

KEEPING YOUR ATHLETE IN THE GAME

MVP PARENT

WINTER 2022

\$4.95



MAKING AN **IMPACT**

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SUPPORTING THEIR
ATHLETES AND
THE COMMUNITY

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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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MVP PARENT, 41 State Street, Suite 604-16
Albany, NY 12207

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PUBLISHER

Richard Dubin

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Janice Radak

STRATEGY & MARKETING

Jason Bradwell

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Erin Rupnick

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Anthony Palmeri

CIRCULATION

Applied Information Group

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Greg Bach
Josh Cupp
Peter Gorman
Amy Masters
Linda Sterling
Phil Stotter
Bob Weil

FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY RICHARD B. DUBIN



A NEW SEASON AWAITS!

Finally, we are starting to see some positive changes with school sports. Seasons have started and its very exciting for the players as well as parents. My oldest daughter has begun her college basketball season and is so happy to be back on the floor (she missed all of her freshman year due to COVID-19 restrictions). My youngest daughter has started her high school basketball season as well, and the smile on her face is incredible.

Watching them compete is a very rewarding experience as a parent. The key word there is.... *watching*. Parents are spectators. Not coaches or referees. I have learned over years how to watch and appreciate the game and not chime in with my input, or even get into it with my kid after the game. Staying engaged, encouraging, and supportive is the key to being a good parent of a youth athlete.

This issue is chock full of exciting content. The cover story on the Huerter family is a really good read. This is a great family from my local area. It's exciting to see a local player make it to the league and he has definitely found his niche. Not to mention the success that his siblings have had at the high school and collegiate level. It takes a village to make it all come together and the Huerter's have put in the work. Our feature writer, Josh Cupp, captured their story very well. You'll definitely want to check out the facility they opened. Impact Athletic Center is a basketball player's haven and I am excited to play there on a weekly basis.

Thanks to Greg Bach from NAYS (National Alliance for Youth Sports) for his contribution on winter Olympians—heartfelt insights from true competitors. Amy Master from isport360 shares the importance of giving thanks to coaches and the various ways to share appreciation. I love this piece. Especially, around the Holidays.

Our Sports Doctor, Bob Weil, DPM, provides a great piece on universal exercises regardless of your child's sport. Sports Psychologist, Linda Sterling, PhD, delves into the ever-important topic of social media and the impact and pressure that our athletes have to face today. This is a growing issue that we all need to be aware of.

Thanks to Phil Stotter, CEP, for his overview of technology and when our youth athlete is ready to incorporate that into training. Technology has its benefits and timing is everything. Dr. Peter Gorman discusses winter training for youth baseball and the use of radar to understand speed.

And last but not least, is the contribution from the NATA (National Athletic Trainers' Association) on sports specialization and youth sports safety—great advice for preventing a potential career killer.

The power of *MVP Parent* is the credibility and evidenced-based approach that we take to educating parents. This knowledge will help you keep your youth athlete in the game performing at the highest level while allowing you to be the best parent you can be.

Here's to a happy, healthy, and prosperous season. ■

IT'S ALWAYS THE SEASON FOR *Giving Thanks*

BY AMY MASTERS

Giving thanks isn't tied to a single day or a season. Thanking the folks who help you day after day shouldn't be an afterthought. The idea of giving thanks or practicing gratitude should be intentional—we should encourage our young athletes to think actively about doing it on a regular basis. This simple shift in thinking can lead to big change—in both mental and physical health. So don't forget to thank the many and varied “coaches” that help you day in and day out.



Who should you give thanks to?

In everything we do as athletes, there are always so many people to thank from coaches, trainers, and teachers to parents and teammates.



COACHES

Coaches make many sacrifices for their teams. They work late at night, they watch film, develop practice plans, and are always communicating with players. They are vital to your success so give them a big show of gratitude.



TRAINER

The trainer is vital for every game and tournament. They are there to keep athletes healthy. And they are there to help if players are hurt or injured. Don't forget to thank them, it will go a long way.



CUSTODIAL STAFF

The custodial staff at the facility or school are always making sure the field, ice, and court are clean and usable. If it wasn't for them, there would be no games or tournaments. Remember to thank them.



PARENTS

Parents do so much to help make athletes successful on and off the field. Driving players to and from games and tournaments. The parents pack food and snacks. And they may wash uniforms and help organize the day. Do not forget to give them thanks.

Why should you give thanks?

It's good for your health. According to research from the American Psychological Association, teens who practice gratitude are more likely to be happier in general and less likely to have behavior problems at school. They're also likely to be healthier overall and could even be more likely to easily make friends.

IMPACT WITH YOUR PLAY

When people give thanks, they just feel better. And feeling better is a sure sign to help in other parts of your life, like sports. If players think about the best game they played, how did they feel that day? By showing gratitude, players show a kindness and a humbleness that helps with the game. It helps them stay focused.

3 Tips to Thanking Coaches

1



WRITE A NOTE

Writing a note is an easy gesture. It can be in the form of an actual card or just send an email. As a coach, I always love getting a note of thanks from parents, players or both. From a coach perspective, I view that player and family a bit differently. They may understand—and appreciate—all of the work that we coaches do day in and day out.

2



HELP CLEAN UP EQUIPMENT

Teams usually have equipment that is used over and over again. Maybe teams have a ton of cones and balls on the field. Or maybe there is garbage or something else on the pitch. When others help clean up, it shows that we are all in this together. It shows that the best teams take pride and show thanks by doing the dirty work.

