

**9. Quitting Time?** Your son is not enjoying his chosen sport any more. He has played for years and excels at it. But now he appears burned out and has even mentioned he wants to quit. As a Second-Goal Parent, what should you do?

Peter Benson, author of *Sparks*, a landmark book on teen motivation, says: “Sparks illuminate a young person’s life and give it energy and purpose.” Helping teens find their spark and encouraging it is an important role for parents, which may be hard if you are emotionally attached to your son competing in his sport, while it no longer sparks him.

Try to disengage yourself from your hopes and dreams for your son as an athlete. This is about what’s best for him, and if he feels he needs to please you, it will be much harder for him to figure out what is best for him.

Juliet Thompson Hochman, a member of the 1988 U.S. Olympic Rowing Team, shared a conversation she had with her father the summer after her first year at Harvard. She was away from family, teammates, and coaches working out but feeling lonely and discouraged. She talked to her father who reminded her that she could quit rowing if that’s what she wanted.

Juliet might have been expecting her dad to pressure her, to talk her into sticking with her workouts. Instead, he reminded her that she could change her situation. She thought about what she wanted to do and realized that she wanted to excel in rowing for herself, not to please her father or anyone else. She rededicated herself, made the U.S. national team the following year, and competed in the Olympics in Seoul.

Whether to quit or not may seem like a “forever” decision to your son, but it doesn’t have to be. He can decide to take a break, even skip a season of competition, without that meaning that he is quitting the sport for good. If he takes some time off, he may find he misses it, or he may feel relieved to be away. He won’t know unless he does take a break.

So, take some of the pressure off the decision. Decisions made under pressure are often not as good as those where we give ourselves time to figure out the best course of action.

Here are some questions you might ask to get a conversation going:

- Is this a recent feeling, or have you felt this way for a while?
- Does this feel like temporary burnout or something deeper?
- Do you think taking some time off would help?
- What is it about playing your sport that feels different now?
- If you do quit, are there other activities that you’d like to get involved with?

Then listen carefully to what he says.

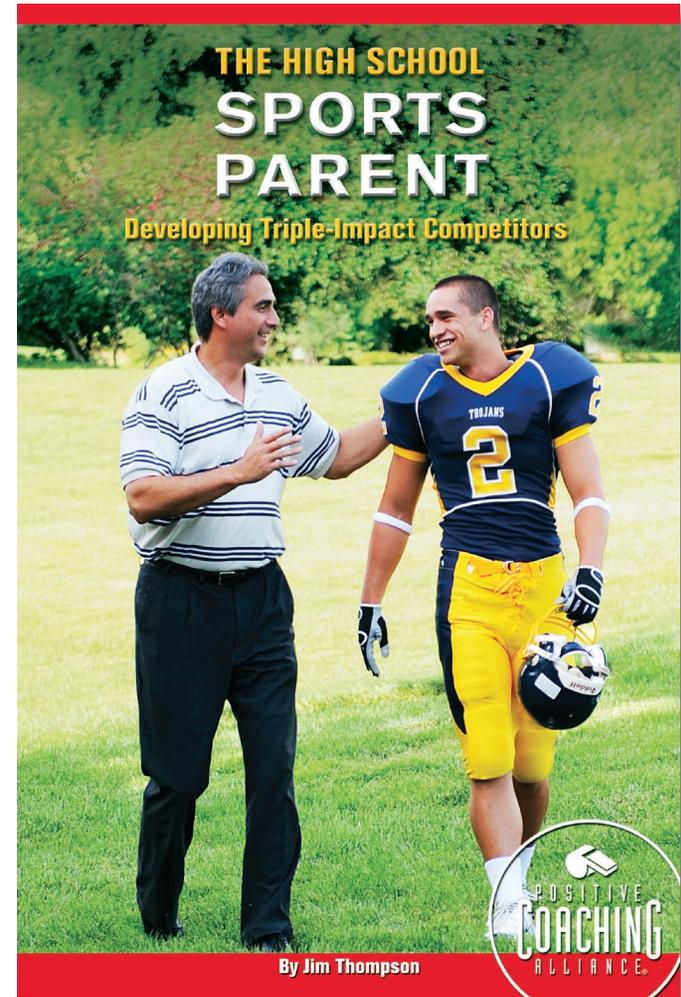
At some point it may be useful to help frame the decision with what I call the Five-Year Question. “How do you think you will feel five years from now if you keep playing? If you take a break? If you quit?”

It also may help for your son to “live with” each decision for a while. For a week he could live with the idea that he will gut it out and keep playing. When he gets up in the morning and he realizes that he is going to keep playing, how does he feel? Then a week living with the decision to quit playing the sport. Again, how does he feel? Doing this for several days at a time may clarify what the best decision is for him.

Ask him to consider the idea of “responsible quitting.” If your son quits in mid-season, how will that impact his teammates and coach? What could he do to honor his commitment to the team while also taking care of his own needs? What would it mean for him to quit in a responsible way? Often this means giving notice, so the coach, for example, could develop another player to take over your son’s role on the team.

Also note that burnout with a sport can accompany other more serious problems, such as stress, depression, social problems, or eating disorders. Your conversations with your son around his sport may lead to important information about whether this is part of a bigger problem, which might not have surfaced otherwise.

I grew up with the idea that it was not okay to quit something I had started. I even felt that I should finish any book I started reading, regardless of how bad it was. But I now see how foolish this was. Time spent with a bad book is time I can't spend reading a great book. If your son continues with a sport that is not rewarding to him, this is time he is not able to spend doing something rewarding, or exploring other potentially meaningful things he can do with his time.



To learn more about *The High School Sports Parent* and other PCA books visit [www.positivecoach.org/our-work/our-books](http://www.positivecoach.org/our-work/our-books)

For more Resources, visit: [www.PCAdDevZone.org](http://www.PCAdDevZone.org)

For more information on Positive Coaching Alliance, visit: [www.PositiveCoach.org](http://www.PositiveCoach.org)