wanted to keep his starter below the pitch-count threshold to keep him eligible to pitch the next day.

The plan nearly backfired. Parson saw his bullpen implode and squander the lead. Luckily, a walk-off home run in the bottom of the sixth gave Leominster the win, but the story illustrates the challenges youth baseball coaches face when trying to manage while keeping kids' arms safe.

"By trying to keep the starter under a pitch threshold so that he could pitch the next game, we almost lost a game we should have easily won," Parson said. "Sadly, I remember many situations with pitchers and pitch counts vividly."

Parson, a father of two baseball players, has been a Little League manager for seven years, district all-star manager for two years, and an AAU coach for four years. While winning is important to every coach, Parson said he has never lost sight of the kids' health.

"My philosophy has always been that there isn't a game important enough (at this age) to warrant hurting a kid's arm for," Parson said. But a recent survey-based study from the University of Florida in

Gainesville suggests only about half of youth baseball players are in organizations where pitch counts are tracked, and most are completely unaware of the USA BMSAC guidelines.

"Our goal was to get an idea of what people know about pitch counts," said Giorgio Zeppieri Jr, PT, SCS, CSCS, a physical therapist at the university and clinical research chairman at the UF Health Rehab Center-Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine Institute. "We have seen a lack of general awareness on this, so that is what prompted us to do this study. I am also starting to see an increase in the number of younger baseball players coming to me for PT."

Zeppieri and colleagues analyzed 98 surveys completed by youth baseball players in all positions between the ages of 4 and 18. Surveys were distributed through contacts at a local baseball training academy and at local youth baseball organizations.

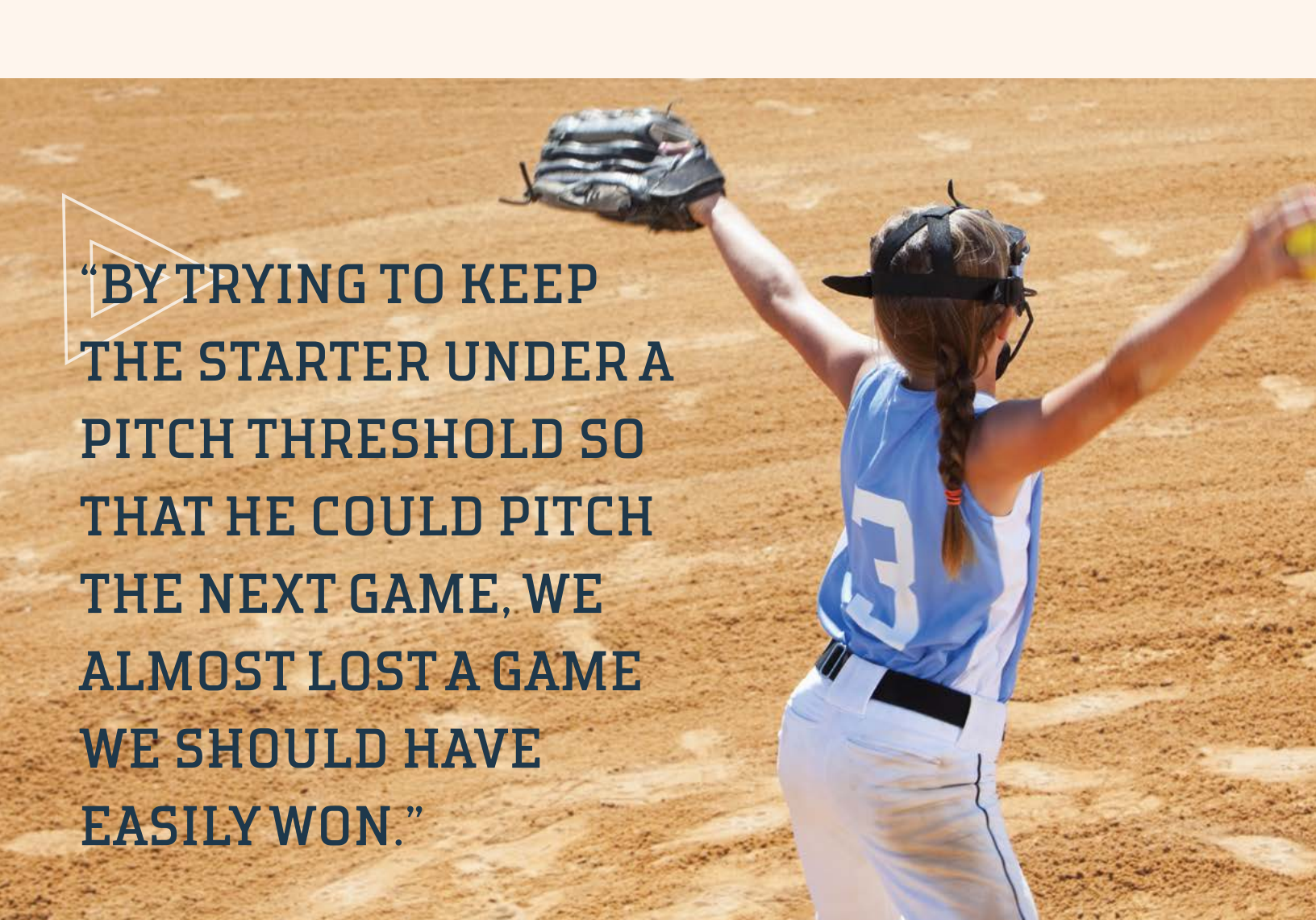
Only 57% of players reported that someone keeps track of the number of pitches they throw during games. Of those, fewer than half (46.4%) said pitches are counted at every game. A surprisingly high number of players reported they typically rest just one day after pitching (21%) or not at all (23%).