3

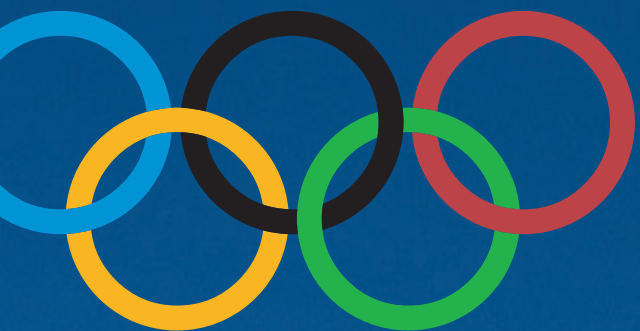


BUY A SMALL GIFT

Some families buy a small gift or give a gift card. It's the thought that counts here: you took the time to think about what this person does for you and you're giving a small token of appreciation.

Think about how good it feels when someone thanks you...then remember to thank your coaches.

AMY MASTERS is Head of Marketing for iSport360.com. She is a sports mom and head of a girls field hockey club. For more information on iSport360, please visit isport360.com



WINTER OLYMPIANS

*Share Personal Insights
for Rewarding Seasons*

The upcoming Winter Olympic Games – which get going in Beijing in February – will showcase some of the world's greatest athletes delivering performances we'll remember forever.

So, sit back and enjoy the events with your young athletes, and use these golden insights from current and former Winter Olympians from Team USA to help guide them to fun and rewarding seasons of their own this winter, and beyond:

BY GREG BACH

Savor the Process:

"I stay in my own world," explains four-time Olympian **Katie Uhlaender** whose event – the skeleton – involves hurtling head-first on a sled down icy tracks at speeds of 90 miles per hour. "I think if you put a lot of meaning behind your performances that's where the pressure comes from, but if you can stay within the passion of the sport as a kid, where you're not really worried about winning or losing, or what people think, and you're just enjoying the act of sport – that's the best way to go." It's a never-ending process for all athletes at all levels to push the focus away from the results and dial into the process. "I've been honing this in more and more because the more I focus on results, or what it means, or what my performance means, or what the world is thinking, that's a scary place to go," she says. "But if I just get to the line and I'm like 'all right, I'm just going to do what I know how to do – I know how to go sledding and I love it' – and I focus on that, I tend to perform well and I have fun. And I think those two things should be the goal – not winning."



Editing Endings:

Three-time Olympic speedskater and 2010 bronze medalist **Allison Baver**, who broke her leg a year out from the 2010 Games, advises athletes who are returning from serious injuries to **spend time re-working in their minds what actually happened in the competition** so they're free of the clutter and ready to compete with confidence. "I had to take myself in my visualization through that crash and that race and changing the outcome," she says. "It's almost like your blueprint is being changed in a way where you have to re-program your brain and re-program your thought pattern of what happened."

Latch on to Lessons:

"Our parents never defined success by wins or losses, or if you made a team," says 2018 Olympic hockey gold medalist **Jocelyn Lamoureux**, who also won silver medals with Team USA in 2010 and 2014. "It was always about your work ethic and if you were a good teammate. I think so many lessons can be lost if success is defined by winning. That just puts unnecessary stress on kids, and I really think you lose the value of what's important about sports."

Reflect & Refocus:

"My greatest knowledge came through my failures," says 2014 Olympic silver medalist **Noelle Pikus Pace**, who competes in skeleton. "Reflecting is a huge role in helping us learn from our mistakes. I'd go back and ask myself what went well, what didn't go so well and how can I improve tomorrow? I just started picking it apart and putting the puzzle together."

30-Minute Rule:

Young athletes take losses hard, so allow them a brief period to work through the disappointment. **"I give myself 30 minutes to be mad and to be frustrated and to beat myself up,"** says U.S. skiing great **Stacey Cook**, a four-time Olympian. "If you didn't do as well as you thought you should or you let yourself down, it's ok to be mad about it. But I put that time limit on it because in the end it doesn't help anything. It doesn't make you better and it doesn't make you try harder. Really, the only outcome of being mad at yourself is that you bring yourself down. So, I give myself a 30-minute window and then I make myself get over it."

GREG BACH is Senior Director of Communications & Content at National Alliance for Youth Sports.

MVP EXCLUSIVE





MAKING AN IMPACT

ON THE FAMILY, THE
COURT, THE COMMUNITY

The HuerTERS aren't just committed to their brood of top notch athletes—they're also helping the local sports community thrive.

BY JOSH CUPP

We all have our stories about the time we've spent, the miles we driven, the BP (batting practice for non-baseball fans) we've thrown with our athletic kids. Myself, through a quick calculation, I've thrown roughly 75K pitches in the last 4 years alone to my 11-year-old son. I've caught another 20K+ 45-56mph fastballs without a proper catcher's mitt, which means my left hand is habitually sore. I've driven to Oswego, Owego, and Otsego Lake this past Spring and Summer alone for baseball tournaments. Those trips were pure magic. Hitting the road and skipping town in the summertime for a ball tourney, there is nothing I'd rather do.

We all love our kids' sports and athletic endeavors. Some of us love it more than others. I'm happy to throw till my arm falls off. I'll talk lob wedge versus bump and run, driver or hybrid, until I bore my kid to death. While other parents may secretly root for rain outs, most of us are from the Ernie Banks school of thought..."Let's Play Two!" I'll pause if you need to research that reference.

