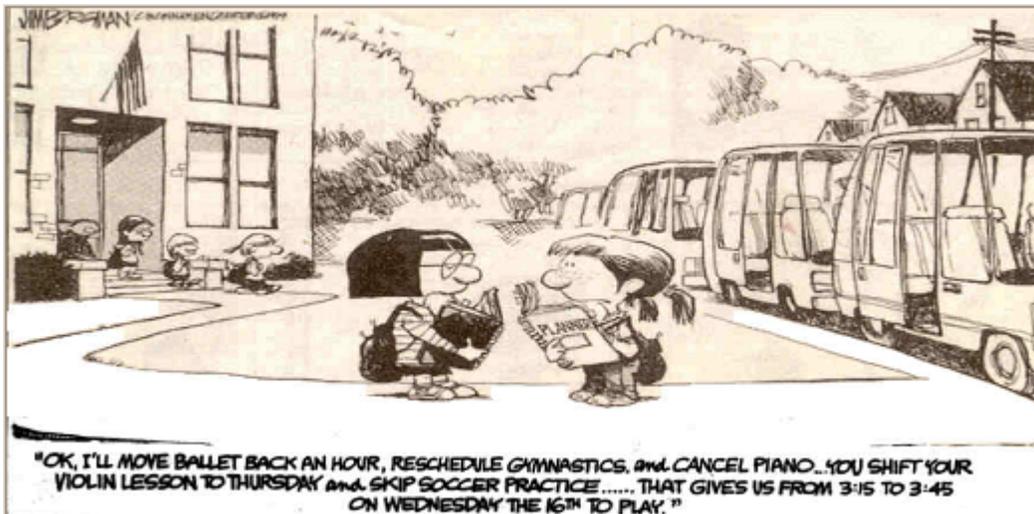




Player Burnout and Overuse Injuries

by Paul Hlaford, PA West - Director of Coaching

By the time you read this spring will be here and all the teams will be outside training ... I hope!! This becomes a period where the players play an enormous number of games in a short period of time. My concern grows when I hear about the amount of games in which players are asked to participate. I recently received an email that was sent to one of the ODP coaches. In it the player talks about their schedule and that there is no time in the schedule to give ODP full commitment. The player goes on to mention that on Mondays there is CCD and HS conditioning, Tuesdays and Thursdays are basketball then cup soccer practice. On Wednesdays, there is H.S. soccer practice and Fridays H.S. conditioning again and to add to this Lacrosse starts shortly. No wonder the player goes on to say that they have been tired. Although these activities are good in and of themselves there are too many of them and this is a disturbing trend within the sports community. It brings to mind the cartoon I use in the youth modules to highlight this problem that is occurring in our children.



Error!

There is an increasing trend of players dropping out of sports participation. By the time a player has reached the age of thirteen, 75% have dropped out of all sports. This is not just a problem in soccer but in all sports. Some reasons cited by players include "it's not fun anymore", involvement in other activities, they dislike the coach.

Player burnout is another reason for players dropping out. Winning as the only reason to participate can be one of the major causes of player burn out. The coach, parent or player who measures winning as an evaluation of performance is missing the point on how to develop players to succeed and gain a true love for the game. This factor can lead to emotional exhaustion, low self-esteem and negative responses to others.^{1[1]} Add these to the other factors for dropping out and you can see that there is a problem.

What is the cure for burn out? Well if there is less pressure on the player to win and more focus on

developing the player and we make sure it is fun then perhaps we can keep more players in the sport. I know you say we have heard this before but all the facts speak for themselves. Coaches and parents are saying that winning is everything, and yes you should always play to win but as I stated before don't relate winning to player development or performance. Lots of players have been successful at the younger age levels but have failed to reach the higher levels as they've gotten older. They just haven't been taught or allowed to learn the necessary skills or more importantly been allowed the time to develop.

Overuse injuries are another concern with young athletes and these injuries are occurring more and more frequently. Overuse injuries occur when tissue is injured due to repetitive pressure on the body. It starts when repetitive activities fatigue a bone or tendon. If there is time to recover from this type of injury then there will be healing, without this recovery period no healing takes place and a chronic injury can occur²[2]. I can't tell you the number of times I have seen players play with injuries. They think that they can play through it or they are told to play and they are not allowing the injury to heal.

Players are playing more and more games and there is no break in between seasons. We seem to have an attitude that more is better, the more my child plays the better they will become. For example the players finish the spring season, then in the summer they are going to soccer camps and as soon as they come back to school they start H.S soccer. Once the fall season finishes they start the indoor season. Where is the break?? We must also look at how many tournaments teams go to now. At one time tournaments used to be for fun and to prepare the team for the league or cup games maybe one or two a season no more. Tournaments can be good if you don't go to too many. Do you ever see our national team or any professional team play that number of games in a weekend!!! Can you imagine FIFA staging the World Cup in the same format that we expect our children to play in?

If we truly want to restrict the burn out and overuse injuries then we must make sure the children play less organized games and allow them to have some down time. In Germany, for example, the youth programs take two months off at the end of the season this gives the player's time to regenerate and refresh. ³[3]

Sources:

1. Mike Singleton, MYSA, USYSA Convention, 2004
 2. Overuse injuries in children and adolescents. The Physician and Sportsmedicine, vol 27, No 1, January 1999
 3. Dave Linenberger, VYSA, USYSA Convention, 2005
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