Eighty-two players (85%) said they had never heard of the USA BMSAC guidelines. Two-thirds of the respondents disagreed with the statement, "The more you throw, the more likely you are to get an injury." And more than half (57%) indicated that they would not seek medical help if they experienced a tired or sore arm during a game.

The findings suggest a need to improve the education of young baseball players about throwing guidelines, risk factors for

**PROMPTED BY RESEARCH SHOWING THAT HIGH PITCH VOLUMES INCREASE THE RISK OF ARM SORENESS**, fatigue and injury – particularly ulnar collateral ligament injuries, which can necessitate Tommy John surgery – in 2004, the USA Baseball Medical & Safety Advisory Committee's recommended the following limits for minimizing the risk of future serious arm injury and maximizing the pitcher's chance of success:

- ▶ **NINE AND 10-YEAR-OLDS:** 50 pitches a game, 75 pitches per a week, 1,000 pitches per season and 2,000 pitches per year.
- ▶ **ELEVEN AND 12-YEAR-OLDS:** 75 pitches a game, 100 pitches per a week, 1,000 pitches per season, and 3,000 pitches per year.
- ▶ **THIRTEEN AND 14-YEAR-OLDS:** 75 pitches per a game, 125 pitches per week, 1,000 pitches per season, and 3,000 pitches per year



**“BY TRYING TO KEEP THE STARTER UNDER A PITCH THRESHOLD SO THAT HE COULD PITCH THE NEXT GAME, WE ALMOST LOST A GAME WE SHOULD HAVE EASILY WON.”**

developing throwing-related injuries, the long-term implications of playing with an injured or fatigued arm, and the benefit of seeking medical help after experiencing arm fatigue or soreness.

“This topic is a big concern, not only for people like me in physical therapy, but for everyone, because we are seeing more and more injuries,” Zeppieri said. “I think the biggest thing we can do is educate people more because I think that most kids, parents and coaches do not understand the guidelines and the importance of following them to protect the kids.”

As frustrating as pitch counts can be for coaches, Parson said he understands why they are needed, and in fact, he thinks the guidelines only address part of the issue of injury risk in youth players.

