



PARENT HANDBOOK

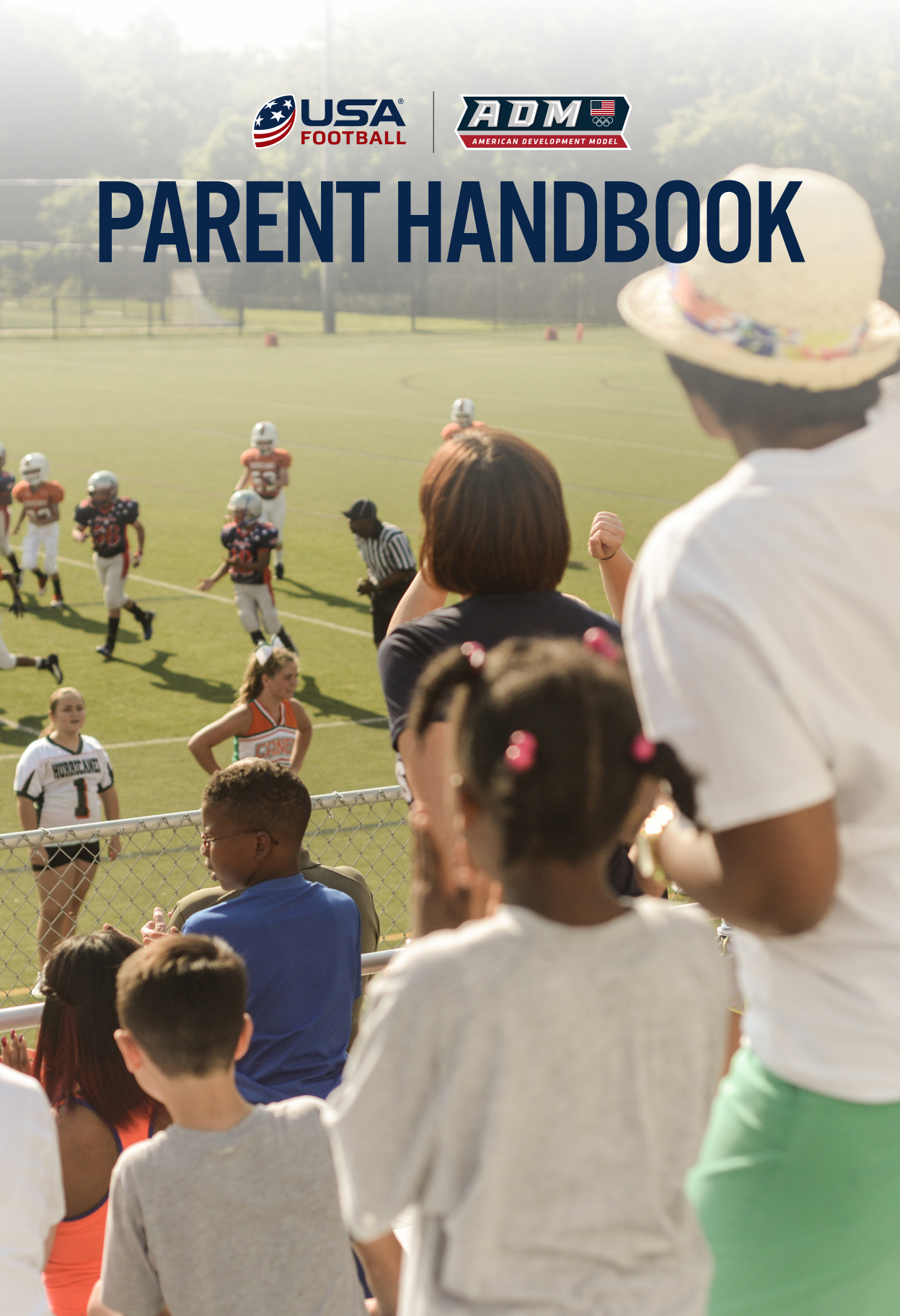


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**IT'S MORE THAN A JERSEY.
IT'S MORE THAN A POSITION ON THE FIELD.
IT'S MORE THAN THE WINS,
THE DEFEATS, THE PLAYS, AND THE CALLS.
IT'S SOMETHING LARGER — IT'S THE TEAM,
THE DRIVE, THE ATHLETE ...
THE SPORT**

