

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

MVP PARENT

SPRING 2021

\$4.95

BEING A SPORTS PARENT

WITH MARCUS & AIYSHA
SPEARS

PAGE 16

Youth Sports
Safety: Athletic
Trainers

PAGE 8

Protein &
the Student
Athlete

PAGE 12

Train for
Functional
Ability

PAGE 23

Communication
Tips for Youth
Sports Coaches

PAGE 26

Navigating
College
Recruitment

PAGE 29

...AND MORE!

4 BACK IN THE GAME

As the pandemic winds down, are student athletes ready for their return to sports?

8 YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY: THE ROLE OF THE ATHLETIC TRAINER

What is an athletic trainer? Why is it vital that your athlete has one on their team?

12 PROTEIN AND THE STUDENT ATHLETE

How Much, When and Why

**16 FEATURE STORY:
BEING A SPORTS PARENT...
THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY**

Between hours driving around to competitions and practices, wrapping ankles, and trying to coordinate your entire family's schedules, it's not always easy. See how the Spears family does it with three young athletes.

**21 CHOOSING THE BEST SHOES FOR
YOUR YOUNG ATHLETE**

Paying attention to the choice of shoes and proper fit for young athletes is extremely important.

**23 TRAIN FOR FUNCTIONAL ABILITY,
NOT "EXPLOSIVENESS"**

Parents would be wise to check on strength-and-conditioning protocols for their student athletes, no matter what age.

**26 COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR
YOUTH SPORTS COACHES**

For youth sports athletes, it makes the world of difference when you can communicate clearly and effectively.

**29 NAVIGATING COLLEGE
RECRUITMENT**

Helpful tips for parents and athletes facing the daunting college recruitment process.



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



SPRING 2021: POST-PANDEMIC LIFE RISING


Welcome to the Spring issue of MVP Parent magazine. It's been tough living through a pandemic, but spring is the time for revitalization, and I am so excited to share our interview with Marcus and Aiysha Spears. Both played at the highest levels of their sport: Marcus in the NFL and Aiysha in the WNBA. And now they have 3 children. Check out how they parent in today's world. It is a very open, honest exchange that can shed light on parenting skills to enlighten each and every one of us, no matter what age our children. Thanks to our feature journalist, Joshua Cupp, for conducting this awesome interview and really getting us into their hearts and home. I hope to carry more interviews like this one moving forward. and I am excited to have Josh on the team. A shout out goes to our photographer, April Greer, who did an amazing job capturing light of this family.

I am also very excited to introduce a new feature on Sports Psychology authored by Linda Sterling, PhD, CMPC. Dr. Sterling brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the mental health field with a focus on youth athletes. Her article delves into what to expect from your child as we are coming out of the pandemic and reentering the game. As my daughter heads off to college to play basketball, I found this piece very helpful.

Then, our Nutrition expert, Jill Lane, discusses protein and clears up some confusion about just how much is needed and when it's most effective to take it. I always get something out of her articles. Jay Vincent delves into training for functional ability and what to focus on for your youth athlete. Many of us think training to be explosive is where it's at, when in actuality, focusing on training for the sport your child is playing is more beneficial.

Dr. Bob Weil starts the conversation about choosing the best shoe for your athlete and what to look for. Paying attention to the shoes your child wears can improve their performance and reduce injury. I'm also pleased to have the contribution from the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) which focuses on the role of the Athletic Trainer and why it's important to make sure your child's team has one close by for safety. Last but not least, you'll find a new column on recruiting by my personal friend, Rey Crossman. This is the start of a four-part series that will shed some light on the process of recruiting and offer some perspective if your child wishes to play at the next level.

I cannot say enough how incredibly grateful I am to the entire MVP Parent team. The vision for bringing evidenced-based, quality information to the sports parent community is really coming into focus. Each issue just gets better and better. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do. And, as always, drop me a line and let me know what you think, or if you would like to take part in making a difference in the lives of the youth athlete and family. ■



**AS THE PANDEMIC WINDS DOWN
AND SPORTS SEASONS RAMP UP,
MAKING SURE STUDENT ATHLETES
ARE READY FOR THEIR RETURN
TO SPORT IS ABOUT MORE THAN
MAKING SURE THEIR UNIFORM
FITS. MINDSET MATTERS.**

PHYSICALLY BACK ON THE FIELD / MENTALLY BACK IN THE GAME

BY LINDA STERLING, PHD, CMPC

It's game time again. After the longest, strangest off-season, sports are back. In the past year, some seasons were cancelled. Other seasons were delayed. Still more seasons were thrown off course with team and individual player quarantines. In a few places, sports never left, but they looked very different with restrictions on and off the field. No matter what the case was with your athlete's season, it likely caused some mindset challenges for you and your athlete.

As we head into a new sports season, athletes are excited to get back on the field and parents are pumped to sit in the stands. But how do you get your mind right for the season?

ADVICE FOR SPORT PARENTS

As a parent, you've watched your athlete navigate the extended off-season challenges. You've experienced them yourself too. As sport starts back up for your athlete, give them time to ease back in. They may have left the track last spring as a top sprinter and now find themselves doubting their ability. Maybe they were the #1 goal keeper and they feel like they're not anticipating the shots like they used to. Some of that is normal. The transition back into sport can be challenging. It's similar to returning from injury.

Some skills will come right back, but athletes may be a little rusty in others. Knowing this is normal and not putting extra stress on athletes to be "back" quickly will help alleviate some of the stress they may feel. Avoid blame about off-season work that did or didn't happen. Maybe you tried to get your athlete to do off-season training. Stay away from

ENERGY GOES TO WHAT YOU'RE BUILDING NOW...A GREAT SEASON.



"I told you so" statements even if the first thing your athlete says after practice is "I'm so out of playing shape!" Help your athlete not blame themselves too. We can't go back and change it so don't give energy to it. Energy goes to what you're building now...a great season.

Like physical skills, the competitive mindset might not come back right away either. This is not cause for alarm. After sitting out for several months, unable to train as they normally would, it makes sense that it would throw even the most mentally tough athlete off their game for a moment. When we don't regularly get into "game day mode," it doesn't come as easily, but I've got some tips for that.

You might be thinking, "This isn't my athlete at all. My athlete is the most pumped I've ever seen her." That makes sense too. Athletes love their sport and getting back on the field can be super exciting. Staying pumped without getting overwhelmed with high expectations for the season ahead is important. I've got tips for that too.

While you're acknowledging how tough this transition has been for your athlete, don't forget to acknowledge how challenging it was for you too. You also lost a season. You're a sport parent. You love watching your athlete play. There is definitely an element of grief happening here. Pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings. Get all of your thoughts and feelings out of your head and onto paper. You might find that you feel better just acknowledging the thoughts and feeling the feelings. As you process, make sure you "turn out" to share. Don't vent to your athlete. When you think of a lost season, at the center of that loss is the athlete. As the parent, you're a level out from there. Always turn

outward to process. Share with a friend or talk with a professional, but don't put that on your athlete. Your athlete should be able to "turn out" to you.

One of the best things you can do for your athlete is to help them develop their mental game. Ideally, they'd work with a sport psychology/mental performance coach and you can encourage them as they do the work. Here are a few tips I share with athletes who are returning to play.

ADVICE FOR ATHLETES

Intentional Goals | You've been out of sports for a while or at least out of your regular sport routine, so it's a good idea to revisit previous goals and set some new goals. It's important to set goals that are meaningful and resonate with you, not just ones that seem expected or sound good. SMART goals are great, but they don't get you motivated to practice every day. To set intentional goals, get a blank sheet of paper and spend some time thinking about who you want to be as an athlete. Write down all of the words that describe the athlete you want to be this season. You'll find it's easy to get 5-10 words, challenge yourself to fill up the page. Don't censor yourself. Think about all components of your game: mindset, foundational skills, leadership, physical training. Once you've exhausted your list, group the similar words together. Four categories work well. For each category then write out three things you need to do to make it happen. Once you're done, come up with a name for your goal...who you will be this season. This doesn't have to be measurable or meaningful to anyone else, just to you. Then keep that goal close to you all season.