My interview series has been enlightening. It's been quite a pleasure to be able to pick the brains of some very successful athletic parents and learn how their philosophies differ on how to walk their children through the wins and losses of living a sporting life. It's not just laying off an 0-2 off speed pitch in the dirt or learning the importance of making an extra pass. Those are just XX's and OO's. Our job as parents is tougher, inherently more three dimensional.

At *MVP Parent*, we're trying to chat with some intriguing sports families and see how THEY'VE done it. Have they been helicopters or have they been more of the "rub some dirt on it" variety?

"FROM THE START WITH ALL THE KIDS WE TRIED TO BE COMPLETE PLAYERS, SCORING THE BALL WAS JUST PART OF THE GAME."

- TOM HUERTER

This edition we caught up with the Huerter family from Clifton Park, NY. Primarily a basketball tribe, all four kids have or will be playing NCAA D1 hoops (Tom Jr./Siena College, Kevin University of Maryland, Meghan/Providence College, Jillian/Senior at Shen [Shenendehowa Central School District, Clifton Park, NY] but likely days from a D1 commitment). Parents Tom and Erin Huerter were an easy interview because they adore their children and talking about them and their athletic endeavors wasn't pulling teeth – it was a pleasure for everyone involved.

Tom Sr. isn't just a former college athlete, he's made a career out of roundball. A late 80s/early 90s sharp-shooter out of Siena College, he'd be happy to have mentioned here that his career 3-point percentage eclipses both his sons' college career percentages. Kevin, Tom Jr., and Meghan would all likely state that the 3-point arc had been moved back twice



since dear ol dad hit at a 39.5% clip a mere 30 years ago. But I digress. After college Tom Sr. transitioned into radio and TV broadcast for his alma mater for two decades. He also heads Huersch Marketing Group out of Green Island, NY. The latest endeavor is Impact Athletic Center, a fortress of athletic activity located in Halfmoon, NY, that focuses primarily on basketball and volleyball tournament play and training, but also includes performance training and physical therapy. Impact, which opened just recently, even houses a restaurant with a health-conscious menu.

Erin Huerter's background is in finance. Her career as a VP at Pioneer Bank spanned more than two and a half decades. In 2018, Erin decided to retire from banking to become even more involved in helping manage her children's mega demanding athletic commitments and to help transition the dream of Impact Athletic Center into a reality.

I sat down to a Zoom chat with Tom and Erin on October 20th, a mere day-and-a-half after their son, Kevin, had inked a

4-year \$65 million contract with the Atlanta Hawks. The Hawks beat the free agency buzzer by a few hours in locking up a key piece of their 2021 NBA Eastern Conference Final run. Impact was also just opening, so obviously it was an exciting and busy time for the Huerter family. Neither of them made me feel rushed and it was clear they both enjoyed talking about their kids and Tom can't get enough chatting hoops.

"We realize that athletics and wellness means so many different things to so many people. It's not only about winning state championships, or being drafted, we want Impact Athletic Center to be a place where people of all ages go to work on their mind, body and soul in a welcoming and friendly atmosphere."

- Erin Huerter





MVPP: Tom, do you feel like it is easier having played D1 basketball yourself to be able to offer advice and maybe break down a game with the kids?

TOM: I think so, definitely. Now does that mean they'll listen all the time? [Shared giggle here...] Certainly having played the game and coached it at a high level, I do enjoy

assessing and early on addressing where weaknesses are/were. We always want to readdress what product we are building. From the start, with all the kids, we tried to be complete players. Scoring the ball was just part of the game.

MVPP: To you both, how has the college recruiting process played out? Between the academic piece and finding the right fit with the schools the kids have picked, did you find the process stressful? Have the older brothers helped having gone through the process a few years before?

ERIN: Finding the right academic fit was always the first conversation. All the kids have always been strong academically. Siena, University of Maryland, Providence are all schools with solid academic reputations. Also, all the schools that made it to the final cuts were terrific institutions as well.

TOM: Exactly, no one felt particularly stressed because there were such great options out there. The boys are happy to help, but I think the girls have been very aware of what the right fit is for them. As far as the athletic part of the recruiting process, we always had a conversation about finding the right team and coach that understood the unique skills each individual brought to the table. Finding the right fit from that standpoint was always going to be important.

MVPP: It's been exciting to see 2 athletes from Shenendehowa go so high in their respective sport's drafts, and then parlay those selections into success on the field/court. I know the Atlanta Braves' Ian Anderson and your son, Kevin, played baseball together. What has that been like?

TOM & ERIN: It speaks volumes about the community's ability to foster our kids' love for athletics. Kevin and Ian played lots of baseball together and were always fairly close, but now essentially being 2 successful young professional athletes cruising through young adulthood in the same city. Add to that, Atlanta sports fans really support their teams and it's exciting for them and for us.

MVPP: Impact Athletic Center (IAC) is impressive. I was fortunate enough to have toured the facility and well, that took a while. What was so impressive to me was how complete an athletic experience it is. Sports-specific training, physical training, physical therapy, basketball courts, volleyball courts, sand volleyball courts, golf simulators, a restaurant, and I know I am forgetting a few things. Speak about that project a little bit?

TOM & ERIN: For us, it was important to build this facility in the community in which our kids were raised. Also, in the past, there were so many different locations we'd cart [the kids] around to to accomplish team practices, training, lifting, recovery, etc. So to have one facility that can accomplish all that under one roof, that was a special opportunity. We realize that athletics and wellness means so many different things to so many people. It's not only about winning state championships, or being drafted. We want IAC to be a place where people of all ages go to work on their mind, body and soul in a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. The Litchfields and McLeods [key investors] have been wonderful to work with and we expect IAC to be a huge part of the community for years to come.

