

Preventing Burnout in Youth Sports

by *Jonathan Buzby*

The best aspect of youth sports in the '90's is that kids have the opportunity to play organized sports when they are three years old. They can play multiple sports in one season. They can play one sport year-round, indoors and out. And there are summer camps for every sport with a schedule to fit every child's needs. Conversely, the best aspect of youth sports in the '90's may also be the most troubling aspect.

Youth sports participation used to be pretty simple. In the '70's and '80's kids played soccer or football in the fall, basketball or wrestling in the winter, and baseball or softball in the spring. The lucky (and wealthier) ones went to a summer camp for one week while the rest spent the summer at local pools and playgrounds.

Today, a child can play just about any sport he wants year-round. There are fall baseball leagues, summer basketball leagues, indoor golf ranges and tennis courts, indoor and outdoor soccer fields and roller hockey rinks, and opportunities to play every other sport you can imagine. Just about the only sport that remains exclusively as a one-season sport is football, and it probably will not be long before the youth football leagues start having spring practice just like the colleges.

How much is too much? Let your child decide. When your child stops having fun it might be a sign of burnout. Priorities have to be set. Your child's health is first and foremost. If he is getting tired and run down because he spends most evenings at practices it might be time to play just one sport per season (if he is playing more than one) or join a team that only practices once or twice a week (if he is on a team that practices more often). School must be important also. If he is not getting his homework finished or is not doing it correctly because he is too tired to concentrate, maybe he is involved in too many outside activities.

Sometimes a child does not want to disappoint mom or dad and will not admit he is tired of playing sports. Once in a while it is a good idea for the parent to decide for the child that it is time to take a season off. Unlike years ago, if you skip the fall soccer league you can usually join an indoor team before Thanksgiving, so it will not be an entire year before he can play again. How your child reacts to the break will also give you some indication as to whether it's a good idea to cut back next year.

Last but not least, take your own feelings into account. If running your child (or in many cases children) to practices every night of the week is burning you out, take a season off. Your kids might not understand but in the long run it will benefit the entire family.

Youth sports are great for kids. Take steps to make sure they do not get burned out. Well balanced sports participation can be an important part of a child's social, emotional, and physical well being. The longer kids play sports the better. The more fun they are having, the longer they will play.