Imagery | Imagery is a triple threat mindset technique. It can be motivational and inspirational, but it also helps with confidence (it's like you've been there). Imagery is especially important as athletes wait for the season to start. When you can't physically play, imagery is the

GET A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER AND SPEND SOME TIME THINKING ABOUT WHO YOU WANT TO BE AS AN ATHLETE.

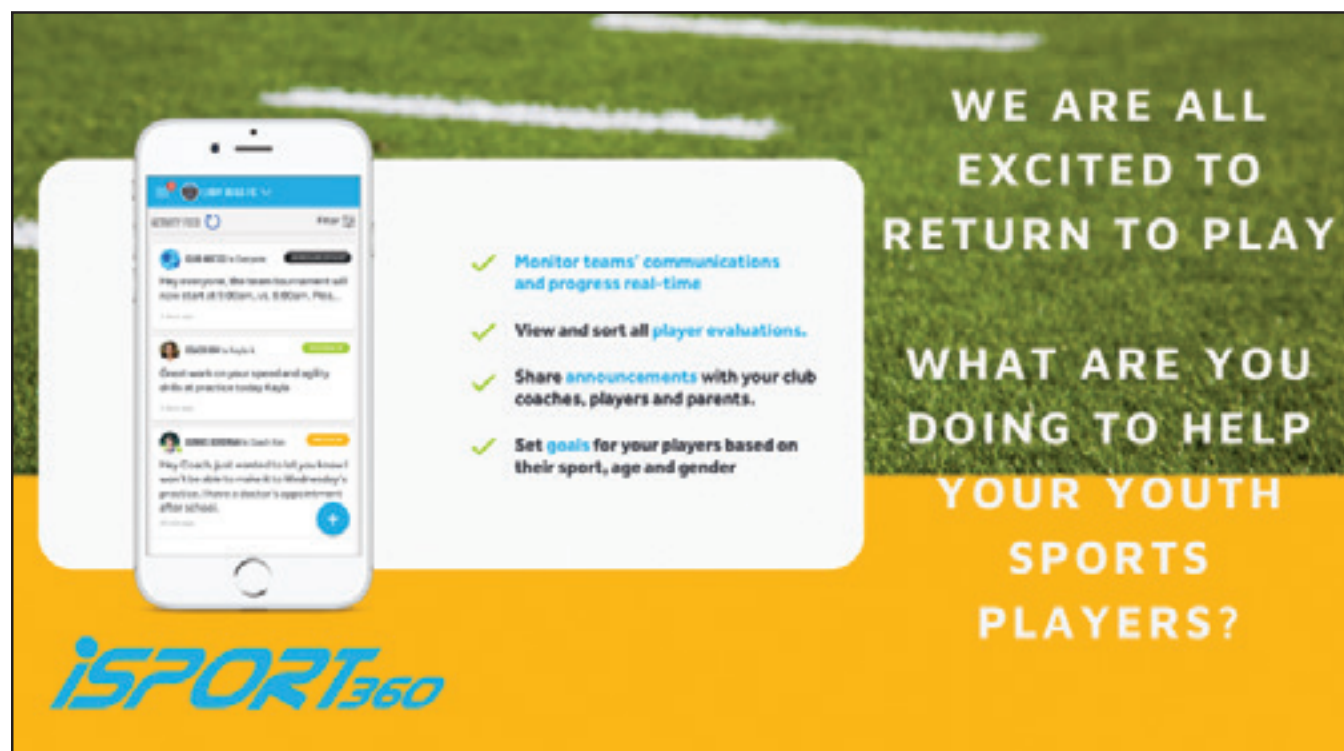
next best thing. Combine the two and you've got a powerful combo. To do imagery: Find a quiet space and set a timer for 20-30 minutes and spend some time remembering who you are as an athlete. It can be helpful to remember your best performance or a competition that was really fun. Remember all of the details and include all of your senses. This helps you get back in the game even before you're actually there. As you get great at imagery, you can start perfecting your game by visualizing it.

Intensity Level | All athletes have an optimal intensity level. The hype level where you play best. Think about your level. Are you high intensity, mid-level, or chill? If you're having trouble thinking of where that is for you, it can help to think about your team or competitors. Do you have teammates who are climbing the fences pumped? Are you calmer than that or are you that athlete? No judgment, just determine where you are your best. Once you've decided, develop a routine to help you get into your optimal zone. Do you need quiet time? Loud music? After an extended time away, it'll be important to find that zone again and put

practices in place to get ready. This is especially true if your day involves online learning. After you shut the laptop, take a break then set a time to start getting in that practice/competition mindset.

It's been a tough off-season for athletes and for sport parents, but sports are back. While it's exciting, it can be stressful too. Be flexible as you support your athlete and yourself. The comeback to sport may not (probably won't) look just like you thought it would. Be supportive and get support when needed. If coming back to sport feels overwhelming and the pressure starts to grow, take time to appreciate getting to play. Remember the love of the game. Enjoy the season! ■

LINDA STERLING, PHD, CMPC, a former collegiate softball player, has masters and doctoral degrees in Counseling Psychology and Sport Psychology and is a licensed professional counselor and Certified Mental Performance Consultant. To learn more about her approach, visit drlindasterling.com.

An advertisement for iSPORT360. On the left, a smartphone displays the app's interface with various notifications and a list of items. To the right of the phone, four green checkmarks are listed: 'Monitor teams' communications and progress real-time', 'View and sort all player evaluations.', 'Share announcements with your club coaches, players and parents.', and 'Set goals for your players based on their sport, age and gender'. The background is a blurred green field. On the right side, white text reads 'WE ARE ALL EXCITED TO RETURN TO PLAY' and 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HELP YOUR YOUTH SPORTS PLAYERS?'. The iSPORT360 logo is at the bottom left.

WE ARE ALL
EXCITED TO
RETURN TO PLAY

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DOING TO HELP
YOUR YOUTH
SPORTS
PLAYERS?

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ASK AN ATHLETIC TRAINER

What Is an Athletic Trainer and Why It's Vital That Your Athlete Has One On Their Team

FROM THE NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION (NATA.ORG)

You may have seen them on the sidelines of games or while watching sports on TV. They are often the first ones on the scene when a player is injured. Visions of water bottles or taping ankles may also come to mind. However, they are so much more than that and putting them in that box can be doing your athlete a grave disservice.

WHAT ARE ATHLETIC TRAINERS?

Athletic trainers (ATs) are health care professionals who provide a safer approach to work, life and sport. They are especially unique as they are educated and trained in the prevention of injury and illness, but also have expertise in injuries, emergencies, rehabilitation, and every step in between. They are also trained on how to help players with chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes play more safely.

Why is it critical for your student athlete's health and safety to have one?

- 1 **Your Athlete's Advocate.** Athletic trainers are your child's unbiased advocate. Their priority is the health and safety of your athlete – above winning or losing a game.
- 2 **Injury Prevention.** ATs can help prevent injuries from occurring, prevent a minor injury from developing into a major injury, and reduce the risk of future injuries.
- 3 **Emergency Prevention.** ATs can provide coaches with critical guidance on when, how long, and how often practices are. For example, when the temperature and humidity pose a health risk to the players for deadly, but preventable heat injury and heat stroke, ATs advise the coach on alternative times, length, and/or intensity of practice to keep the athletes safe.

DID YOU KNOW?

March is National Athletic Trainers' Month. If you have an athletic trainer that you work with, this month is a great way to celebrate them and all they do.

OVER 80%
of athletic trainers
have a master's degree.

Rules about what athletic trainers can and cannot do vary by state.

THEY ARE EXCELLENT GUIDES TO OTHER HEALTH PROVIDERS.

Your student got a tooth knocked out at practice? They know a great dentist. Eye injury? They know an ophthalmologist.

