



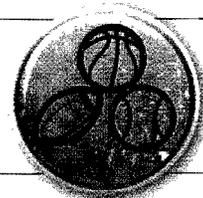
# The Death of the Multisport Athlete

Friday night lights are back for high schools across the country, and as you read this, many of the nation's top athletes are hard at work on the gridiron preparing for this week's upcoming game. I remember my first experience around a star athlete. I was 11 years old and my oldest brother was attending Wheaton North High School, which at that time was home to Kent Graham, the best high school athlete in the state of Illinois. Kent was a 6-foot-5-inch physical freak and the number-one-ranked quarterback in the nation. He also played safety. He earned three all-conference distinctions in basketball and regularly hit .400 for the baseball team. My dad fondly recalls Kent hitting a home run off my brother in Little League that cleared the lights and still hasn't landed.

of training young kids whose bodies are still developing as if they are professional athletes. Dr. Andrews goes on to recommend specialization only once an athlete reaches his or her senior year in high school.

Unfortunately, his recommendations may not resonate with most coaches and parents. The pressure to develop faster and at a younger age is greater than ever before, and parents are convinced the most effective way to earn any type of athletic scholarship is through showcase events, such as Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) tournaments. While these types of tournaments have successfully spotlighted top basketball talent to recruiters, some argue they are hurting an athlete's development. In AAU, kids can play as many as four games in one day with little to no coaching, potentially impeding the necessary

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But this was back when your best athletes played multiple sports — an era that appears to be ending, as sport specialization dominates the modern high school scene. In an attempt to better position themselves for college recruiters and professional scouts, high school athletes are focusing exclusively on one sport year-round. There's certainly no shortage of opportunities, as I addressed in my January 2014 article "School's Out," which took an in-depth look at how club sports have gone from preparing athletes for high school athletics to essentially stealing athletes away from high school sports programs.

Arguments can be made for both sides of the equation, but there is one argument that prominent doctors strongly disagree with: athletes who play the same sport year-round are less susceptible to injury. In an interview with *Athletic Business* in August 2013, orthopedic surgeon and injury consultant Dr. James Andrews shared some insight from his book "Any Given Monday: Sports Injuries and How to Prevent Them for Athletes, Parents and Coaches — Based on My Life in Sports Medicine." In the interview, Dr. Andrews notes the dramatic increase in overuse injuries he was seeing in youth sports, due in large part to kids participating in one sport all year with little to no recovery time. Interestingly, another key factor in the rise in injuries, according to Dr. Andrews, is professionalism, the practice

developmental strides they should be making.

For many high school parents and athletes today, it is no longer as much about love of the game as it is a business. Parents are "investing" outrageous amounts of money into their children's athletic development, because the fear is that they will not reach the level they need to without specialization, a notion constantly disproved. Look no further than the professional athletes we see today. Many were multisport athletes. Remember that high school wide receiver who was first-team All-State as a sophomore and led his team to the state semifinals his junior year? His name was LeBron James, and ironically, his high school football career came to an end in the summer before his senior year, when he broke his wrist playing in an AAU basketball tournament. @

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