Ladies, I keep saying, yes, we are very serious about providing you the best training that is available in the USA. You need to take time to think about all this pressure to perform, to excel, to get a college scholarship, to be the best at everything. Sometimes all this pressure is not realistic. Sometimes this pressure starts with parents and sometimes it’s your friends, your teachers and at times it’s you. For some parents, those of you with upwardly mobile, highly competitive parents in their relation to your schooling, we must take care. These parents want their daughters to be at the best preschool centers (where you have to apply early and each “applicant” has to go through a battery of tests as part of the “admissions” process to “weed out” the less “competent”) so that they can then qualify for the best kindergarten programs, which, in turn will set them up for the best elementary schools, the best middle schools and of course the best high schools, leading naturally to the best colleges. Once a family steps onto this overly competitive treadmill, the brunt of the pressure falls on the you, the ECFH student athlete. Our daily obsession with being the best has warped our perspective and is seriously squeezing the word FUN from your daily lives.

The fact of the matter is that sports, above all else, should be for fun. They are designed for you to play and as an important vehicle for you to learn and master new physical, mental and social skills. Sports are not primarily designed to determine who “the best” is or to prepare a student for a college scholarship or a professional career. When you, the student athlete, are left to your own devices to play sports, your play is both enjoyable and rewarding. However, when adults at school, in the community and at times in the home impose their competitive structure on our players play, when kids are organized into “A” and “B” teams with tryouts to determine who gets placed where and who gets cut, when the more talented get all the playing time and the less skilled sit the bench, when adult coaches and parents get overly involved in the outcome of the competitions to the extremes, then fun drains away and it becomes a source of heartache for the player. It’s in this environment that burnout will take root and flourish. We are quite fortunate that this monster rarely shows its head here within our club.

If you would like a very simple litmus test for determining whether you are a candidate for burnout, it revolves around the word “fun.” Simply put, there are three stages in the development of you as a hockey player. The first two are healthy and will keep you happy and excited about field hockey, the third leads directly to unhappiness and burnout, I am going to just copy these three stages from others as they are well known and well documented by many others more qualified than me:

**The first stage is called the FUN/FUN stage. This is the stage when your children are first introduced to their sport and they can’t get enough of it. If left to their own devices, they’d play it 24/7. The activity is totally a blast, they love hanging out with their friends who play and they don’t experience competitive or performance pressures of any kind. Most well run recreational sports programs are like this. It’s the FUN in this stage which initially attracts children to the sport to begin with and it’s the FUN that serves as the glue that will keep the child-athlete attached to the sport over the long haul.**

**The second stage in the development of an athlete is called the SERIOUS/FUN stage. This is when the athlete may first join a real competitive team and begin working with a more knowledgeable coach on proper technique and strategy. This is the stage where competitive pressures are first introduced and the athlete has to learn to manage both winning and losing. It’s at this point that the athlete may have also developed some personal goals that he/she feels committed to pursuing and achieving in relation to the sport. While the activity still remains extremely fun, the athlete is willing to invest some significant time, lots of energy and many hours of hard work towards the pursuit of these goals. In other words, she is very serious about the sport, while at the same time maintaining her passion for it.**

**This second, SERIOUS/FUN stage is the stage of optimal learning and peak performance. In fact, this is the only stage where an athlete will be capable of truly achieving her dreams. This is as true for the Olympic caliber competitor as much as it is for the 13-year-old club player. It’s the fine blend of serious and fun that allows an athlete to be successful without any adverse consequences. As a parent, this is the stage that you want to try to keep your children in throughout their time in the sport. It’s within this stage that they will continue to grow and develop both as athletes and human beings. Out of this SERIOUS/FUN stage will come the development of a healthy athletic identity, a solid sense of self-esteem, courage and confidence, leadership skills and numerous other beneficial life-skills.**

**The third stage, when the athlete becomes a high risk to burnout is called the SERIOUS/SERIOUS stage. This is the phase in your child’s involvement in the sport when the fun, passion and anticipation gradually disappear and are replaced by unhappiness, dislike and dread. In this stage, there is much too much pressure put on the athlete. It’s also in this phase that the athlete begins to seriously question why she is practicing and competing anymore. Previous goals and dreams no longer hold their motivational power and the athlete spends her practice time not truly enjoying the activity and just going through the motions. It’s during this phase that the athlete is much more vulnerable to developing performance problems and is most likely to become a dropout statistic.**

**Outside attempts at “motivation” and excessive pressure from parents and coaches do not help the athlete to get back on track in this phase because the athlete has lost her way from the inside. She no longer has a purpose in training and competing in field hockey. It has lost its meaning for the athlete. Despite the fact that this individual may be experiencing significant success, the athlete still wants to quit or at least not work hard because she has lost both the fun and her “big enough why” (compelling reason to train).**

**How do players get to this burnout stage? One of the major reasons for players burning out has to do with all the adults involved in their sport. Specifically, I’m referring to all adults to include the coaches. If there’s too much pressure coming from an adult, too much focus on winning, excelling, and beating others, if there’s any anger and disrespect sent their way whenever they fail, if there would be even the least bit of humiliation waiting for them after a particularly poor performance, if their coaches are continually negative or worse demeaning, if they are physically overworked on a consistent basis, then sooner or later these experiences will gradually accumulate and completely drain the fun out of their sport replacing it with a dislike. When this happens, burnout will follow.**

So, ladies we need to stay in the SERIOUS/FUN stage 2 and not cross over into the SERIOUS/SERIOUS stage that often has very negative impacts. You know some of the players from other clubs who are in the serious/serious, win at all costs regimes, many of these players at the collegiate level, fail. So, have fun, work hard but enjoy getting better, participate in all the other activities ECFH has to offer so your quality of live remains high and diversified. We are training you in far more than merely field hockey and all these hockey related activities are useful in your development as a student athlete. Use sport as a way of living, a way to enjoy your teenage years, a way to set yourself up for future success.