OVER 30%
of secondary schools have
ZERO access to an athletic
trainer and still play sports.

Athletic trainers also provide care in the **MILITARY, PERFORMING ARTS, CLINICAL, INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS,** and more.

Athletic trainers are currently not regulated in California. This means that someone who is not trained or has had their license/certification revoked can practice in California. Athletic trainers have been pushing for government regulation for years, but have faced stiff opposition. This push continues today.

- 4** **Emergencies.** ATs can provide onsite emergency care in the event of a serious or life-threatening event such as sudden cardiac arrest, heat illness, or cervical spine injury.
- 5** **Communication and Coordination.** In school-based sports, ATs play an important role in communication and coordination of care between the school nurse, teachers, coaches, and school administration.
- 6** **Mental Health.** In addition to managing physical healthcare needs, ATs play an important role in supporting the mental health of student athletes. They are trained to identify red flags for mental health concerns and will work to refer your child to receive the care they need.
- 7** **Saving Time and Money for Your Family.** If your school employs an AT, they can reduce school absenteeism and your time missed at work by providing rehabilitation and treatment of injuries on campus. Additionally, ATs can streamline the testing, diagnostics, and referral process to ensure your child is seen by the correct provider (doctor, dermatologist, dentist, etc.), and receiving only the tests needed.

HOW ARE ATHLETIC TRAINERS DIFFERENT FROM PERSONAL TRAINERS OR STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACHES?

Athletic trainers

Similar to other healthcare providers, ATs must receive (at minimum) a bachelor's level education from an accredited program; however, starting next year, to become an athletic trainer, they will need to get a minimum of masters. Additionally, the profession is regulated by 49 states plus the District of Columbia. This means that ATs must be licensed and/or certified to practice within the state and are required to maintain their certification by completing continuing education, similar to other healthcare professionals.

ATs can assist in wellness and performance, they provide a full continuum of care – from the prevention of injuries to return to play, and every step in between.

Coaches

While coaches may receive training in terms of first aid or CPR, they are not trained healthcare professionals and have their own set of unique skills that are not solely focused on health and safety.



“I’VE TAKEN ALL THE POSITIVES FROM IT. I COULD BE DEAD...THE DOCTOR SAID I HAD TWO MINUTES TO LIVE IF NOT FOR THE QUICK ACTION OF AN AT.”

Brady Barron (student athlete), Methuen, MA

Personal Trainers

Personal trainers are those people that come to mind when you think about the gym or fitness classes. While they certainly don’t want anyone to get injured, they are not regulated and are not healthcare professionals.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR ATHLETIC TRAINER?

You should expect your athlete’s athletic trainer to be professional, provide clear and consistent communication, and proactive education and risk mitigation strategies. They should be certified or licensed as an athletic trainer and you have the right to ask for their credentials.

They should also provide unbiased and compassionate medical care. They are with your athlete almost every day and get to know your son or daughter, a privilege no other medical professional gets to have with their patients.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SCHOOL OR TEAM DOES NOT HAVE AN ATHLETIC TRAINER?

The reality is that not every school prioritizes health and safety of their

athletes. If they have sports, there should be enough athletic trainers available to provide care to all sports disciplines.

If your school doesn’t have an athletic trainer, or not enough on their team to take care of your athlete’s sport, talk to the coach or athletic director. Determine the level of awareness and discuss the increased risk that both the athletes and school face (lawsuits) without an AT. If the staff is aware of the importance of the AT, determine what obstacles prevent the school from employing an AT and gather support from fellow parents and those in the community. Present to the school board or league administration and engage with leaders at your school or club to develop a plan for hiring an AT. We have resources to help you with this at <https://www.atyourownrisk.org/>.

One thing to keep in mind. Tournaments, travel clubs, and community sports usually do not have athletic trainers available. Before signing up, make there is an AT on-site to ensure player safety. If there is not one, programs such as “Go4Ellis” makes it easy to hire ATs for per diem work.

Athletic trainers are here for you and your athlete. For more information about the profession, to advocate for an athletic trainer on your team, or to learn more about athletic training as a potential profession for your athlete, please visit nata.org or atyourownrisk.org. ■

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PROTEIN AND THE STUDENT ATHLETE:

How Much, When and Why

BY JILL LANE

Protein comes from the Greek word meaning “of first importance,” which seems appropriate once you consider its numerous functions. Protein plays a key role in many aspects of health for athletes and adults alike (in fact protein contains something called essential amino acids that the body needs but can’t make, we will cover more on that below). But due to recent release of documentaries, books and other media on plant-based eating, people (even student athletes) have never been more confused on how much protein they should eat...or if they even should eat it at all?! In this article we will cover protein for the student athlete: why it is important, how much to eat, when to eat it, where to get it and to how to best prepare it. You will hopefully take away that your student athlete can (and should) eat both a plant-based and protein-rich diet to perform, recover, grow and be well – score!

BUT FIRST, A LITTLE CHEMISTRY

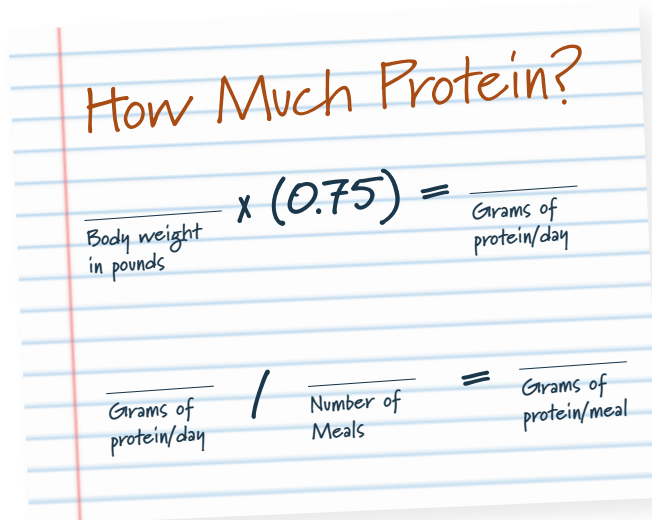
Protein is a macronutrient, along with carbohydrates and fats. Macronutrients (AKA ‘macros’) are the primary source from which the human body derives energy (calories). Student athletes require a steady stream of energy from macros to fuel growth, performance and recovery. Additionally, macronutrients contain micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, antioxidants), which the body also needs for optimal health and performance, just on a smaller scale.

Protein is made up of amino acids. The body breaks down (via digestion) the protein we eat into amino acids. There are 20 amino acids, 9 of which are essential to the body. The body cannot make these 9 amino acids, so we have to eat foods that contain them, making them an ‘essential’ part of our diet. In the sports nutrition or supplement world you might hear a lot about the branched-chain amino acids or BCAAs for short (valine, isoleucine and leucine) – they are 3 of the 9 essential amino acids.

What do amino acids do? Imagine a box of different color Legos®. You can build many different things with the varying shapes and colors of these Legos. Amino acids are like Legos: the body uses different amino acids to build and rebuild many different things in the body with them. More specifically, the body uses protein and amino acids to:

- Maintain and add muscle mass
- Repair muscle
- Maintain strong bones
- Help skin, hair and nail growth
- Produce collagen for tendons, ligaments and muscle
- Help in recovery from illness, surgery and injury
- Build mood chemicals called neurotransmitters (like serotonin)
- Support sleep
- Prevent anemia—keeping blood healthy
- Produce enzymes (key starter engines for the body’s chemical reactions)
- Produce healthy hormones
- Help general growth and development

According to a Harvard School of Public Health article “protein is found throughout the body—in muscle, bone, skin, hair, and virtually



every other body part or tissue. It makes up the enzymes that power many chemical reactions and the hemoglobin that carries oxygen in your blood. At least 10,000 different proteins make you what you are and keep you that way.”

