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**HEADLINE:** Multiple sports have rewards

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Question: It seems to be that many kids now are becoming exclusive in playing just one sport to reach a higher level of competency in that sport.

Is that the overall trend, and if so, at what age should we encourage our son to move in that direction?

Thank you for your guidance.

Answer: You are right in spotting the trend. "Specialization" has become a popular choice of many young athletes. I do recognize this as a significant decision that does have to be made at some point.

First of all, let's admit (even though I hate to) that for the most part anytime these kids spend more time on one sport than the others, they will become more proficient at that particular sport. That is what has created the need for more kids to specialize to obtain that competitive edge or at least stay within close talent range.

I wish this style of progression never came about. I am a huge fan of kids playing multiple sports and having all the fun and learning that comes from each sport along with their own unique challenges, disciplines, relationships and physical development.

Although these specialized kids may gain an advantage in that sport's skill level, I think the sacrifice that comes with it is too great.

If the ultimate goal is to get a college scholarship then maybe that is the course to take. If the goal is to have a wide range of experiences and developmental opportunities, then the multiple-sport route is the one to take.

Remember, the percentage of high-school athletes that get college scholarships is so low, that it just doesn't make sense to forgo all the fun, relationships and learning that take place with playing lots of sports.

All too many times the specialized athlete looks back at his sports adventures after high school and wishes he could do it again including other sport memories. After the scholarship didn't come in, they often wish that they would have played a variety of sports to cultivate well-rounded skills, and allow for a broad range of relationships and experiences.

I would love to see kids playing because they are motivated by good healthy fun, rather than entering into a world of pressure; striving for goals that may have been placed in their

lives by someone other than themselves.

There is something refreshing about seeing a kid's excitement at learning a new skill, or seeing progress in his own work, without feeling the need to compare himself with others, or wonder if he is doing well enough to meet someone else's expectations.

Putting all your eggs in one basket is often too high of a risk to take. To know at such an early age, which sport will ultimately be the best for a lifetime, is just too difficult.

So many things can change along the way for a young athlete. Keeping the options open has many advantages. Experimenting with many sports will tend to eventually reveal those sports that each individual child is good at, and he will discover a love and passion for that particular sport.

Continue to make it possible for him or her to pursue that sport, while playing other sports in the off-seasons. These other sports will serve to enhance the one he or she is most passionate about.

There are too many high-school kids that find out that they really aren't that good at the specific sport that they have spent all their time and money on, realizing that they invested themselves in trying to be the best at something that didn't really work that way. They end up wishing they had just had more fun with more sports and more people.

So, for the sake of the full experience, and benefits of youth sports, it is my suggestion to not "specialize" until your later high-school years.

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