



# Pressure to Place My Children on a Travel Team

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**"I have 7 & 5 year old boys who participate in all regular season team sports. I am getting pressure to have my kids participate in the select/travel teams for baseball even at this young age. I was a college athlete myself, and it makes me very angry to hear someone tell me that my kids will never play high school ball if they don't participate in the travel teams during the offseason.**

**"I'm trying very hard not to be 'that parent', being that I was a very intense, competitive athlete back in my day. I want my kids to play because they like to play, not because I pushed them into it. What is the balance?"**

## PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer-Chicago

Your question raises an issue that is coming up with more frequency.

You are right to say that you want your kids to play because they like to and not because you pushed them. In the long run this approach will enhance both their personal and athletic development. The determination they will need to excel comes from within and is rooted in a love for what they are doing.

While your primary concern as a parent is with your childrens' overall well being, let's for a moment look just at their development as athletes. If you want your children to become great athletes you will encourage them to play multiple sports. Field vision, reaction time, and balance are some of the skills that are honed by playing different sports. Many professional athletes attribute their success, in part, to having played different sports until a late age.

In his book, *Positive Sports Parenting*, PCA Founder and Executive Director Jim Thompson cites the statement of Dan Gould of Michigan State's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports that premature specialization is a problem. Research indicates that for most sports it is not a good idea to specialize before the age of 12. Some think waiting until 14 or 15 is an even better idea.

Some risks of over-involvement in a sport at too young an age are burnout and overuse injuries. For example, your five year old has at least nine years before he can try out for a high school team. During that time he

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could explore a variety of sports and other activities before beginning to focus on the one(s) he likes most. Or, he could focus on baseball, giving him less time to explore.

Unless it is your son choosing baseball, there is a likelihood that the game will become less fun and he'll quit. Repeating the same motions required by a particular sport with insufficient rest over time wears on tendons and joints. There has been a significant increase in overuse injuries to young athletes in recent years.

This does not mean that your sons should not join travel teams if they are the ones saying they want to focus on baseball. Travel teams require a substantial time and financial commitment. It is important to weigh the effect on your child and the family.

You can increasingly involve your sons in the decision-making as they get older. Ask them about their desires and discuss the pros and cons with them. Learning to approach decisions in this way is an important life lesson. Ultimately the decision is yours to make in the best interest of each child and your family.

*PCA Trainer Joe Scally is a longtime soccer coach based in the Chicago area. Joe spent several years as PCA's national director of training.*

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