“I think pitch counts are part of sensible coaching,” he said. “It is unfortunate that they had to be put in place, but I think pitch counts resulted from coaches overusing kids because they valued winning over all else. However, I don’t think pitch counts are the only thing that is important. Teaching kids to warm up properly and teaching them to throw properly is just as

important. If kids don’t spend time learning proper mechanics, there is more strain put on their arm, which will also lead to injury.”

Parson agreed that better awareness of risk factors is needed.

“I think the bigger problem is coaching and parent education,” he said. “With all the emphasis being put on winning in town and travel programs, coaches are increasingly under pressure to win. Much of that pressure comes from parents. They want their kid to be on a great team and/or be the star player, and they lose sight of what is really important. They should be more concerned with their kids learning how to play the game properly and having a good experience and less about the prestige of winning and having their kid be the star.” ■

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*Chris Klingenberg has been a correspondent for LER for a year and previously was a sports editor for Gatehouse Media New England where he covered sports for six local high schools. He still covers games as a freelancer and enjoys watching high school athletes on the field. Klingenberg has also been an AAU baseball coach for seven years, a varsity baseball assistant for two years and will be entering his second season as the JV baseball coach at Westford Academy in the spring.*



Children from nontraditional family structures, including single-parent and divorced families, have lower odds of participating in organized sports than those from traditional families.

ACCORDING TO A FEBRUARY 2016 ARTICLE ON *PUBLIC IN LIBRARY SCIENCE*

BY ROBYN PARETS

It's not unusual for parents to spend weekends at sports fields, rinks, courts, pools and gyms. Sports participation, which instills lasting health benefits and self-esteem, is indeed a fact of life for many families.

But children from nontraditional family structures, including single-parent and divorced families, have lower odds of participating in organized sports than those from traditional families, according to a February 2016 article on *PLOS ONE (Public in Library Science)*. The study also showed that children from families with lower income levels – often linked to nontraditional families – are less likely to participate in sports. The study, conducted by the Department of Public Health Sciences at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, analyzed a cross-section of Canadian youth and their parents.

The study findings are consistent with existing theories about why children from divorced and single-family households may be less involved in sports. Experts discussed these issues with MVP Parent, along with possible solutions:

# How Nontraditional Family Structures

AFFECT YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPATION



“CO-PARENTING ISN’T A ‘ONE AND DONE’ NEGOTIATION. PARENTS AND STEP-PARENTS WILL BE DEALING WITH EACH OTHER REPEATEDLY FOR YEARS.”



## 1 CHALLENGING FAMILY DYNAMICS.

Some typical scenarios include step-parents who don’t want to be involved in a child’s sports or divorced parents who can’t agree on how to approach their child’s activities. This issue is indeed tricky, said Brian Brunkow, a San Diego-based lawyer, author and youth football coach who speaks about student-athlete development. Parents and step-parents need to learn to communicate effectively and respectfully. “Co-parenting isn’t a ‘one and done’ negotiation. Parents and step-parents will be dealing with each other repeatedly for years,” said Brunkow.

## 2 DIFFICULTY DRIVING TO SPORTING ACTIVITIES AS A SINGLE PARENT

It’s no secret that single parents sometimes find themselves juggling work and kids without help from another adult. For this predicament, arranging rides with other parents is a great option. Yet, no one wants to continuously ask for rides, so a work-around is to refrain from using the word “help” and instead offer to carpool, said Ian Janssen, PhD, a professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University and coauthor of the *PLOS* study. If carpooling is too challenging for a single parent, perhaps he or she can supervise off-the-field tasks, suggests Brunkow, like collecting fees, ordering uniforms or organizing fundraisers. “This way everyone contributes and there’s no uncomfortable perception of handouts,” he said.