So much great material wound up on the cutting room floor. I asked Tom off the record who hit for more power between his son, Kevin, and Ian Anderson in the middle and high school days. We talked about who the kids came to after a particularly tough game for kind words and what those convos sounded like. We agreed that in retrospect that those tough chats after bad games were some of our best memories. Watching our kids feel the feels of disappointment or temporary failure is as necessary as helping them learn to ride a bike or nurse their first broken heart. I know I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have had some fairly measurable success in my athletic endeavors, so I love that my son, Francisco, has also decided that sports will be a part of his life. It has taken me a while to realize the buzz I get from going to his sporting events, coaching his teams, or pitching him BP isn't the pride I feel in all his successes. The win in being a sporting parent is having this huge platform to show your kids how much you love them in this odd quantitative fashion. Games attended, miles driven, free throws rebounded, pitches thrown, tears wiped away...those are our stat lines, and filling up that stat sheet will always fill my heart. ■

JOSH CUPP is a former NCAA D1 student athlete and 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.

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**WATCHING OUR KIDS FEEL THE FEELS OF
DISAPPOINTMENT OR TEMPORARY FAILURE IS AS
NECESSARY AS HELPING THEM LEARN TO RIDE A BIKE OR
NURSE THEIR FIRST BROKEN HEART.**



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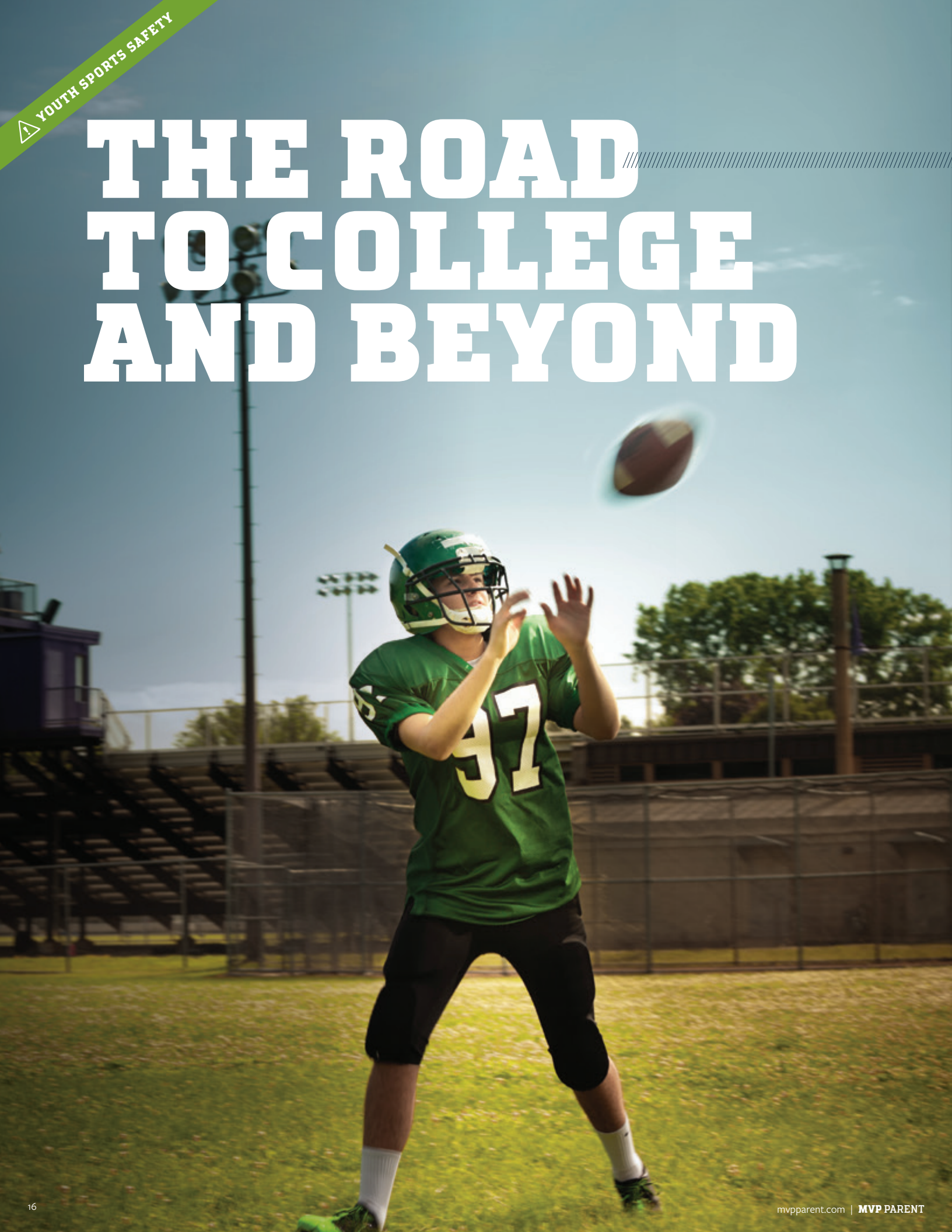
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Developer of the MLB/USA Baseball PDP (Player Development Program)



BAREFOOTSCIENCE
STRONGER WITH EVERY STEP

THE ROAD TO COLLEGE AND BEYOND



Keeping **HEALTHY** Is a Competitive Advantage

If your young student athlete is showing talent and enthusiasm for a specific sport, it is very tempting to go “all-in” on the one sport as soon as possible, especially if there are aspirations to play in college and professionally. Parents are faced with many opportunities and decisions on how to help their athlete perform at their best and achieve their goals – including club sports, personal coaches, camps and more.