HOW MUCH PROTEIN

So how much protein should your student athlete eat per day? There are some qualifying questions here, like what is your athlete’s weight, age, general health, and what are the overall goals: are they strength training and trying to add more muscle mass or are they falling behind on the growth chart? In general, the literature and science suggest that a growing teenage athlete can eat between 1.6-2.0g of protein per kilogram of bodyweight spread throughout the day. Say what? Let me make it simple.

(your athlete’s body weight in pounds) X (0.75) = grams of protein per day your athlete should aim to consume

Now take that number and divide by however many meals your athletes eat. Most athletes I work with eat between 4 and 6 snacks and meals per day.

So for example, if your athlete weighs 150 pounds:

$150 \times 0.75 = 112.5$ grams of protein per day

$112.5g / 5 \text{ meals per day} = \text{roughly } 22.5 \text{ grams of protein at each of these } 5 \text{ snacks/meals}$

**STUDENT ATHLETES REQUIRE
A STEADY STREAM OF ENERGY
FROM MACROS TO FUEL GROWTH,
PERFORMANCE AND RECOVERY.**

1

Protein is best when it is spread throughout the day: have your athlete aim to eat some based on their above calculation about every 3-5 hours

2

More is not better at one sitting: 20-40 grams of protein per meal or snack is the 'sweet spot' for getting the metabolic job done

3

Be consistent with intake: if your athlete misses or under eats their protein at a snack or meal here or there they won't lose a hamstring...but repeated lack of protein intake may impact health, performance, and recovery, so be mindful.

WHEN SHOULD PROTEIN BE EATEN?

There are 3 overarching themes in the protein research around when to eat it.



WHAT FOODS CONTAIN PROTEIN

There are actually A LOT of foods that contain amino acids. The goal is to eat foods that are complete proteins – complete proteins are protein-rich foods that contain all of the essential amino acids in an ideal ratio and quantity for the body. Complete protein sources include:

- Eggs (free range when possible)
- Chicken (choose pasture raised when you can)
- Turkey
- Beef/Bison (choose grass-fed when possible)
- Fish (cold-water fish like salmon, sardines, halibut, trout, cod)
- Pork
- Dairy (organic cottage cheese, whey protein, Greek yogurt)
- Soy (organic tofu, tempeh, miso)
- Quinoa

As with any food group, to get the most nutrition out of our food, it is best to rotate through different sources of protein (and carbohydrates, veggies, and fats) as each gives a slightly different profile of amino acids and calories, as well as amount of fat and micronutrients.

Vegan and vegetarians will depend more heavily on the plant-based sources listed and should include complementary sources of plants that are not complete proteins, but high many essential amino acids like beans, legumes, and a variety of nuts, as well as plant-based protein powders. Rotation and variety is very important for this group in order to grab as many amino acids as possible from the plants – which can be challenging, but it is doable.

If you find your student athlete (or yourself) eating the same 5-10 things on repeat, you both have just earned yourself a well-built NSF Certified for Sport multi-vitamin/mineral to take daily to fill micronutrient gaps you could be creating by not getting a lot of variety in your diet. (The NSF International's Certified for Sport program certifies that what is on the label is in the bottle and that the produce does not contain unsafe levels of contaminants, prohibited substances, or masking agents. NSF International is an independent and accredited non-governmental organization whose mission is to protect and improve global human health.)

HOW TO PREPARE IT

You got this! You can bake, broil, grill, sauté, boil (like hard boiled eggs), blend (like a protein shake) or parfait (like a homemade Greek yogurt parfait). Herbs, high quality salt, like Himalayan or REAL salt, fresh cracked pepper and olive, coconut or avocado oils are your teammates to making any of the proteins listed taste amazing, no matter which way you choose to cook them!

To wrap this up (oh, add that to your list too...a nitrate free deli meat roll up or wrap!) as we said above, protein comes from the Greek word meaning “of first importance” – which makes sense now, right? Protein can and should be a key part of your athlete’s fueling plan in addition to plants, plants, plants, carbohydrates, and performance fats ([see my previous article to learn more](#)). Not getting enough protein may negatively impact growth and development in addition to performance and recovery. Protein supports mental health and immune health –

both of which are extremely important for our teens – athlete or not! So eat your protein, and your plants too.

Contact me for a list of the references used to support this article.

JILL LANE, mom of 3, founder of Fueling Champions® has been teaching nutrition and exercise science to pro-athletes, sports families, student athletes, coaches and health care practitioners for 20 years. Some of her current and past clients include coaches and players from the NFL, NBA, and MLB. As a former All-American, Olympic Development Team Member and Division I Scholarship Collegiate athlete herself, Jill has a clear understanding of what competitive athletes require to achieve and sustain their personal best.

Her mission to support the next generation of student athlete leaders (as well as those who lead them on a daily basis) comes full circle in Fueling Champions®.

Join us at www.FuelingChampions.org + Instagram @TeamFuelingChampions



PROTEIN CAN AND SHOULD BE A KEY PART OF YOUR ATHLETE’S FUELING PLAN IN ADDITION TO PLANTS, PLANTS, PLANTS, CARBOHYDRATES, AND PERFORMANCE FATS. NOT GETTING ENOUGH PROTEIN MAY NEGATIVELY IMPACT GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ADDITION TO PERFORMANCE AND RECOVERY.



MVP EXCLUSIVE

BEING A **SPORTS PARENT**

There Is No Right Way
WITH MARCUS & AIYSHA SPEARS

BY JOSH CUPP

If you've picked up this magazine or are checking it out online, chances are you're a sports parent. Between hours driving around to competitions and practices, wrapping ankles, and trying to coordinate your entire family's schedules, it's not always easy. Perfecting time management, understanding different coaching styles, handling injuries, and consoling our kids after less than stellar performances can be beyond arduous.



I'm the parent of a 10-year-old sports crazed boy who would rather take extra batting practice than drop in a Fortnite session. My son, Francisco, plays organized baseball, tennis, basketball, and with his "hobby" sport of skiing, he regularly dominates black diamonds from Killington to Vail. You plant corn you get corn. I was an AJGA Rolex All American high school golfer. I followed with All Conference honors as a student athlete at Old Dominion University. My athletics career culminated with some professional success bouncing around mini-tours with a cup of coffee on the PGA Tour in 2000. I also coached NCAA DI golf for seven years at American University and the University of San Francisco.

With my background at all levels of sports, it must be easy to have all the answers when assisting Francisco with his athletic endeavors, right? Wrong. I know athletics, and I know my kid so that's a great start. Certainly, I don't inherently know all the right buttons to push, so I thought it might be a worthwhile venture to sit down virtually with two successful former professional athletes that are also currently navigating youth sports with their children.

MVP Parent put me in touch with Aiysha and Marcus Spears. Aiysha is from Detroit, Michigan, and her collegiate basketball career began at

I KNOW ATHLETICS, AND I KNOW MY KID SO THAT'S A GREAT START. CERTAINLY, I DON'T INHERENTLY KNOW ALL THE RIGHT BUTTONS TO PUSH, SO I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE A WORTHWHILE VENTURE TO SIT DOWN VIRTUALLY WITH TWO SUCCESSFUL FORMER PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES THAT ARE ALSO CURRENTLY NAVIGATING YOUTH SPORTS WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

St. John's University in Queens, New York, and she finished at Louisiana State University (LSU). She went on to be selected 7th overall in the 2003 Women's National Basketball Association Draft by the Washington Mystics. Marcus hails from Baton Rouge, and was an All American defensive end at LSU. The Tigers won a national championship in 2003, and Marcus went 20th overall to the Dallas Cowboys in the 2005 National Football League (NFL) Draft. Marcus now regularly graces ESPN's Get Up!, and First Take, dishing out his perspectives on the largely unreported bits of the NFL, also known as the interesting takes

that only a former player would be able to translate. Aiysha has started MomAgent, a business born out of using her immense experience with parenting athletic children aimed at helping others guide their children more effectively. More importantly, Aiysha and Marcus are parents to three gifted athletic children: Macaria, Marcus Jr., and Miko.