## 3 FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

While the costs involved in youth sports can pose a barrier for non-traditional families, parents may seek out financial help. Many programs and sports leagues waive fees for economic hardship, offer scholarships, or offer extended payment plans. Parents can also ask if game-day services – such as working concession stands or refereeing – can be substituted for fees, said Brunkow. Owners of pricey travel teams may be receptive to bartering fees for services i.e., public relations or accounting services for the team. With a little research, parents may also be able to find youth sports programs that cater to kids from blended families or that offer special pricing. Local YMCAs, for example, often offer sliding scale payment plans based on income levels and discounts for single-parent households. ■

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*Robyn Parets is a journalist and personal finance writer based in Boston. A former staff writer for Investor’s Business Daily and NerdWallet, Robyn is also the founder and owner of Pretzel Kids, a children’s yoga brand and online training course. You can follow her on Twitter @RobynParets or reach her via email at [robyparets@gmail.com](mailto:robyparets@gmail.com).*



# *Getting Enough* **SLEEP**

can help prevent injuries

**Studies show  
sports injuries  
go up when  
adolescents don't  
get enough sleep**

BY JOHN C. HAYES



Parents have been warning their adolescent children to get a good night's sleep for many decades. While this used to be done out of concern about academic performance, today's parents have an additional worry: Lack of sleep may increase young athletes' risk of sports-related injury.

The issue is particularly acute because studies are showing that in today's pressure-packed and digital world, adolescents are getting shorter and shorter nightly periods of sleep. Sports medicine researchers have explored the consequences of this trend and found that as sleep falls below the recommended 8-9 hours-per-night level, injury risk goes up.

A study published in August in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports* found that elite adolescent athletes who got at least 8 hours of sleep per night were 61% less likely to be injured than their less-rested counterparts. A 2014 study in the *Journal of Pediatric Orthopedics* reached much the same conclusion; data from the orthopedic center at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles showed that the likelihood of injury over



Holly Benjamin, MD, a pediatric sports medicine specialist at the University of Chicago, has co-authored studies of athletic performance and sleep patterns in adolescents. Besides packed academic schedules, she notes that adolescent athletes may be especially vulnerable to the effects of sleep deprivation and/or

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**“We often forget that sleep is an important component for a young developing person. Kids’ days are becoming filled with after-school activities, sporting activities, science projects and playing multiple instruments.”**

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21 months was 65% in athletes who reported less than 8 hours of sleep per night, and 31% in athletes who reported sleeping 8 or more hours per night.

“We often forget that sleep is an important component for a young developing person,” said Matthew D. Milewski, MD, lead author in the 2014 study and a pediatric orthopedic and sports medicine specialist at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Farmington. “Kids’ days are becoming filled with after-school activities, sporting activities, science projects and playing multiple instruments.”

At least some of the pressure parents put on their children to excel in different programs in school perhaps should be directed to assuring those children get a good night's sleep, he said.

All coaches should monitor players for signs of burnout, which can reflect sleep deprivation and over scheduling, Milewski said. These include a tired appearance, anxiety, loss of sports-specific speed and coordination, and the appearance of stress from playing on multiple teams or pressure from coaches, players, or parents.

general sleep disorders due to precompetition stress and travel, especially when it spans time zones. Even athletic competitions near home can have an impact on sports performance when early-rising adolescents must compete in the evening after a long and stressful day at school, Benjamin said.

“We want them to be happy. If they are fatigued or depressed and their performance is poor, it can be a sign of overtraining and burnout,” Benjamin said.

To check for sleep problems, concerned parents or coaches may want to ask student-athletes to prepare a sleep diary for a week. The diary should rate the quality of the sleep, whether they woke up at night, whether they woke up rested in the morning, and whether they were sleepy during the day. ■

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*John Hayes is a freelance medical writer based in San Francisco with more than 20 years of experience in the medical field. He has written and edited for physician and patient audiences in multiple medical specialties ranging from anesthesiology to ophthalmology and when he's not writing, enjoys hiking, photography, and tai chi.*





# Mindfulness

**Athletes can improve performance by finding their center**

BY ROBYN PARETS

**C**ollege applications, standardized testing, piles of homework. It's no wonder high schoolers are stressed out. When you add competitive sports into the mix, this creates even more anxiety.