This can lead to specializing in one sport at a very early age. Sport specialization is intentional and focused participation in a single sport for a majority of the year that restricts opportunities for engagement in other sports and activities.

Parents often get the message that early specialization is a pre-requisite to advancing to those higher echelons of the sport, however, that is not necessarily the case. When athletes specialize too early, or engage in excessive play, they are increasing the probability of significant injury and reducing the chances of achieving their goals. It has been estimated that the United States spends as much as \$5.2 billion per year on injuries related to sport specialization.

As youth athletes navigate to the sport of their choice at an older age, it will likely benefit them physically, mentally and emotionally to play multiple sports and avoid overtraining. In fact, according to Trackingfootball.com, more than 85% of those drafted during the 2020 NFL draft were multi-sport athletes.

The National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) supports the following recommendations as they relate to the health and well-being of adolescent and young athletes:

- 1 Delay specializing in a single sport for as long as possible:** Adolescent and young athletes should strive to participate, or sample, a variety of sports. This recommendation supports general physical fitness, athleticism and reduces injury risk in athletes.
- 2 One team at a time:** Adolescent and young athletes should participate in one organized sport per season. Many adolescent and young athletes participate or train year-round in a single sport, while competing in other organized sports simultaneously. Total volume of organized sport participation per season is an important risk factor for injury.



- 3 Less than eight months per year:** Adolescent and young athletes should not play a single sport more than eight months per year.
- 4 No more hours/week than age in years:** Adolescent and young athletes should not participate in organized sport and/or activity more hours per week than their age (i.e., a 12-year-old athlete should not participate in more than 12 hours per week of organized sport).
- 5 Two days of rest per week:** Adolescent and young athletes should have a minimum of two days off per week from organized training and competition. Athletes should not participate in other organized team sports, competitions and/or training on rest and recovery days.
- 6 Rest and recovery time from organized sport participation:** Adolescent and young athletes should spend time away from organized sport and/or activity at the end of each competitive season. This allows for both physical and mental recovery, promotes health and well-being and minimizes injury risk and burnout/dropout.

Sports specialization is an evolving health issue in adolescent and young athletes. Current evidence shows an association between sports specialization and overuse injury in athletes as well as an impact on mental health. While current literature has paid more attention to the physical and mental aspect of sports specialization, the psychosocial implications of young athletes continue to be a concern. If you have access to an athletic trainer, reach out to them to ensure that planned sports participation and training is setting your athlete up for health and success with their sports goals.

For more information, visit: www.atyourownrisk.org.

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UNIVERSAL EXERCISES // WHATEVER THE SPORT!

BY ROBERT WEIL, DPM

Now, as a sports podiatrist, of course I'm prejudiced, but the fact is that strengthening your kid's feet and ankles is one of the smartest things you can do as a sports parent. So is working on balance. It doesn't matter what sport, what level or age. The 2 very important goals for all parents and coaches – especially for our youth – is to prevent injuries and, when appropriate, enhance performance. We've stressed before how youth sports injuries are at epidemic levels – especially overuse and repetitive motion injuries!

One of the most common of injuries in sports, if not THE most common, remains injury to the ankle. That alone is good reason to pay big attention to strengthening them, but that is not the only one. Strengthening both feet and ankles can enhance speed, quickness, agility and balance, which is so important in all sports. In all my years seeing many great athletes, I've never seen anyone with "over developed ankles" – it's usually a weak link and, as mentioned, a common area of problems.

The body's base and foundation of support are the feet and ankles, but too often they are neglected unless it's to rehabilitate a previous injury. It makes much more sense to strengthen and train these areas routinely and proactively.

Old routines typically involved tape or braces for ankles, which have a place, but usually for a previous injury or to deal with reoccurring problems. These can be helpful, but they do not replace proper strengthening which can be very beneficial for all the areas above – like shins, knees, and back. So often we'll see young athletes totally concerned with how much they can bench press or work their arm and shoulder muscles – after all, these are the "show muscles." But these same athletes might have difficulty balancing on one foot! Young athletes, their parents, and coaches need to be educated about including foot and ankle strength and stability exercises for functional strength – the ability that allows one to move with power and speed, change direction, or stop and start while maintaining balance.

These abilities can be trained successfully with simple, inexpensive equipment like rubber bands and elastic tubing, balance boards, mini trampolines and pieces like the innovative Sanddune Stepper™ (Indio, California). Balance work also enhances and improves knee, hip, core, and back stability and strength. Creating imbalance with unstable surfaces demands all our stabilizer muscles in our whole body to work to gain and retain stability and balance (you're actually finetuning your proprioception – you body's ability to sense where it is in space).

Have your athlete try these “Instability Training” exercises. Try balancing on one foot, or standing on a trampoline or tilt board. It's challenging, safe, and fun! The stabilizer muscles in the body's core and small muscles help protect all the joints of the feet, ankles, knees, hips, and spine. Changing foot positions, such as rising up on the toes only, changes the balance demands to work different areas.

Rubber bands and elastic tubing have always been one of the most effective ways to strengthen all the ranges of motion of our ankles. Moving the ankles up and down, side to side, and in and out can strengthen all the lower leg muscles and tendons. Slow deliberate movements are best when using bands or tubing. They are available in different widths and resistance: have your athlete start light and move through a full range of motion, progress gradually. Getting some instruction on proper technique and progression from a physical therapist or athletic trainer is always helpful. These types of exercises are simple and safe for all ages and levels but don't let their simplicity fool you – top athletes in all sports have benefited greatly! ■

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.



