

# The Myths of Youth Talent Development



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF  
YOUTH SPORTS

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

## About the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports

For over 30 years, the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports has scientifically studied the benefits and detriments of sport for children and youth. The staff of the Institute focuses on translating scientific findings about youth sport participation into practical training programs that have helped countless organizations to maximize the beneficial effects of sports participation for young athletes.

To find out more about ISYS and its research and educational efforts, please visit

[www.youthsports.msu.edu](http://www.youthsports.msu.edu)

*Advancing Knowledge,  
Transforming Young Lives*

*Educators want to provide opportunities for youth who possess certain aptitudes and abilities to maximize their potential. This is true in athletics just as it is in music or academics. Unfortunately, youth and high school sports have become increasingly professionalized over the past 20 years. Many parents and coaches are convinced that their child has special athletic talents that must be developed early to win a state championship, earn a college scholarship, or become a professional athlete. Ironically, researchers have found that parents and coaches often base their talent development practices on false assumptions.*

### **Myth 1: Athletic Talent Can Be Accurately Predicted in Youth:**

*Sport science research shows that it is very difficult to predict who will be a successful elite athlete from their performance as children and youth. It is true that there are some athletic prodigies who excel through all levels of sport. For the vast majority of children, however, early success does not predict later athletic performance.*

**Myth 2: More Is Always Better!** *It takes 10 years or 10,000 hours of practice to develop expertise in any field, including sport. However, these hours must be distributed in different amounts at appropriate developmental times. Too often youth sports parents and coaches are over training young athletes, which results in more injuries, later losses of motivation, and burnout.*

**Myth 3: Early Single Sport Specialization Is Essential:** *With the exception of a few early specialization sports, young athletes shouldn't think about specializing in a single sport until age 14-15. Even then they may still play a second sport for a change of pace.*

**Myth 4: You Cannot Have Fun If You Are Going To Be Good:** *Because the development of athletic talent is a long term process, research shows that elite athletes must fall in love with their sport in their early years of involvement. They need programs that emphasize fun, camaraderie, and skill development.*

**Myth 5: Talented Individuals Need Different Entry Programs and Coaching Approaches Than Their Less Talented Counterparts:** *There is feeling today that children as young as 6 or 7 need to be placed into special athletic talent development programs. This is not the case. All children should be encouraged to play multiple sports, develop fundamental motor skills, and have time to fall in love with physical activity.*