To help youth athletes learn healthful ways to relieve stress, parents and coaches are turning to mindfulness-based interventions. These stress-busting methods can also help reduce injuries, enhance positive thinking, promote mental awareness and improve focus.

## THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

What exactly is a mindfulness-based intervention? It's an umbrella term to describe techniques, like yoga and meditation,

that help people become aware of how they feel in the present moment. When practicing meditation, breath work and yoga, for example, participants can achieve a deep sense of inner peace.

When it comes to student-athletes in particular, mindfulness is key as it can also help with recovery from injury and with performance – both in sports and in school. These were the conclusions of an analysis of the medical literature in the June 2016 issue of the *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation*, which corroborate the advice of mindfulness experts.

Better yet, “higher perceived performance led to higher satisfaction and improved motivation, which also had a positive influence on burnout prevention,” according to an article published in July 2015 by *The Sport Journal*.

“Athletes are under such immense pressure, and at the high school level, they get the physical coaching but not the mental part that is achieved through mindfulness,” said Holly Meyers, a mindfulness coach and certified yoga instructor in Washington, DC, who has worked with professional and student-athletes for 15 years. “These athletes are like gladiators. They go out onto the field and everyone is screaming. There is so much distraction.”

Through Meyers’ classes, workshops and one-on-one sessions, she uses breathing techniques, yoga movement and meditation skills to help young athletes cultivate awareness. Athletes can see positive results in just one class, she said.

For example, during a class with the University of Maryland football team in 2010 in College Park, Meyers worked with the group on breathing and relaxation skills to help them stay focused. Two of the football players came up to her after class and asked if she could demonstrate the breathing method again as it helped alleviate their anxiety.

“It was amazing,” she said.

## WHERE TO FIND MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

Because most student-athletes experience school and sports pressure, mindfulness programs can benefit almost all involved in youth sports. But, if your child is having trouble sleeping, experiencing difficulties at school, or dealing with mental health issues, mindfulness and yoga may be particularly helpful, according to a 2012 article in the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*.

If you’re lucky, your school or sports program may offer classes or workshops in mindfulness. If not, you can still find programs by calling your local yoga studio or doing an Internet search for teen yoga programs. You can also ask a yoga studio owner if an instructor is available to conduct sessions for the team or one-on-one lessons with your child.

Or try going with your teen to a local meditation class. A parent can also benefit from mindfulness and then practice these skills with his child, says Meyers. ■

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*Robyn Parets is a journalist and personal finance writer based in Boston. A former staff writer for Investor’s Business Daily and NerdWallet, Robyn is also the founder and owner of Pretzel Kids, a children’s yoga brand and online training course. You can follow her on Twitter @RobynParets or reach her via email at [robyparets@gmail.com](mailto:robyparets@gmail.com).*





WHEN IT COMES TO  
STUDENT-ATHLETES  
IN PARTICULAR,  
MINDFULNESS IS KEY  
AS IT CAN ALSO HELP  
WITH RECOVERY FROM  
INJURY AND WITH  
PERFORMANCE – BOTH  
IN SPORTS AND IN  
SCHOOL.



A young child with curly hair, wearing a dark blue football jersey with the number 5, is holding a brown football. The child is looking off to the side with a focused expression. The background is a blurred outdoor field with trees and a house in the distance. The entire image has a semi-transparent dark overlay.

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

# MVP PARENT

**MVP PARENT** is committed to providing a credible resource that educates and supports the parents of youth athletes. **MVP PARENT** gives parents the information they need to keep youth athletes performing at the highest level physically, mentally, and emotionally. MVP Parent takes a holistic and evidence-based approach to injury prevention, skill development, nutrition, and sports psychology.