DR. ROBERT WEIL & SHARKIE ZARTMAN



There are many tough decisions now for parents whose children want to participate in sports: how to choose the right program, how to help coach them, preventing injuries.


Dr. Robert Weil, an original New Yorker with an office in Aurora, IL, is a sports podiatrist that has helped many elite athletes and hosts the radio show “The Sports Doctor”. His co- author Sharkie Zartman, is a former All-American volleyball player and former member of the U.S. National team. They have combined their expertise into one book designed to help parents navigate through youth sports programs.

#Hey Sports Parents is broken down in four Sections. The first section written by Sharkie, is *Sports Parenting 101* which includes choosing the right program, nutritional guidelines, college recruiting and stress management.

“In the next section,” says Dr. Bob, “called *The Sports Doctor Is In*, I talk about overtraining, sports and drugs, the importance of the right shoes and orthotics, and the very real risks of contact football for kids. The third and fourth section highlight various experts in youth sports and parenting.

Dr. Bob and Sharkie met years ago when they both hosted shows for the same radio network. “We thought this book would be a great resource because of our different professional perspectives” says Sharkie.

You can find #Hey Sports Parents on Amazon, Kindle, and Ingram.



SOCIAL MEDIA & SPORT ALWAYS ON

BY LINDA STERLING, CMPC, LPC

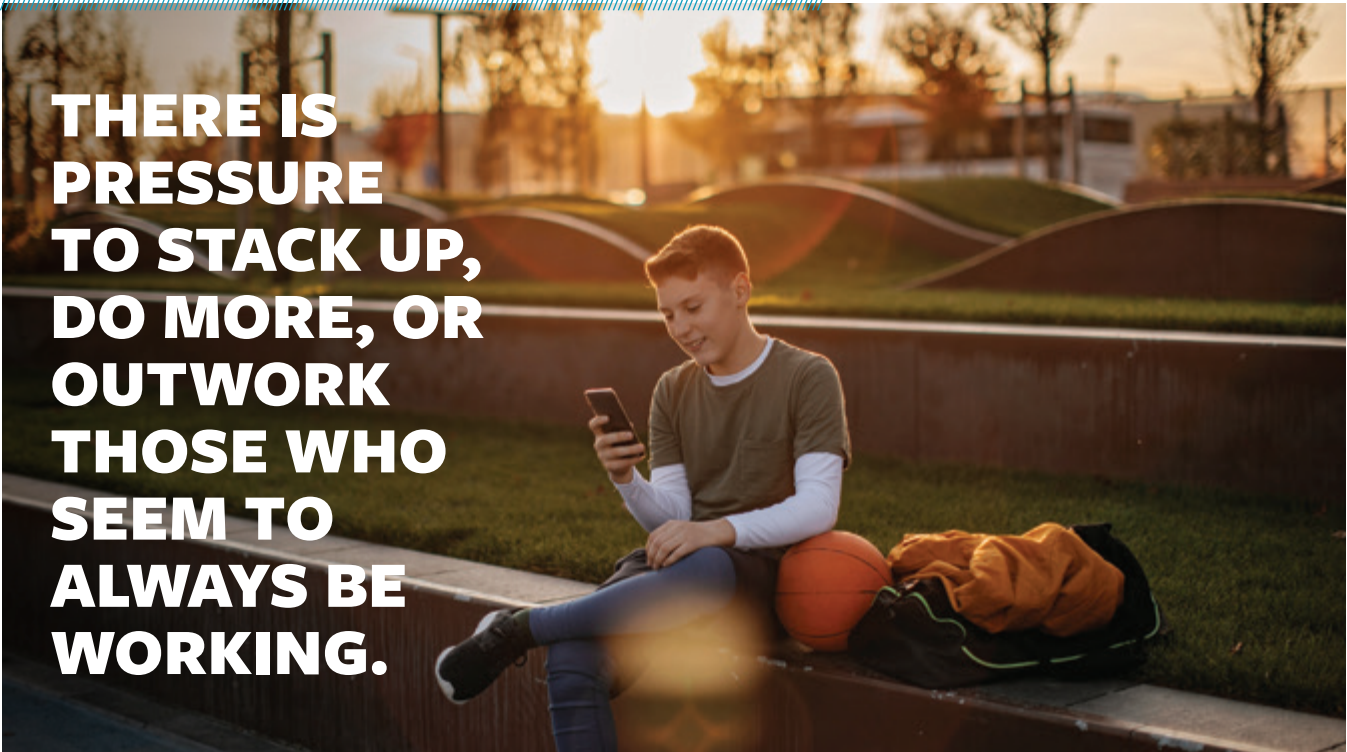
Always on. Always connected. Always in the spotlight. Social media has benefits for athletes, but also creates a new level of pressure. For many sport parents, getting media coverage was fun back in your day. It meant getting your name in the local paper when you played well. Maybe your parents or grandparents would cut out the article so you could have it for your scrapbook. As we all know, times have changed.

Social media is great in that it keeps people connected. It allows us to celebrate sport. Sport fans and athletes get to witness all of the great athletic feats happening. Young athletes can be motivated by this. They see examples of what's possible and set higher goals because of it. When athletes do great things, it's shared for everyone to celebrate. That awesome race finish from last weekend? You don't have to verbally describe it to your friends and family, everyone gets to see it! Social media can lead to athletes feeling empowered. Not only do they get to share their stellar performance, they can also share their voice with the world.

