



AVOIDING BURNOUT

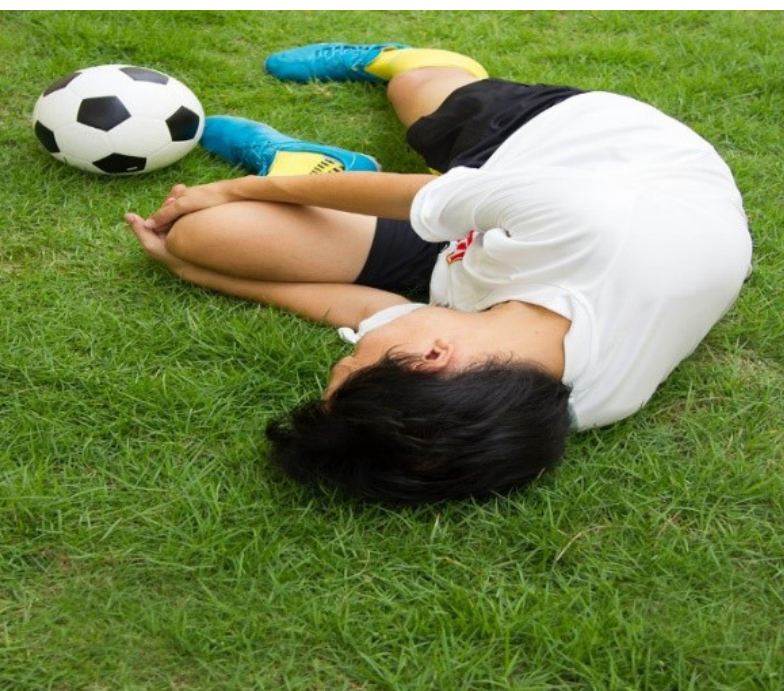
“Should I be concerned that my 15-year-old boy may burnout after being immersed in soccer for the past 10 years? He is putting in a lot of time and I know he loves the game, but sometimes he seems like wanting to quit.” Young athletes are playing the same sport year-round at a very intense level. They compete, practice, plus dedicate gym time as if they were professional athletes. On top of these commitments, they need to meet academic requirements, including attending school and doing homework that barely leaves them with time to sleep. But, should we be concerned that they may crash and burnout?

There is no question that the athletic stakes are much higher than ever before. To earn an athletic spot at a top university is becoming increasingly challenging. NCAA coaches are constantly in the look-out for the best athletes and know that if they compete at the varsity and club level, they have, by far, much better chances of being recruited.

There are three factors that, when combined, lead to burnout: 1- sport specialization at a very young age; 2- the unfamiliarity of using effective stress management coping skills; and 3- the proliferation of social media as a tool to remain socially connected.



1- *Sport specialization at a young age*



An athlete younger than 12-year-old, who plays one sport for more than 8 month/year to the exclusion of participating in other sports, and has limited free playing time is specializing in sports. Playing just one sport significantly increases the chances of muscle burnout. One of the major concerns is the muscular repetitiveness that often leads to torn muscles. At a young age, muscles are not quite developed, yet, which leads to an increase in injury. The number of ACL surgeries has double in the past 15 years. Although the medical field has made tremendous progress in orthopedic surgeries, young athletes may fear re-injury, hence hesitating their come back.

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UPCOMING EVENTS SPRING:



I am collaborating with Proform Tennis Academy to provide Sport Psychology services.

Various Dates

Date To Be Determined

I will be giving a talk: Applying Sport Psychology in Coaching in a joint collaboration with NY Presbyterian

ColumbiaDoctors
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I am collaborating with The Zone - Basketball Training Camp.

Various Dates

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2- *Unfamiliarity of using effective stress management coping skills*

Some young athletes learn skill development very quickly. Others happen to be physically strong. In either case, they tend to use those gifts to their advantage. Additionally, many athletes follow Vince Lombardi's motto, "winners never quit and quitter never win." Hence, their belief system is to continue plowing along at full speed, and when this strategy begins to fail, then it is time to go even faster. As the competition becomes more intense, these athletes eventually meet equally gifted athletes who give them a run for their money. Unless they have worked on how to properly use sport psychology strategies that prepare them for before and during the game, they will be overwhelmed by the stress of competition. Upsetting and frustrating feelings are either ignored or minimized. Feelings do not go away and will reappear when facing similar situations. The lack to emotionally navigate game challenges eventually leads to underperforming, getting frustrated, and more likely to wanting to quit.



3- *Proliferation of social media*

The speed with which social media has taken over the "social interacting space" for these young individuals is concerning. Its consequence is that the human nervous system requires one-to-one interaction to develop its capacity to regulate emotions. It is a human physiological requirement, not a personal preference. The less their interaction, the less developed their capacity to navigate stressors and remain focused. If their nervous system is not developed enough to manage competitive stress, then they will be more likely to get emotionally distracted during matches, which leads to under-performing given their learned skills and talents.

How to avoid burnout

The most important reason for pursuing a sport is because it is fun. The motivation to continue making progress and follow the demanding training and competitive schedules must come exclusively from the athlete, not the adult, coach or teammates. We call it, intrinsic motivation. It is born from within, not from outside. It is the player who needs to embrace to its fullest the grinding of pursuing a sport out of fulfilling his/her own goals, not somebody else's. In accepting these challenges, stressors will come up.

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Tips to keep in mind:

1- Accepting that emotions will come up; 2- Using positive and affirmative cue words to regain focus; 3- Practicing breathing relaxation lessen tension; 4- Keeping realistic expectation; 5- Celebrating progress rather than wins. Equally important, learning when to peak, how to rest, and what to eat provide tools excel. When young athletes achieve their goals, it promotes confidence. Intrinsic motivation is a personal experience that can be taken anywhere else in their life.



Final Thought:

Achieving flow: if it is not challenging enough, raise the intensity; if it is too easy, push yourself to higher expectations.



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