USA Football is creating a new standard in football by providing parents and athletes with trusted resources to make the game better and safer.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

SKILLS AND DRILLS

SPORTS NUTRITION

STRENGTH TRAINING

CHECK OUT EXCLUSIVE PARENT RESOURCES AT WWW.USAFOOTBALL.COM/PARENT.





WHAT IS THE ADM PILOT PROGRAM

Youth tackle football continues to be a popular sport across the United States with more than 3 million athletes ages 5-17 taking part each season.

Starting this fall, USA Football will be working with select youth leagues and school districts across the country to begin an exploratory study aimed at:

Creating a developmentally appropriate pathway to help players acquire fundamental movement skills – running, jumping, hopping, throwing, catching – along with football specific skills and abilities.

Finding more entry points to the game to increase participation and enjoyment.

Increasing physical activity and involvement in the game.

Improving safety.

Your league has agreed to adopt a general player pathway that includes flag football, a modified game called Rookie Tackle and traditional 11-on-11 tackle football.

This pathway also includes coach education and recommendations for practices and games.



ROOKIE TACKLE

Rookie Tackle is a bridge game between flag football and traditional 11-player tackle that introduces younger players to their first experience with contact – including the skills of blocking and tackling.

The playing field is modified to be smaller in size to fit the physical capabilities of youth athletes.

Similar to coach pitch in baseball, 8-foot rims in basketball or 5-a-side soccer, Rookie Tackle provides a developmentally appropriate approach to football that is supported by youth sport and youth athletic development experts as well as youth and high school football coaches.

Some specifics about the Rookie Tackle game include:

- A smaller playing field that measures 40 or 60 yards by 35 yards, requiring all drives to start at the 40-yard line regardless where the previous possession ended.
- The option to play 6, 7 or 8 players on each side.
- Players starting each play in a crouching two-point position instead of in a three-point stance.
- No special teams.
- Mandated position rotations.
- Coaches ensuring players of equal size, abilities and temperament are lined up against each other.
- Two coaches per team allowed on the field to organize plays and guide players.

As your player learns this modified game, research will be conducted to examine physical activity, involvement and attitudes toward youth football.

Other stakeholders such as commissioners, coaches, youth athlete development experts and you – the parents – will be surveyed as well to gain additional insight. These results will be examined and used to further refine a football development pathway for all players in all communities to adopt.

MAKE FOOTBALL A GREAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CHILD



A child's educational career is a series of steps designed to take them where they need to go, developing new skills and building on the ones they already know to advance along an educational pathway.

Football is no different.

USA Football's pilot player development pathway – called the American Development Model (ADM) - begins with flag football as an introduction to the sport but also offers multiple other entry points to the game depending on when a child wants to begin playing.

Through flag football, players learn many of the basic skills that are universal to the game – running, throwing, catching, footwork, tracking the near hip to pull a flag or make a tackle. All within a non-contact setting. This builds confidence and provides a high-energy activity that gets children moving and learning.

Deciding whether or when kids want to stay with the flag game or transition to tackle will be a decision made within each family. Know, though, that going from flag to what we've

traditionally known as tackle football also has incremental steps along the way. From flag football, many players will progress to Rookie Tackle, a small-sided tackle game on a smaller field designed to be a bridge between flag football and full 11-on-11 tackle. This is where a child's first experience with tackle football takes place.

USA Football believes that developmental approach to the game driven by high-quality coaching will improve athlete enjoyment and skill development. By modifying the game at younger age levels and educating coaches, commissioners, officials and parents on the game adjustments, mechanics and skills, we can create an athlete-centered understanding that leads to a better experience.