This sounds amazing. Sharing happy times. Cheering on athletic accomplishments. Feeling empowered. Unfortunately, there is a downside to social media for athletes. But you knew that.

judge, and even comment on...over and over again. People are brave behind a screen. They can say harsh things that they probably wouldn't say in person. Unfortunately, knowing that fact doesn't make it sting any less. Even if most of the comments you've received are positive, research shows it's tough to let go of the negative. This can lead to athletes doubting their ability and thus decreasing their confidence.

Pressure to create a personal brand. When you post on social media, you're intentionally or unintentionally creating a personal brand. You're posting what you're passionate about which gives others perceived insight into who you are (or at least how you want to be seen). This might develop organically as you share about your sport, your love of dogs, and your travel adventures. Increasingly, this has gone from an unintentional, organic process to curating an intentional personal brand. This is especially true for athletes (and sport parents) with the potential to make money as a college athlete now. Athletes are influencers and "followers equal dollars." The price of education is



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PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE EFFECTS OF BEING ALWAYS ON.

Comparison. It's hard to not compare when you're inundated with opportunities for comparison. For athletes, this isn't just social media, but other sites that track athletic stats or provide a ranking system. While sometimes it seems like helpful "research" into the competition, other times it can become an obsession, increasing anxiety and diverting focus. There is pressure to stack up, do more, or outwork those who seem to be always working. Constant comparison is exhausting and can increase the risk of burnout.

Criticism. Everyone on the internet has an opinion. This is especially true in sport. Monday morning quarterbacks are everywhere. It's tough for athletes to survive a good performance without criticism, it's almost impossible to escape a poor performance. It's there for everyone to see,

something athletes hear from a young age. It's easy to see how they may start feeling the pressure to make money and how this seems like a good way to go about it. We'll know more about the effects of this in the next few years, but right now we're seeing sport parents becoming managers, which isn't always a healthy relationship dynamic.

No time off or escape. With social media, athletes really don't get a break from their sport. It's always there. At any time, you can read or watch something about your sport. While it may feel like dedication, it's actually limiting. Without a break, the negative effects of the comparison, criticism, and other pressures are multiplied. Adolescent brains need a break, they need a little down time to process and grow. That's where the improvement actually happens.

Social media is not going away, but athletes and parents can learn to navigate.

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

1 Ask before posting about your athlete.

Make sure you check with your athlete before you post about them. Get their permission then keep it brief. Focus on how proud you are of them. Never comment negatively on a teammate or an opponent.

2 Keep an eye on your athlete's posts.

Adolescents have developing brains and heightened sensitivity to social pressure which can influence decision-making. Social media posts don't go away. They may have real consequences as an athlete's career continues and the spotlight gets brighter.

3 Implement a "check with me first" rule or at least a "think about it" rule before posting.

This will allow your athlete an opportunity to think about what they're about to post and provides you an opportunity to support them or help them reconsider.

4 Check in with your athletes.

Have conversations about how to handle social media in a positive way. Let them know they can come to you with social media concerns.

5 Talk about the feedback.

It's important to know which feedback to take in and which feedback to let go of. Coaches and recruiters provide a useful perspective. The comments of random internet users, who may or may not know what they're talking about, should be let go.

6 Think about deactivating or taking a social media break when needed.

Many athletes will step away from social media when it becomes a distraction, when it's negatively influencing their mindset, or when they know they need to focus on their upcoming competitions.

7 Set an end time for social media each day.


Athletes need a break from the 24-7 information stream (even if they don't see it that way).

8 Have athletes put their phones in another room at night.

The pressure to check social media interferes with sleep. Night-time can also amplify the negative side effects of social media. That's when doom-scrolling and anxiety tend to be at their highest.

Athletes are known to love a little glory and that's okay. It can feel good to have your MVP moment! It's being "always on" that takes a toll. Following these tips can help athletes and families enjoy the positives of social media without the draining downside. ■

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.



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When Is My Youth Athlete Ready for Sports Performance Technology?

ADDING TECH CAN EMPOWER COACHES TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS AND ATHLETES TO STRENGTHEN THEIR PERFORMANCE.

BY PHILIP STOTTER, CEP



In our modern, tech-infused society, it seems like children are practically born with a smartphone in their hands. How many of us have seen toddlers sitting in their strollers casually tapping and swiping on their parents' digital devices like pros? How many tweens are walking around with their own smartphones? Let's face it: tech is here to stay, and parents are responsible for deciding how and when to introduce their children to it.

As a dad of four young boys, I spend most of my time running to or from games, practices, lessons, etc...I'm sure if you are reading this you can relate. I also spend time coaching youth baseball as well as other sports that my kids participate in.

Through my personal experience, I've played competitive sports through college and still spend most of my professional career in some aspect of sports. For the past 25 years I've worked in sports therapy, owned my own clinics, worked with professional athletes and teams, invented products for sports, and now serve as the Director of Sports Science for V1 Sports, a digital leader in video analysis and ground force technology.

Because of my experience, I'm asked the question almost daily, how old should an athlete be before you add technology to their sports training?

The simple answer is as soon as they begin the sport regardless of age. In a world where children are "growing up digital," it's important to include technology in their sports training – the earlier the better – as this is an important aspect of their learning process. Just like schools that have implemented Chromebooks, smart boards or any other digital means of learning, the new normal is digital technology education.

