



ORGANIZED SPORTS Early Sport Specialization



What Is it?

Early sport specialization refers to athletes who focus exclusively on one sport at an early age. Brenner et al. (2019) claims that early specialization typically results in year-round, high-intensity training.

Criteria for Early Sport Specialization

Myer et al. (2015)



Choose 1 Sport



Quit All Other Sports



Play For > 8 Months
*In a Year

Example:

7 year old child



Maximum participation in organized sports per week.



Participate in only 1 sport league at a time.



Play an organized sport for 8 months maximum per year.

Why Parents Encourage Early Sport Specialization

Gould (2009)



Better coaches work with more talented athletes.



Success stories about athletes who became pro by specializing early in childhood.



Judging their parenting self-worth based on their child's achievements.



Pressure from coaches.

Early sport specialization, can result in physical and mental detriments that increase the risk of injury and other negative outcomes. These challenges may result in athletes stopping their participation in sports and a reduction in overall physical activity levels (Wolfe et al., 2014).



By ≈ age 16, late adolescents have the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills required for highly specialized training in one sport (Cote et al., 2009).

Risks of Early Sport Specialization

Brenner et al. (2019), Malina (2010), & Straccolini et al. (2019)



↑ Injury



Burnout



Social Isolation



↓ Enjoyment



↓ Unstructured Play



Inadequate Sleep



Adult Manipulation



↓ Grades



↓ Family Time