Our conversation took place via Zoom in mid-January. I think we spent 5 of our 40 minutes belly laughing about our kids' quirks, and happily sharing stories about how we try to impart wisdom on our offspring and how it is sometimes well received and other times completely ignored. It was one of the most respectful, informative and just plain fun and entertaining chats I've had in ages. I've attempted to keep the interview Q and As on point with the topic of raising athletic children in this piece, but please, for the love of athletics and wanting to have a good chuckle, please check out the interview in its entirety on [MVP Parent's YouTube channel](#).





“SPORTS ARE A TERRIFIC INTRODUCTION TO LIFE IN THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD A COMMON GOAL.”



MVP: Having both been so active in highly competitive athletics at such young ages and both being so successful in athletic endeavors, do you think it was a foregone conclusion that your children would participate in sports as well?

AS: Yes and no. We knew the kids would have interest, but we didn't know necessarily which sports would keep their interest. I thought the probability would be high, let's say that. We knew if there was interest, we would be into it with them.

MS: For me, sports, – especially team sports – is about life. Very few people work alone. Sports are a terrific introduction to life in that there are several people working together toward a common goal. I mean, finding success, a college scholarship, that's great, but I always wanted them to get into athletics for the life skills aspect of it.

MVP: Is there temptation to coach your kids' teams? Have either of you succumbed to that temptation?

MS: (after a solid minute of co-giggles with Aiysha) I have. Sometimes it's hard to not be that parent that knows everything, but knowing you're a parent that knows a lot. My daughter is a strong volleyball player, and I know little about that, but I am learning as I go. I played for Nick Saban, that's as tough as it gets. I just don't want them to get out there and act surprised when coaches get after you, you know; coaches get upset and coaches can curse. The early stages maybe I was too involved, but I have since backed off. Less coaching and more intently watching from the sideline. I just want them to be prepared for different coaching styles.

AS: The foundational skills, life skills portion of the coaching we feel like we always want to have a hand in.

MVP: Marcus, you've been coached by all time greats Nick Saban and Bill Parcells and have played successfully at the game's highest level. How do you handle a difference in opinion with your son's football coaches?

MS: I give his coaches lots of credit, they know plenty about the game. I look at it really as, are the coaches willing to accept input? I try to make myself available if anyone wants my take. Bad practice habits I'll step in on and that's why originally I helped with coaching early on.

AS: We also scout coaches and kind of check out how they handle their teams – especially how they handle coaching in a game atmosphere. Parents talk and we do our homework and vet out who we think may be a good fit.

MVP: Assuming Marcus being listed at a svelte 315 lbs that you've not played an extensive amount of volleyball, do you both find it more fun watching your daughter, Macaria, excel at a sport with which you're less familiar?

AS: She wanted to start playing at age 5, and I never played volleyball formally because my coaches always knew my first love was basketball. I am learning so much from her coaches now because she plays at the top club in Texas. We've all learned the game together. Volleyball is an amazing sport.

MS: She started at such a young age and mom has guided her 100% with the volleyball. Originally, I just enjoyed watching her run around and having fun. But then to watch her develop a true love for the game, that has been great. Dad steps in with intensity and doing things the right way with stress on work ethic. Mom and Dad both try to key on the hard work angle. I'm more of the motivator, get after it type, and Mom is more of the organizational, teaching, and patience guru. Thank God for my wife.

MVP: Where do you both stand on the debate between having your kids play several different sports like we all did vs. getting single sport specific as many coaches are pushing in recent years?

AS: I feel like multiple sports is a way to teach them to do different things. With COVID right now, it has been tougher to participate in as many sports as the kids would like.

MS: I was big on multiple sports, but my daughter saw so much success early in volleyball that she just identified as a volleyball player. She does still have interest in other sports, but more casually. To identify one way or the other, we are definitely a sports family over here.



MVP: Are the kids playing sports now during the COVID-19 pandemic? How has that challenge played out with your family?

AS: A lot has been cancelled but we are set to get back on the volleyball court. Coaches and players only, so that is tough, but at least we will get back playing. However, we know other kids and teams that have played an entire season. Baseball happened this Spring, and the kids played and wore masks on the bench.

MS: Baseball, technically, is social distancing anyway outside of running the bags. We were comfortable with that. Our son didn't play basketball and he was ok with that. The kids have been homeschooled for three years, so the remote learning wasn't new for them.

MVP: Slowly but surely your kids are starting to approach recruiting age for college athletics. How is that process being approached? As a follow up, how did the recruiting process play out with you both?

MS: At the time of my recruitment, all the best high school football players from Louisiana went to college in Florida (University of Florida, Florida State, University of Miami). 2001 was the first year we all decided to stick together and go to LSU. It was Nick Saban, Jimbo Fisher, Derek Dooley...then young, enthusiastic coaches that was a lot of it. We had 10-12 of the top 40 high school football player in the country that year and we got together and decided to stay home and represent our state like all the kids in Florida did. It worked out. Plus, my mom and dad were close, and I met my wife.

AS: For me it was similar to Marcus. We had a few girls from Detroit going there, to St. John's. There were five women on the team from Detroit already, so we had a Detroit house off campus. Also, I wanted a woman coach. I loved the big city, I loved NYC, so that was a seemingly great fit.

MVP: If any of the kids have a bad game or a rough practice, who are they more likely to commiserate with afterward?

MS: (lots of laughs from both) The son's personality is like Mom's. My daughter's personality is like mine. My daughter is like get it all out and then be done with it. My son is more emotive and "feel my pain," you know? I'm more like, you just sucked today. My daughter plays a bad game and she is seeking guidance, "What did I do wrong? What do I need to do to get better?" My son we need to be more sensitive with, and we have to add bits like, "Well, you have these few positives too."

AS: I am a straight shooter too, but I might be a bit more compassionate. I never want them to get too caught up in the moment of one particular performance in one particular game. Their journey is more than that and their temporary disappointment is just that, temporary. As long as they're working hard, trying hard, and having fun then they're on course.

MVP: Aiysha, being a mom of sports kids, was it an innate move on your part to start MomAgent given all the stresses and challenges you endure in that role? Tell me more about what MomAgent is all about.

AS: It was a completely natural progression. Other parents were always asking Kia and I about teaching techniques, recovery strategies, and such. So we thought, we were always answering these questions, so we decided to make a more formal business structure out of it. We are just launching our website at themomagentbox.com. We have a presence on YouTube and Instagram and we are happy to be working with MVP Parent too. Parents of kids that play sports need to feel a community and have a way to network with each other and we are looking to facilitate that process.

Our interview lasted just over 40 minutes, but the take away is timeless. Our kids are so different, and that is truly beautiful. Team Spears has done a great job in identifying that key bit of knowledge and they have a great time talking about and celebrating it. Being a great sports parent doesn't carry a particular formula or approach. There really is no one right way. An approach that works for one child might be lost on another. Not unlike trying to achieve success at a job or an important personal relationship, you have to put in the work, listen, and observe. Understanding our children and what THEIR goals and challenges are should be our primary focus. I never heard Aiysha or Marcus once talk about their kids' stats or brag about early scholarship offers. I did hear them speak about how much fun they have watching their children play sports and how they think athletics act as a metaphor for life. They have expectations for their kids and it's not to get D1 scholarships or play sports for a lucrative living. Play hard and play for the right reasons, be good/encouraging teammates, practice and train with intent, and if you find success in a moment, act like you've done it before because that next moment might be trying, so remain humble.

If you find yourself as a parent of an athletic child or children wondering whether to sign up for travel soccer, deciding at Dick's on whether to go wood or aluminum bat, or whether to mention something to one of their coaches, just know we ALL have those moments of indecision. I think we'll look back at these moments as the good times. A little conflict and the trials and tribulations, that's the best stuff. If it were all high fives and walk offs, that'd get old after a while. Personally, I'll always prefer the 2004 Red Sox and Ben Hogan's 1950 US Open victory over rooting for chalk. Talk to other parents, pick up MVP Parent, hit up themomagentbox.com, or maybe best, just sit down with your kids and talk to them. Listen up and you might find the answers are simply getting their take and coming to a decision together. Treat them like the adults they will soon become, whether we're ready for that or not.

