

In one sport or many, balance conditioning

So often young athletes are faced with the question regarding concentrating on their main sport versus playing multiple sports. Today it's not unusual to see kids younger than 13 who are already putting all their efforts into one sport. The multiple-sport athlete is far less common today than years ago.

Some of the thinking by coaches and parents is that the young athlete will tend to fall behind if they play different sports instead of just one sport year-round.

This is a good question with no exact answer. Here are some factors that can help make the decision. Physically, with young, growing bodies, playing the same sport with the same movements, same muscles being used, same stress to the same areas, is challenging. Overuse injuries in the upper and lower extremities are a problem.

It is important to include off-sport conditioning that will help develop all areas of the athlete's body to counteract repetitive motion problems. Concentrate on working "the opposites," or areas and muscles that counteract repetitive motion areas. Athletic trainers, physical therapists and coaches can help develop those strategies.

Off-sport conditioning is no less important to the multiple sport athlete. Balance exercises and foot and ankle strengthening are a must, regardless of the sport.

Tennis, gymnastics, swimming, soccer, figure skating, volleyball and dance are examples of sports where specialization starts very young. My thinking is if the kid's interest is really that one sport, then it's OK to specialize. But don't let the coach convince you that that's the only way to become really good and possibly get that scholarship, etc. It isn't. Many of our best college and pro athletes played multiple sports as kids.

Either way, make sure your young athlete enjoys his or her sport and is not being physically or mentally burned out because of the constant demand. Even serious one-sport kids require time off and proper recovery — more is not always better.

At the same time, things hap-

pen. Acute injuries can be so unexpected, in our outside of sports.. Getting immediate evaluation and care is important; it's why I always appreciate the critical role of athletic trainers being able to evaluate what happened and what to do about an acute injury.

It's no less important off the playing field. Winter conditions and icy surfaces can be dangerous. My son Adam slipped

on the ice a few weeks ago and fractured and dislocated his ankle. He was in Chicago getting out of his car at work and fell. He was that co-workers were able to know not to move him and after calling me, they called 911. Experts came on the scene to properly move him and take him to the hospital, where top trained doctors and orthopedic experts were able to reduce the dislocated ankle and evaluate the fracture.

Within a few days I had top area orthopedic surgeon Dr. Mark Asselmeir surgically repairing the ankle with eight screws and a 4-inch metal plate. Adam is looking at a good few months of crutches and rehab, but I expect him to be fine.

Speaking of athletic trainers and the great job they do, I'll be taking part in the New Concepts in Sports Medicine program at Aurora University on Jan. 31. My topic will involve the uses and indications for orthotics and the role of the foot in sports. Oscar Kreiger, director of athletic training education at the university, has put together physicians and therapists for the program. I'll be stressing to the athletic trainers the importance of foot screenings and foot mechanics.

In addition, free foot screenings will continue through 2009 at my Aurora office — call 630-898-3505.

On another note, even in these crazy, scary, challenging economic times, it makes sense to count your blessings — family, friends, etc. Concentrate on the positive, it helps. Happy holidays and see you next year!

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