

# How young is too young to benefit from playing?

- **Organized Sports for Preschoolers: Too Soon or Just Right?**

There's a big debate a-brewing out on the soccer field these days as tiny three-and four-year olds are taking up scaled-down cleats and shin guards and milling about in confusion while their parents look anxiously on, calling out encouragement or instructions ("kick the ballll!"). The "traditional" age for an introduction to organized sports has always been at about age eight, when coordination and



drive kick in for most kids, and many kids have been pushing that envelope with t-ball and other sports at about five or so, but parents seem to be pushing their kids into sports earlier and earlier now (even as young as 18 months!), which leaves child development experts shaking their heads.

Early-sports proponents say that being out on the field is far better than being on the couch in front of video games, and that preschool is a prime time for learning motor skills like throwing, catching, jumping and running. Okay, true enough. But development experts opposing this trend claim that it's too early to competently learn game rules and that there's simply too much pressure on a kid that age to perform. Pressure that seems to come from the [cough] parents.

Parents these days seem especially keen on getting their kids into school teams as early as possible, pushing the poor kid into a practice regimen that's a sure-fire path to early burnout. Personally, I think that three and four is way too young for any kind of organized sports. Kids that age should be playing in an open-ended way. But that's me. What about you?

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