JOSH CUPP is a former NCAA D1 student athlete, head coach, and has competed at golf's highest professional level. In addition to writing, he pitches never-ending batting practice to his best friend and son, Francisco, and peddles wine at the Thirsty Owl in Saratoga Springs, NY. He can be reached at joshuacupp@gmail.com.



MORE ON MOMAGENT

with Aiysha and Kia

A MomAgent is...

A mom who takes an active role in helping turn her kid's athletic dreams into reality. We like to use the synonyms: superwoman, driver, chef, therapist and of course #1 fan!

One day while at a baseball game

Kia called me and said we should do something for sports moms since we are always at our kids sporting activities and are constantly being asked what we do with our kids whether it's workouts, nutrition, advice on coaches or where their kids should go to school, so we figured why not create a community that can help other sports moms with their athletes. Then the name search began and MomAgent was born.

Each quarter we will partner with a charity/organization

that is aligned with our goal and mission of helping create equity and inclusion in youth sports by donating a percentage of all proceeds to their cause.



You can expect a carefully curated box

of MomAgent essentials that will provide things that help mom and/or her athlete with recovery, nutrition, new products on the rise. There will be some awesome MomAgent swag, always something special for mom to relax, and most importantly a community of other MomAgents to engage with. Every quarter we will have an expert presentation in various fields that will help both the MomAgent and her athlete grow and improve on their athletic journey.

We are looking for total world domination!

You didn't think our kids got their competitiveness from their dads did you? Seriously, we are looking to create a brand. The days of the "soccer-mom" are gone, we've evolved and MomAgents are taking over! We intend to grow a community of people that know and understand the power of sport, the positive impact it can have on our children and believe that all children, no matter their socioeconomic background, should have the ability to participate.

CHOOSING THE BEST SHOES FOR YOUR YOUNG ATHLETE

BY DR. BOB WEIL

Paying attention to the choice of shoes and proper fit for young athletes is extremely important. There is no BEST shoe. Numerous brands and styles are available from which to choose. That's the point – lots of choices!

So let's talk about what's important.

- 1** **Make sure you're choosing shoes that are designed for the sport.** For the most part, it's smart to stick with what is designed with the particular sport's demands in mind. Good sturdy heel counters are important as well as the ball of foot flexibility,

regardless of the sport. Only running shoes have different foot type criteria, such as motion control and neutral or stability designs. Other sports might be catching up to this, but not yet.

- 2** **Stick with "name brands" that guarantee good quality.** You don't need the highest priced shoe with a prominent athlete's endorsement but stay away from bargain basement brands. If your young athlete has had good success with a particular brand or style, stick with it. This is easier said than done because the brands are always changing. Hand-me downs (wearing older siblings' shoes) is never a good idea! This can cause problems especially with running, jumping and multi-directional sports.

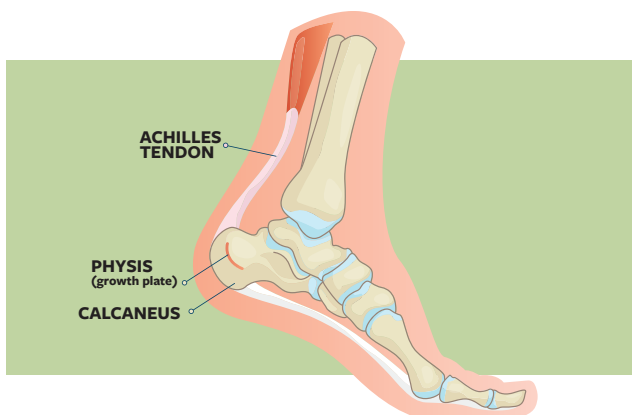
SHOE REPLACEMENT IN TIMELY MANNER IS IMPORTANT. IF CLEATS ARE USED, CHECK THEIR WEAR PATTERN – IF UNEVEN, REPLACE THEM.



3 If your young athlete has a history of foot, ankle, lower extremity injuries or problems, or fitting concerns, get a **podiatrist's opinion**. Some good questions to ask and consider are: What are the best shoes for my athlete's foot type or mechanics? Would they benefit from orthotics or from physical therapy and strengthening?

4 Do not use running shoes for other, especially multi-directional, sports. Running shoes are designed for straight ahead movement, not side-to-side field or court sports. You can use "cross trainers" for many of these, but truthfully, shoes designed for a particular sport are best.

5 Cleats are traditionally used by soccer, baseball, softball, and football players at young ages. But cleats can create problems with growth: There is a large growth center at the back and bottom of the heel which is susceptible to stress from running and jumping; this spot can be aggravated by cleats. Most heel pain in pre-teens and adolescents is related to this. Get your youngsters into a multiple nub shoe that spreads the pressure more evenly. These heel conditions, often called Severs or apophysitis are quite common in cleats that are positioned right under this area. Other growth centers under the balls of the feet and specifically the big toe also can be aggravated with cleats. I would like to see routinely no cleats before adolescence, but "tradition" makes this a tough sell. If heel problems persist or recur, get podiatrist or medical evaluation as often foot type (for example, high arches or excessively pronated feet) compound the problem. I've had great success with orthotics for these kids!



6 Proper fit is always important! Would it surprise you to know that over 50% of us all – including athletes! – are wearing the wrong size length or width shoe? This includes the youngsters, whose feet are still growing.

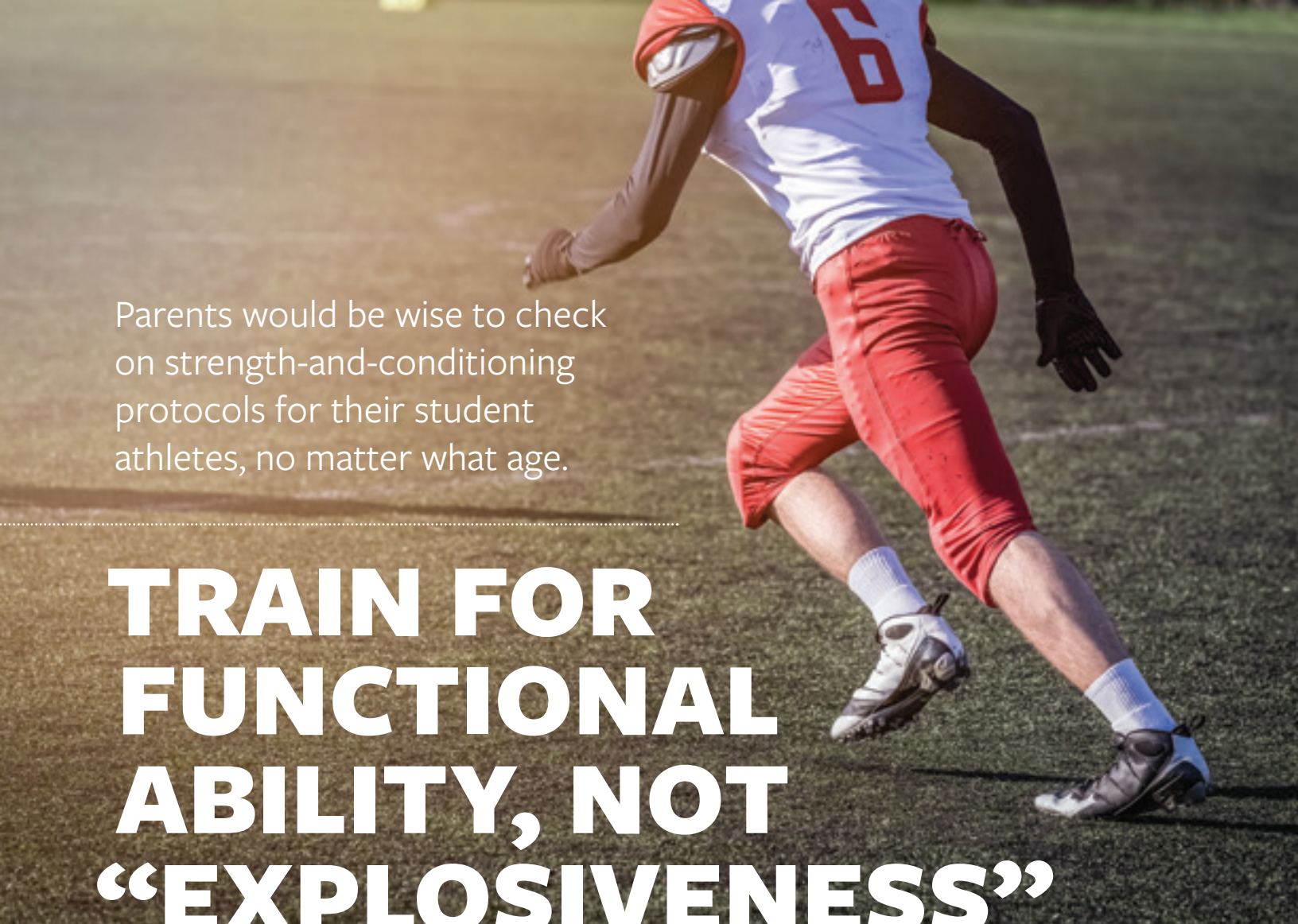
- Make sure to go to reputable sports shoe stores with properly trained "shoe fitters."
- Have your athlete's normal proper game-time socks with you.
- Make sure both feet are measured for both length and width.
- Make sure shoes are comfortable – sounds simple but if they don't feel good, don't buy them. Good idea, not only for the kids, is to wear shoes around the house for day or two to make sure they are really comfortable. If so, then play in them – if not replace or exchange them. You don't want your young athlete to discover after practice or playing in them that they're not comfortable and not exchangeable.