After learning the fundamentals of the tackle game, players advance to play 11-on-11 on a full field for the first time but with some rules modifications.

Limitations on blitzing and within special teams allow players during this transitional phase to continue to build on skills they have learned while adding new ones. While in Rookie Tackle, players are encouraged to try multiple positions. Athletes now get opportunities to play both sides of the ball but begin to hone in on positions they are most suited for.

As player development continues through the youth football experience, athletes advance to more position-specific learning in a game that more resembles the high school version. Here, players are playing high school rules with no modifications other than the elimination of cut blocks. While score is kept at the earlier levels, this is where true competition begins both between teams and within teams.

While coaches are encouraged to provide opportunities for all, it is at this level that players are vying for playing time and athletes focus on one position on each side of the ball.

This full-field game is the final step on a youth football player's pathway. The road for each athlete will be different, and parents will play a key role in helping to identify when their children are ready for the next step.

But through a guided transition with coaches taught to address players specific to the ages and skill levels they oversee, this will lead to positive experiences, enjoyment and the best opportunity to build each player's skills.





CREATING A BETTER, SAFER GAME

Here's 5 ways USA Football is helping your organization make football safer and more fun for your child.



HEADS UP FOOTBALL

USA Football's Heads Up Football program is a comprehensive approach to teaching youth organizations a better and safer way to play football. This player safety program includes instruction on proper blocking and shoulder tackling fundamentals; concussion recognition and response; heat preparedness and hydration; sudden cardiac arrest; and proper equipment fitting.



COACHING EDUCATION

We would not send our kids to school to learn from teachers who aren't trained. The same should hold true for sports. Through USA Football's online coaching education, the men and women who volunteer as coaches are prepared to build proper practice plans, instruct on the fundamentals and identify potential health risks before they happen.



LEVELS OF CONTACT

Coaches plan effective practices through a step-by-step approach to teaching the fundamentals so players can build skills and gain confidence in limited full-contact environments. Athletes start out working against air and soft, padded surfaces, showing proficiency in the skill before moving to player-on-player contact. Coaches should use these terms to designate the amount of contact for each drill.



ROOKIE TACKLE

By shrinking the field and limiting the number of players on each side, USA Football has developed a version of tackle football designed to serve as an introduction to tackle football. Games are played on a smaller field and with fewer players on each team, there's a higher coach-to-player ratio, leading to more learning opportunities to enhance skill development at earlier stages. This should lead to a better playing experience.



AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Learning comes in stages, and football is no different. Just as young baseball players progress from t-ball to coach pitch to the full nine-player game, USA Football's American Development Model takes young football players from the flag game to a modified version of tackle football called Rookie Tackle before advancing to 11-on-11 tackle, with the intent of a better, more enjoyable experience.

EQUIPMENT FITTING AND BEST PRACTICES

The start of the football season is an exciting time as young athletes across the country take to the field to enjoy America's favorite sport.

If your league has adopted Heads Up Football, your coaches should have received training from USA Football on how to properly fit each athlete with a helmet and shoulder pads. Throughout the season, coaches will check these fits and adjust the equipment accordingly.

As a parent, it's important that you recognize when your child's equipment needs an adjustment. Whether through normal wear and tear, following a growth spurt or simply the result of a haircut, helmets and shoulder pads need to properly fit throughout the entire season.

It takes about five minutes per week and can be done before getting into the car and driving to practice.

HELMETS

Have your child put on his helmet, using his or her index fingers in the ear hole with the thumbs on the bottom of the shell. While pulling the helmet open using the fingers and thumbs, roll the helmet into place by moving the helmet from the front of the head to the back, bringing the helmet down into proper position.

