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Journalism 347

Op-Ed

The More the Merrier with Young Athletes

If you have ever played a sport in middle school or high school, you have probably felt the pressure from coaches to only play one sport. If you are a parent with kids who are involved in sports, you have probably seen this same pressure from coaches. But what exactly is the benefit or purpose of investing time into just one sport? Recent studies have shown that kids who play multiple sports are in better physical shape, are more disciplined, and are more prepared for adult life than those who play just one sport.

The pressure to get to the professional level is more intense now than ever. Young athletes all over the world watch their favorite players on television and dream of being them someday. The common theme around high school sports is whether athletes should play multiple sports or just focus on one specific sport to truly perfect their skill. There are two sides to every argument, but this particular argument doesn’t really seem that complicated to me.

The recent debate has hit social media and television stations across the country. Professional players, coaches, and fans have voiced their opinions for all to hear. Senior and football player at UW-Whitewater, Harry Henschler, is no different. He took to the Royal Purple to voice his opinion on the subject. “If someone encourages your child to specialize in a single sport, that person generally does not have your child’s best interests in mind”. The powerful words spoken by the big man attracted plenty of attention from other college athletes and students here on campus. He isn’t saying that if you only play one sport throughout your career you won’t amount to anything. He is saying that playing multiple sports helps you in more ways than it hurts you. Of the 256 players drafted in the 2018 NFL Draft, 90 percent played multiple sports in high school. Although this stat highlights one professional sport, numbers like that are tough to ignore.

The overall goal as a child or as a teenager should be to have as much fun as possible. By exposing kids to multiple sports, we are giving them the chance to decide which sport they enjoy the most. Too many times we hear of parents limiting their child to one sport in hopes they get really good at that sport and earn a scholarship. Sure, it pays off sometimes, but those parents are limiting their child in more ways than just deciding which sport to play. We can’t deny that being more versatile does open more opportunities for the future.

No person should be offering the idea that playing just one sport is bad because that is just not true. Doing any physical activity is good for your health and even your self-esteem. While playing multiple sports is great for teamwork and building mental toughness, playing just one sport allows the athlete to focus on one task at a time. If you are a basketball player you will be able to focus on basketball during the primary season which is winter and focus more on school work in the offseason.

Unfortunately, a lot of one sport athletes still don’t get much of a break in the offseason. Unlike in the past, most of the time spent by young boys and girls today is devoted to tournaments and other structured competitions. When I was growing up there was a league we played in with kids from our town and that was it, until high school. Junior, Erika Marion, has seen her brother go through the same strenuous workload in high school. “Now there are year-round tournaments that feature kids as young as 10 years old. Teenagers and young kids are not built to put that much strain on their bodies all year round”. In fact, [recent studies](https://www.nsr-inc.com/scouting-news/multi-sport-athletes-vs-single-sport-athletes/) have found that kids who play one sport year-round are said to be more tired, spend more time on sports than on school, and some even lose interest in that sport completely. “My brother works harder than anyone I know. I know he will get a football scholarship from a university, but at what cost?” She raises a great point and one that many parents are thinking about.

It is easy to see how so many professional athletes have become so successful. Playing multiple sports allows athletes to use different parts of their brain and body to become more efficient. I want my child to be successful as much as the next parent, but I want that to happen because they are the ones to choose it.