7 Shoe replacement in timely manner is important. Foot growth generally ends in girls 13-14 and boys 15-16. Even if your child has not outgrown them, it is wise to replace sport shoes each season or at least twice a year due to wear and tear.

- Pay attention to shoe break down: Put the shoes on the table and look at the back of each shoe to see if the heel is rolling inward or outward – if so, they need to be replaced.
- If cleats are used, check their wear pattern – if uneven, replace them.

8 Skate boots in both figure skating and ice hockey need special consideration. Proper fitting of boots is crucial and I recommend only experienced boot-fitters. Custom boots might be indicated. Again, if foot problems have been or are present or recur, get a podiatrist's opinion. We've seen great success with proper orthotics in skate boots as well. ■

DR. BOB WEIL is a sports podiatrist in private practice in Aurora, Illinois. He hosts "The Sports Doctor," a live weekly radio show on bbsradio.com. For more information, go to sportsdoctorradio.com.



Parents would be wise to check on strength-and-conditioning protocols for their student athletes, no matter what age.

TRAIN FOR FUNCTIONAL ABILITY, NOT “EXPLOSIVENESS”

BY JAY PRIMAROLO

It would be safe to say that every National Football League (NFL) fan is familiar with the name Saquon Barkley. This young football prodigy was a college sensation and performed on a level that can be accurately described as breath-taking in his first season in the NFL. Unfortunately, shortly into his 3rd season in the NFL, Barkley suffered from a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) ending his 2020 season. This is a common occurrence in the NFL and professional sports as a whole. But, why so common? Are they just unlucky? The answer lies in their faulty preparation methodology. Their off-season strength and conditioning efforts are not only having very little effect on their ability to perform, they are a large contribution to the rate of injury in not only professional sports, but collegiate and high school and even younger sports as well.

Strength and conditioning is one of the many facets of sports performance preparation. It is now taken very seriously among collegiate and professional sports. There is even a specific coach whose job it is to provide programs to the athletes and monitor them along the way. The coach's job (so he thinks, erroneously) is to make the athletes as fast, strong, and explosive as possible. He does this because he believes that improving these factors of functional ability will have a profound effect on the athlete's performance. This belief has inspired the implementation of “explosive” exercises like the hang clean, power clean, plyometrics, agility ladders... and the list goes on. Unfortunately, the beliefs of these coaches are flat out wrong and not rooted in any sort of scientific evidence. Most of these exercises and drills are either doing nothing to improve the performance of the athlete, and in many cases affecting performance in a negative way and causing them to perform worse.

There are 5 general and trainable factors of functional ability: muscular strength, muscular size, cardiovascular efficiency, bone and connective tissue strength, and metabolic efficiency. These are trainable factors, meaning, exercise has a direct effect on improving them. Notice you don't see the words "explosiveness," "power," or "speed," That's because these characteristics are a secondary effect of improving the 5 general, trainable factors – but combined with one other aspect: skill.

The enormous misunderstanding in professional and collegiate sports is that if you perform exercises which "look like" or are "similar to" movements you perform in your sport, the improvement in the performance of the exercise will translate to the improvement of the sport's movement. This is WRONG. This can be explained by the Principle of Specificity. Motor learning research over the last several decades shows that your activities must be specific to a skill for maximal improvement to occur. Here, "specific" means "identical," not "similar" or "just like." A barbell squat may be similar to a vertical jump, or a bench press similar to blocking technique used by an NFL lineman, but barbell squats will only help you get better at barbell squats, and bench press will only help you get better at bench press.

These "functional exercises" have been indoctrinated into the minds of athletes over the last 10-20 years all due to a clever marketing gimmick to sell subpar equipment and silly exercise classes. A lot of the popularity of "functional exercise" also has to do with selection bias. Basically, you've got a huge sample size of people using these silly training techniques. This includes the top-level athletes and winningest teams. When the athlete or team performs well, many people give credit to their strength-and-conditioning program. The problem is, nobody takes into consideration the thousands of other athletes and hundreds of other sports teams implementing the same training approach, but with very little success. Observers also don't take into consideration various other factors that contributed to the success of the individual or the team. Emulating the behaviors of high-level athletes is usually a step in the wrong direction because the individual's genetics are mostly responsible for his or her success. As such, star athletes are mostly born, they are not made despite the appeal of that fantasy.

The proper approach that athletes should be taking is to completely separate exercise from sports specific skills. Your strength-and-conditioning program as an athlete should follow evidence-based approaches: training each major muscle group intensely using joint congruent movements, all while focusing on rest and recovery to allow the adaptation to occur. Basic, multi-joint movements done through a modest range of motion with a slow and controlled lifting and lowering cadence is the most effective and safe way to improve the 5 general trainable factors of functional ability. Not to mention, it will largely reduce the chance of injury in the training room to potentially 0%. Keeping an athlete safe is far more important than improving his or her "speed" or "power." What use are those improvements if the athlete is injured and can't perform on the field of court?

Skill training should be the primary focus of the athlete. If the strongest and fastest people of the world were the most successful at a given sport, then the NFL would be composed of all Olympic weight-lifters and strong men along with Olympic sprinters, which, as we know, is clearly not the case. The athlete's ability to perform sports specific skills is the most important factor in sports performance. The ability to catch or shoot a ball, pass, dribble, serve, etc. will all contribute to the athlete's success FAR more than improving "explosiveness." Athletes should choose a safe and time-efficient strength-and-conditioning protocol utilizing High Intensity Training principles so they can spend the majority of their time working on sports specific skills to be the best athlete they can be.

JAY PRIMAROLO is owner of BioFit Personal Training Studio (biofitny.com) in Saratoga County, New York. As a certified personalized trainer, he specializes in using science-based High Intensity Exercise and nutrition counseling for improvements in physical health and fitness, injury and disease prevention/treatment, weight loss, and strength-and-conditioning of all age groups and physical conditions.

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be the primary focus
of the athlete.