- 1 CHECK FOREHEAD.** Make sure there is at least 1 inch between the eyebrows and helmet padding and that there is snug contact with the forehead and near the temples.
- 2 CHECK EARHOLES.** Moving to your child's side, look into the ear opening and ensure that it is aligned directly with the ear canal openings.
- 3 CHECK SPINE ALIGNMENT.** Standing behind your child, the helmet should entirely cover the first two cervical vertebrae on the neck. Grasp the helmet lightly to secure its position and gently insert an index finger under the bottom of the helmet to feel for solid and complete contact.
- 4 CHECK CHIN STRAP.** Attach the chin strap with straps underneath the facemask and ensure that the cup is centered. It should be snug but comfortable.
- 5 APPLY CROWN PRESSURE.** Place both hands on the crown of the helmet and apply steady downward pressure, enough that your child feels solid contact with the top interior padding.
- 6 APPLY SIDE-TO-SIDE PRESSURE.** Standing in front of your child, have your child bow his or her neck while you apply a gentle twisting motion to the headgear to ensure contact remains along the side of the head and jaw pads. The skin on the forehead should move slightly but not allow the helmet to slide.

7 APPLY FRONT-TO-BACK PRESSURE. Grasp the helmet on each side and apply gentle pressure in a nodding motion. Make sure the helmet does not slide down on the forehead or neck but that the skin moves slightly with each movement.

8 CHECK THE FACEMASK. Ensure that there are two or three inches between the player's nose and the facemask and at least one inch from any part of the mask to any part of the child's face. Ask the child if any of the bars impair vision.

If your child's helmet fails any of these checks, report it immediately to your coach.

SHOULDER PADS

Have your child put on the shoulder pads but do not cover them with a jersey, then apply the following checks.

1 AC JOINT. Padding should extend approximately a half-inch past the top shoulder joint, and the caps should properly cover the shoulder ends.

3 THORACIC VERTEBRAE. From behind your child, ensure that the padding completely covers the areas from the bottom of the neck to bottom of the ribs.

2 XYPHOID PROCESS. The soft padding in the front must extend below the end of the breast bone on the chest with the plastic arches coming to the bottom of the bone. The two pieces of plastic shell should sit evenly without overlapping on the front or back.

4 CLAVICLE. Your child should have a comfortable range of motion while still covering the collarbone area. Upward motion should not pinch the neck. Pads should move with the body but not slide out of position afterward.

If your child's shoulder pads fail any of these checks, report it immediately to your coach.



WHAT TO EXPECT AS A FOOTBALL PARENT

Youth football organizations need everyone doing their part to be successful. That includes players, coaches, administrators, officials and parents.

Being a youth football parent is no small role. You are the caterer, the cab driver, the nurse, the laundromat, the team's biggest fan and sometimes the shoulder to cry on. That's a lot of responsibility. To make the season run smoothly, here are six ways you can create a positive learning environment for your young athlete and the rest of the team.

LET KIDS BE KIDS.

Children are not mini-adults. Most young athletes play football to have fun and be with their friends. They are not thinking about scholarships or even playing in high school. Most of them aren't concerned about what happens past the next play. There is enough pressure as is to perform in front of mom and dad. Try not to add to it.

BE POSITIVE.

Poll after poll shows that winning and losing rank far down the list of concerns by youth football players. If only that was true for all parents as well. Focus less on the scoreboard and more on the strides your child is making. They don't have to score the big touchdown or make an interception to earn praise. Call out the blocks they make or the times they slow a runner down so a teammate can make the tackle. Show them you are watching.



BE OBSERVANT.

Being positive doesn't mean you turn a blind eye. The coaches in your league have been trained by USA Football to teach proper fundamentals to all players. That means reps during practice and opportunities during games. All of USA Football's educational material – including important health and safety information – is available for free at **usafootball.com**. Check it out for yourself and know what you are watching.

RESPECT COACHES.

The more than 400,000 men and women nationwide who volunteer their time to coach football at the youth level do it because they love the sport and they enjoy sharing it with kids. They give up many nights and weekends with their families to spend time teaching your child. Your role is to watch, cheer and support. Let the coaches coach.

