

Sports success not necessarily related to specialization

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Specializing in one sport early in a child's athletic career is often touted as a way to gain that elusive college scholarship or even go on to the pros. However, researchers presenting their work at the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine's Annual Meeting in Toronto, Canada today say "not so fast."

"Our study, which is the largest study to date examining the topic of single sports [specialization](#), provides a foundation for understanding current trends in specialization in youth sports," said researcher, Patrick S. Buckley, MD of the Rothman Institute at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, PA. "Our results noted that current high [school](#) athletes specialized, on average, two years earlier than current collegiate and professional athletes. The results of our study suggest that specialization at a very young age does not increase the likelihood of an [athlete](#) achieving elite status within his/her sport."

Buckley and his colleagues distributed a survey to high school, collegiate and professional athletes prior to their yearly pre-participation physical exam. A total of 3,090 individuals completed the survey (503 high school, 856 collegiate and 1,731 professional athletes.) The age of single sport specialization significantly differed between groups and occurred at an average age of 12.7 ± 2.4 for high school, 14.8 ± 2.5 for collegiate and 14.1 ± 2.8 for professional athletes. More than 80 percent of athletes from all study groups reported that they were glad they had focused on a single sport at the age they did. Current [high school](#) and college participants also recalled a higher incidence of sports-related injury than

current professional athletes, some of whom noted that their injuries could be attributed to overuse. Notably only 22.3% of [professional athletes](#) said they would want their own child to specialize to play a single sport during childhood/adolescence.

"More research needs to be done to fully understand the benefits and risks involved with sport specialization at young ages and establish evidence based strategies that will optimize the sport experience for kids while minimizing injury. In addition, we must continue to educate parents, coaches, medical professionals and athletes on the do's/don'ts of safe play to keep kids active for life," said Buckley.

Provided by American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

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