COMMUNICATION TIPS *FOR* *Youth Sports Coaches*

BY AMY MASTERS

As a coach, being a good communicator is very important. It actually makes your players more comfortable, helps them develop, and can create a positive culture. Of course, poor communication can do the opposite. For youth sports athletes, it makes the world of difference when you can communicate clearly and effectively.

The best way to communicate is to use the sandwich method. The coach provides two positive and specific points of feedback—think

of these as the bread. Be specific and talk about something good you thought the player did in a game or practice. The third item—this is the meat—is something constructive that you feel the player can do better, again, be specific. This method—good/needs work/good—balances out the number of positive messages to the constructive ones. Most players only remember the “bad” things or constructive criticism. As a coach, you want them to feel comfortable, know what they do well and what they need to work on. There are always more ways to develop and athletes who want to improve should welcome feedback.

FIVE TIPS TO COMMUNICATING FEEDBACK



1 BE CLEAR

A player should know exactly what you are saying. And in the days of COVID-19, it has been hard to coach with a mask on, so taking that extra time to be clear in communication is important.

2 BE SPECIFIC

Don't say, good game; be specific about why they had a good game.

3 BE VISUAL

Some players are visual learners. Giving verbal feedback may work well for some players but visual feedback using a white board and actual demos are good ways to communicate what you want the player to do to make a change. Even verbal learners can appreciate visual feedback.

4 BE SANDWICH LIKE

Communicate 2 positives and 1 constructive piece of feedback. This helps the player know that they are good at certain tactics and need to tweak others.

5 BE POSITIVE

There are ways to be positive and make your player feel empowered. When someone feels empowered, it helps them grow.

BY GIVING SPECIFIC AND CONSISTENT FEEDBACK IN A TIMELY MANNER, YOUR PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO MORE EASILY ACT ON FEEDBACK.





TOOLS TO HELP YOU COMMUNICATE

At Practice

When coaching at practice, there are 3 ways to communicate to players. You can verbally tell them, specifically pull them to the side and provide feedback. You can show them by using a small white board and drawing what you want them to do. And

you can show them by demonstrating both what to do and what not to do. Everyone learns differently so implementing different ways to communicate is helpful.

Using Technology

At iSport360 (isport360.com), a youth sports platform, we have many ways to give feedback when you aren't there in person. This type of communication actually creates a bond between coach, team, and

player. Imagine after you leave a game and you remember that you wanted to tell Suzie how well she did. You can wait until the next practice or just message her on the app. And imagine when you leave and you thought, Suzie did these things really well, but if she tweaks this move, she will be even more powerful on the field. Then you can send Suzie a video to show her what you want her to see and do before the next practice. That continuity and communication is important and helps the player as they go about their day. They know where to focus energy before the next game.

By giving specific and consistent feedback in a timely manner, your players will be able to more easily act on the feedback. This will empower them to want to get better. It provides ownership to the athlete and will help them grow. ■

AMY MASTERS is head of marketing for iSport360, a sports mom forever, a youth sports coach for over 10 years and club owner. She has seen it all and is now helping others empower youth sports athletes.

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Navigating COLLEGE RECRUITMENT

**College recruitment
of student-athletes can
be daunting. Here are
some helpful tips for
parents and athletes.**

BY REY CROSSMAN



WELCOME TO THE FIRST OF OUR 4-PART SERIES ON COLLEGE RECRUITMENT!

Each issue, we'll tackle a new topic crucial to helping your student-athlete through this important process.

The college recruitment process possesses a number of important life decisions for potential matriculating student-athletes and their families. Understanding how to navigate through this process can be critical in efforts to finding the “right” school fit. Over the years I’ve found that the student-athletes who have ultimately placed significant value in a number of categories across the board have experienced the most success. In efforts to find the “right” school, families should first recognize and identify who the student-athlete is, what they are looking for, and what they’ll need to fulfill their aspirations of being student-athletes collegiately.

WHO IS THE STUDENT ATHLETE?

When asking this question, I am specifically interested in identifying two things: The student-athletes academic background and their level of play (D1, D2, D3).

Academic: The academic question is an easy solve. Simply view transcripts and inquire about standardized test scores. Strong performances by students in AP (advanced placement) courses can also be of great benefit. Typically, the higher the grades, the more college opportunities to choose from.

Level of play: Identifying the correct level of a student-athlete is not so simple. For some athletes, an eye test is all that is necessary, while for others, the answer isn’t so clearcut. This can be the case for several reasons, but historically, the difference in levels comes down to three things: Size, athleticism, and skill. A considerable amount of competition against peers is the place for prospects, parents, and coaches to evaluate and identify these characteristics. The sooner in the process the better in best identifying the level of the prospect.

WHAT IS THE STUDENT-ATHLETE LOOKING FOR AND WHAT DO THEY NEED?

This question is about learning where the student-athlete places value. Are sports and academics valued equally? Are academics the priority? Is sport the priority? Is the student-athlete concerned about the location of the school? Do they value networking and internship opportunities? Does the school enrollment size matter? Is financial



aid needed? Identifying and having answers to these questions can be extremely helpful to families in navigating through the process and moving closer to a manageable number of school choices.

The NCAA recruitment guidelines and recruiting calendar for Division 1, 2, and 3 athletics can be intricate and sometimes confusing. The differences are seen most in the types of communication allowed between coaches and student-athletes and the frequency in which they are being had. Many of these rules were designed to limit the amount of communication elite student-athletes receive from coaches. Coach contact depends on the sport, age of prospect, division level, and



specific type of communication. It would benefit families to try to gain a comprehensive understanding of the NCAA recruiting rules. For most sports, coaches can start contacting the athletes on their recruiting lists beginning June 15th after sophomore year or September 1 of their junior year of high school.

Is the student-athlete being recruited? In what capacity? Have college coaches been in regular contact? Has a program inquired about game film and transcripts? Has your prospect been invited for an official/unofficial campus visit? Have you been on a conference call with the staff and taken a virtual tour? Has a program extended an official scholarship offer?

The recruitment process has always thrived heavily on relationships and direct lines of communication between the current high school/Amateur Athletic Union coaches of the student-athletes and college coaches. These relationships provide college coaches a personal introduction of the student-athlete and in some cases, can be a leg up in the beginning stages of the recruitment process. There are certainly other forms of communication for those who are not privy to these types of relationships. The organization of an articulate email can also be a significant tool. This introduction email should give coaches an understanding of who the student-athlete is. A quick introduction, a short highlight of recent game footage, two to three recent games

where they played their best, transcripts, SAT/ACT scores, and contact information of the High School and/or Amateur Athletic Union coaches that are involved most in their recruitment process. The email addresses of the coaching staff can be found on the program's team page. Look to send these emails to the director of operations, graduate assistants, or head managers on staff. They are the main people responsible for looking at these types of messages. It doesn't hurt to cc the coaches on staff, but in most cases, they will forward to those mentioned above. If a follow-up email is necessary, giving some time before sending one is a good idea.

I want to encourage all potential matriculating student-athletes and their families to take a deep breath. Be deliberate in asking and getting answers to your questions, maintain a sense of open-mindedness and optimism, and practice patience. As the process unfolds there will be a number of opportunities to play sports collegiately, all while checking off some of the other categories you place value in. Yes, choosing a school to attend is an important life decision, but try to find comfort in knowing that there are questions that once answered will help in moving closer to the school that is the "right" fit.

REY CROSSMAN is a basketball teacher and mentor who recently started his own basketball training and college recruitment consulting business. He has coached and developed a number of professional players, over 100 collegiate players, and 1,000's of youth players. He spent 2 years at Yale University as Director of Basketball Operations and 3 seasons as an assistant coach at Skidmore College. Crossman graduated from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a bachelor's degree in exercise science. Reach him at reycrossmanbasketball.com

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A background image of a volleyball game, overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. It shows a player in a blue jersey jumping to hit the ball over the net, while two players in red jerseys jump to block. A volleyball is visible in the upper left corner.

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.