THINK BEFORE YOU APPROACH.

There will come times when you, as a parent, need to talk to a coach. Make sure it is for the right reason. There's an old adage that says to step back before pressing "send." The same goes true for face-to-face discussions. If you see a health and safety hazard, by all means step forward. If you are concerned about playing time, your child's position or something else, start by talking to your kid. Odds are the coach has already discussed it with him or her. If you must talk to the coach, be respectful, talk calmly and give the coach the time to respond.

RESPECT OFFICIALS.

The men and women in the striped shirts are there to do a job. They don't pick sides, and they certainly aren't getting rich off of their time at the football field. Players and coaches make mistakes. So do game officials. Let the coaches address those situations when they happen. It's natural to want to yell and argue, but that empowers the players to do the same. Encourage instead and watch how kids respond.

ADM PLAYER AND

The journey that every kid takes is a pathway for physical growth, maturation and behavioral development. Physical growth in height is tracked on a growth chart and is clearly visible from year to year. Parents and other adults are vital in this journey.

Similarly, we must consider the development of a youth football player in a similar way, where qualified coaches provide that pathway to learn and grow with the game.

Pediatricians, developmental specialists, physical educators, youth sport experts, sports medicine experts and the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) have spent years studying and creating an environment where young people learn fundamental movement skills, enjoy the sporting experience, feed into higher sporting ranks and remain physically active for life. This is called Long-term Athlete Development.

In 2014, the USOC introduced its long-term athlete development plan – the American Development Model (ADM). Several U.S. national governing bodies are beginning to adapt their sports to the ADM, including USA Football.

In part, this is because of the win-at-all-costs attitude that has taken hold of many youth sports and early specialization philosophies where children are limited to one sports experience from an early age. And because this is the natural progression of sports and how children find enjoyment within them.

USA Football envisions a future that embraces the concept of long-term athlete development to combat the epidemic of youth sport injuries, burnout, childhood obesity and physical inactivity.



COACH PATHWAY



Sports are a powerful vehicle for life – teaching fundamental movement skills that can be used across activities and fitness along with social and cultural competencies, creating a positive attitude toward physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

USA Football's ADM includes player and coach pathways. At the youth level, this includes a variety of entry points to the sport, taking the player through flag football and a modified Rookie Tackle before advancing to more traditional 11-on-11 tackle football. Players take steps in line with their physical and emotional maturity to get them ready for the high school game if they choose to continue their careers.

We believe in the right age, right stage approach similar to progressions in other sports. In baseball, the progression includes tee ball, coach pitch and then player pitch with the distance to the pitching mounds and bases increasing with age so that field dimensions match the size and abilities of the players.

With the emphasis on player development, youth coaches are essential for the successful implementation of a player development pathway. Youth coaches must be equipped to teach fundamental movement skills, football skills, game rules and life skills in a fun and age-appropriate manner.

Your league is a key piece in studying how the future of youth football will be shaped. USA Football will continue to develop educational initiatives for youth coaches to support your player's pathway along his or her own individual journey.

NUTRITION, HYDRATION AND SLEEP



Nutrition

Eating and drinking are just as important for young athletes as improving their skills and learning the right plays. All of these elements are necessary for success on the field.

Get your child ready for game day with some simple nutrition tips:

Carb up. Have your child eat a bigger meal two to four hours before taking the field. Incorporate protein and antioxidants, if possible, with plenty of carbohydrates. Try a pasta dish with lean ground turkey meat sauce or a chicken stir fry with lots of rice and veggies

Snack attack. At 30 to 60 minutes for action, give your child a small snack or sports drink. The key is not to fill the stomach but to satisfy it.

Never skip. We are all rushing around on game and practice days. If there's just no time for a full meal, grab a yogurt, banana or bowl of cereal while rushing out the door.

Colorful plates. Foods that offer a variety of nutrients help with both performance and recovery.

