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KidsPost

Playing one sport year-round isn't smart, even for kids who want to go pro

Intense training often leads to burnout or injuries, studies show.

By **Fred Bowen** June 22

It's summertime. That means long, hot days, no school — and summer camps.

Lots of kids spend at least some of the summer at camps. There are overnight camps, theater camps and, of course, sports camps.

Some kids spend the whole year playing one sport, such as soccer, baseball or basketball. And what do they do during the summer? They go to a camp and keep playing that sport.

So what's wrong with that?

There's a lot wrong with specializing at a young age. It's much better for kids to play a variety of sports and use the summer to sample new ones.

A study published in the journal *Sports Health* found that “for most sports, there is no evidence that intense training and specialization before [age 13 or 14] are necessary to achieve elite status. Risks of early sports specialization include higher rates of injury . . . and quitting sports at a young age.”

How big is the risk of injury if you specialize in one sport? A Loyola University Chicago study of 1,200 youth athletes found that kids who specialized in one sport were 70 percent to 93 percent more likely to be injured than multi-sport athletes. That's a lot.

Kids who specialize in one sport also get burned out. An Ohio State University study found that kids who played a single sport were more likely to quit their sport and be physically inactive as adults.

But don't you have to specialize in one sport when you're a kid to have a chance to play in college or be a pro?

No!

Sorry, but I have to talk about another study. This one was a survey of college athletes by the American Society of Sports Medicine. The study found that 88 percent of college athletes played more than one sport when they were kids.

Look at this year's National Football League draft. Twenty-six of the 31 first-round picks, including Jared Goff, the player drafted ahead of all the others, had been multi-sport athletes in high school, according to Tracking Football.

It wasn't just the first round: 224 of the 256 draft picks had played more than one sport in high school. More than a third of the drafted players were three-sport athletes.

So if you are a year-round baseball kid, try soccer this summer. It will get you into great shape and help you move your feet in the infield. Or if you're a soccer kid, try hoops or lacrosse, or tennis or rock climbing.

Have some fun, and try something new. It's summertime.

Bowen writes the sports opinion column for KidsPost. He is the author of 21 sports books for kids.

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