Let's break this down a little more. What technology is appropriate for the youngest of athletes?

As a parent and coach of youth athletes, I find it extremely helpful to use any technology that can help me communicate the learning process to the player as well as their parents. Video analysis is a great tool that does just that. Not only can your son or daughter watch their sports specific movement on replay, this recording can also be sent to their parents so that they can be part of their young athlete's training program.

As a parent, I also want to know how my athlete is progressing. Technology can play an important role in communicating objective data, not only to the youth athlete but to their parents as well. Game stats are great, but they only represent historical statistics – not how a player is progressing. Adding technologies at a young age – such as a radar gun for pitching or hitting – allows coaches to have an objective goal to work toward that they can share with their player. Coupling this technology with video analysis adds an element of competition to the practice routine that every athlete likes and thus turns their practices into what kids love best, video games. The big secret here is to use kid-friendly technology that is intuitive and easy to understand. Graphical representation of data with simple goals typically lead to the greatest response from young athletes.

So, when are they too young for technology? Never, and I personally recommend adding technology to your athlete's practice program because technology is turning practice into gametime and it's advancing our youth athletes like never before. ■

PHILIP STOTTER, CEP, is a clinical exercise physiologist and biomechanics expert turned inventor and business developer. He is Director of Sports Science for V1 Sports, a software development firm specializing in integrated video capture and analysis, ground pressure measurement, and game tracking and stat tools to help coaches and athletes improve their game. Find them online at visports.com.

Images are compliments of the author and V1 Sports.



THE BOYS OF SUMMER

USING RADAR TO UNDERSTAND SPEED OF PROCESSING IN BASEBALL

BY DR. PETER GORMAN

As winter training slowly comes to an end, athletes eagerly await the start of a new season. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the sport of baseball. The “Boys of Summer” are once again ready to set new records, and, hopefully, replace any previous disappointments with cheers and thrills. This goal of achievement relies heavily on the premise that the winter training program was fundamentally sound and efficient in correcting weaknesses and forging new strengths.

The winter training program has to realize that, like most sports, baseball is a “true agility” sport. Every movement on the field is decision-based, which, in essence, is the definition of true agility. This requires not just great physical ability, but also great cognitive ability. Decision-based movement requires RADAR – it requires the athlete to:

- 1 **Recognize:** The ball was hit left, but the athlete must recognize that the ball was hit left or the pitch is coming. Recognition starts the process – mental engagement begins with recognition of the stimulus.
- 2 **Attend:** Once the stimulus is recognized, the athlete must attend to it. This is the “think” part of the game, as the athlete observes the target in motion, predicting where it is headed. The ability to do this is, arguably, more important than any physical attribute.
- 3 **Decide:** The athlete attends to the stimulus while suppressing any distractors (no room to start right and then go left... too many moments would be wasted), then, decides what action is the right response.
- 4 **Accept:** Once decided, the athlete’s mind and body must accept that decision by having the brain tell the body what to do.
- 5 **React:** Once the decision is accepted, the athlete must now move and react to it. Yes, reaction is physical, but it is based in a cognitive process. The efficiency of the athlete’s cognitive process, from recognition to reaction, is known as the athlete’s Speed of Processing (SOP).

How many coaches or trainers know the actual SOP of their players? It is amazing that terms like “bat speed,” or “exit velocity,” or “60-yard time” are thrown around with oohs and aahs. Yet, if we do not know the athlete’s SOP, then the fastest bat speed or 60-yard time might just be wasted statistics. Remember SOP is the time between recognition and reaction. If SOP is slow, then reaction is slow. If reaction is slow, then the athlete plays slow, and “slow” is often “too late.” Fast bat speed, but slow in pulling the trigger... you are out. Fast 60-yard time, but the athlete is slow to react to the pitcher releasing the pitch... you are out.

The Functional Movement Screen (FMS), which many coaches and athletic trainers use to screen athletes, states this very clearly: “First move well, then move often. Moving well speaks to quality of movement and speed of processing (cognitive function). While moving often is not simply quantity but rather the capacity and adaptation that allow brain and body to function cohesively and optimally for life and sport.”

It is well understood that all position players must be able and agile in all directions, so an efficient winter training program must understand the importance of cognition and must be able to evaluate and correct any physical imbalances. An athlete is only as strong as his/her weakest link. Fix weaknesses before developing strengths. This eliminates the need for the athlete to compensate. Train the true athlete, not the compensatory process.

For a more detailed discussion of how this can be accomplished, see “How I Learned More from Training 9-year-olds than from Training Pros,” By Peter Gorman, DC, in the January 2022 issue of Lower Extremity Review at lermagazine.com. ■

PETER GORMAN, DC, is a contributor to the USA Baseball Sport Development Blog, and is widely referred to as the developer of heart rate monitor technology and owns seven major patents in the United States and Canada. He was named President of Microgate USA in 2010 and became an adjunct professor at the University of Bridgeport Chiropractic College in 2012. He later joined CourtSense, developing innovative and logical progression that helps athletes attain symmetry and better coordination.



- 1 **RECOGNIZE THE PITCH IS RELEASED**
(100 milliseconds)
- 2 **ATTEND TO SPIN, SPEED, ARC AND LOCATION OF THE BALL** (75 milliseconds)
- 3 **DECIDE TO SWING** (50 milliseconds)
- 4 **ACCEPT MESSAGE FROM BRAIN TO BODY TO SWING** (25 milliseconds)
- 5 **REACT WITH YOUR SWING** (150 milliseconds)



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.