Three things to avoid:

1. **Fatty and fried foods.** Greasy foods such as hamburgers and French fries are hard to digest and just sit in your child's stomach.
2. **Protein shakes and bars.** Protein plays an important role in children's overall diet, but they should not consume a large quantity right before a running around.
3. **Artificial sweeteners.** These will stress your child's digestion, and the last thing anyone wants before a big game is an upset stomach.

Hydration

Children have a harder time cooling down during activity than adults, and the chances of them becoming dehydrated can become a problem, especially when fluids leave the body faster than they can be replaced. But what goes out must come back in.

Hydrating before a game or practice is just as important as during it. Make hydration a habit. One of the best ways to keep your child hydrated is to get them drinking fluids every 20 minutes during the course of activity and after it ends.

- **Before activity:** Drink 16 to 24 fluid ounces of water 10 to 15 minutes before activity.
- **During activity:** Hydrate with an electrolyte-packed sports drink or water every 15 to 20 minutes throughout play.
- **After activity:** Have your child drink chocolate milk as a post-workout snack to replenish nutrients lost during exercise.

If your child's urine is a dark yellow color, akin to apple juice, it's time to rehydrate. If you see any of the following dehydration symptoms, remove the child from activity, find shade and start drinking water or a sports drink:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| • Feeling faint | • Vomiting |
| • Headache | • Breathing deeper or faster than normal |
| • Fever | • Skin numbness or tingling |
| • Intense thirst | • Muscle spasms |
| • Nausea | • Extreme fatigue |
| • Lack of urination for hours | |

Sleep

Our days are so busy, especially practice and game days. So it's natural for kids to get to bed late after a long night at the field.

Between showers, homework and a youngster's natural inclination to avoid bedtime, it takes time to get everyone down and resting on their pillows.

But sleep is a key ingredient to a child's growth and development. Getting a full night's sleep improves overall health and provides a proper foundation for both performance and recovery.

Here are three ways that a proper night's sleep – at least eight hours – affects a child.

Ability to focus. A child who cannot focus will struggle to execute assignments, develop skills and improve overall skill sets – both on the field and in the classroom. Being fully rested allows kids to have heightened reaction times and awareness levels while making fewer mental errors.

Improved overall health. Sleep is a major ingredient to individual health, both mentally and physically. Sleep plays a huge role in reducing stress, limiting fatigue and simply feeling better in general.

Quicker recovery. Exercise depletes energy levels and fatigues muscle. Sleep is the body's opportunity to recuperate and get some gas back in the tank. Combining sufficient sleep with other recovery methods or treatments allows for quicker and more thorough recovery.

IMPORTANCE OF PLAYING MULTIPLE SPORTS

Multiple Sports: Facts vs. Myths

Participating numbers are dropping for many traditional youth sports in large part because children are focusing on a single sport at earlier ages.

Driven by year-round travel clubs and the availability of indoor practice facilities, parents are spending more money and more time for their children to specialize early.

Encourage your children to play a variety of sports while they have the chance. Taking part in a variety of activities leads to greater skill and muscle development.



1 **MYTH: Most college athletes specialized in one sport as a child.**

FACT: Eighty-eight percent of college athletes played more than one sport in high school.

2 **MYTH: The only way to build the skills necessary to play at the college level is to focus on one sport.**

FACT: Children who play multiple sports tend to be more physically developed than those who limit themselves to one sport. This gives the child an advantage in overall athleticism as they age and grow.

3 **MYTH: Young athletes need to play year-round to stay in shape and avoid injury.**

FACT: Athletes who play just one sport are 70 to 93 percent more likely to get hurt, according to a variety of studies.

4 **MYTH: Kids who spend their time in one sport are more likely to stay active throughout their lives.**

FACT: Children who specialize in a single sport early in life are more likely to burn out and stop participating altogether.

5 **MYTH: The only way to truly love a sport is to start early and stick with it.**

FACT: Playing multiple sports statistically produces longer playing careers, better confidence, improved athletic development and less chance of burnout.