

# Quantifying Parental Influence on Youth Athlete Specialization: A Survey of Athletes' Parents

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**INTRODUCTION:** Youth athlete specialization has been linked to decreased enjoyment, burnout and increased injury risk though its impact on athletic success remains unclear. The extent of extrinsic influence from parents on this phenomenon, however, remains unclear. The goal of this study was to assess parental influences placed on young athletes to specialize. It was hypothesized that parents generate both direct and indirect pressures on specialized athletes.

## METHODS:

A survey tool was designed by an interdisciplinary medical team to evaluate parental influence on youth specialization. Surveys were administered to parents of the senior authors' orthopaedic pediatric patients.

## RESULTS:

Of the 211 parents approached, 201 (95.3%) parents completed the assessment tool. One-third stated their children played a single sport only, 53.2% had children who played multiple sports but had a favorite, and 13.4% had children who balanced their multiple sports equally. A total of 115 (57.2%) parents hoped for their children to play collegiately or professionally and 100 (54.7%) parents encouraged their children to specialize in a single sport. Parents of highly specialized and moderately specialized athletes were more likely to report directly influencing their child's specialization ( $p = 0.038$ ) and to expect their children to play collegiately or professionally ( $p = 0.014$ ). Children with an injury history were more than 5 times more likely to receive elite regional or professional instruction than children without an injury history ( $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, parents who hired personal trainers for their children were more likely to believe their children held collegiate or professional aspirations ( $p = 0.009$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Athletes who received instruction from elite coaches were significantly more likely to have suffered a sports-related injury than athletes who received instruction only from school coaches or family members. This finding may reflect a link between elite youth coaching and sporting injuries, but further longitudinal studies are required to support direct causation. Parents influence youth athlete specialization both directly and with investment in elite coaching and personal instruction. The majority of parents aspired for their children to play collegiately or professionally. Parents of more specialized athletes exert more influence than those of unspecialized athletes.

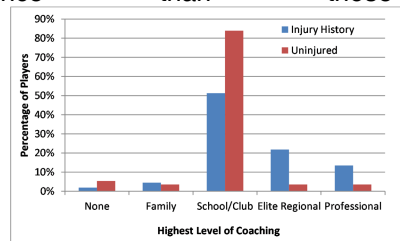
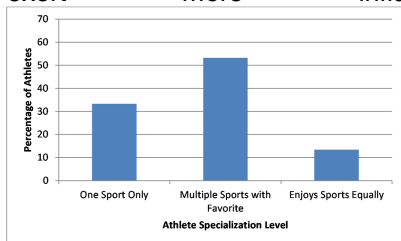


Table 1: Demographics

Female (Parent gender)	71.4%
Male (Child gender)	58.2%
Youth Athlete Age	13.8 ± 3.0
Overuse Injury History	72.1%
Surgical History	16.6%
<b>Child's Favorite Sport:</b>	
Soccer	25.9%
Basketball	19.4%
Baseball/Softball	15.4%
Lacrosse	8.5%
Cross Country/Track & Field	7.5%
<sup>a</sup> Other	23.4%

<sup>a</sup> > 2% each: Football, Track & Field, Swimming, Tennis