

For more information contact:

Sheryl Cash	847-384-4032	847-804-7486	scash@aaos.org
Lauren Pearson Riley	847-384-4031	708-227-1773	pearson@aaos.org

Nearly half of today's high school athletes specialize in one sport

Only 22 percent of professional athletes want their own children to focus on a single sport

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (March 14, 2017)—Youth single sport specialization—training and playing just one sport, often year round and on multiple teams—is a growing phenomenon in the U.S. A new study presented today at the [2017 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons \(AAOS\)](#), found that 45 percent of high school athletes specialize in just one sport, two years earlier than current collegiate and professional athletes say they did.

The new study—which involved surveys of 503 high school, 856 collegiate and 1,731 professional athletes (3,090 athletes, total)—also found that high school athletes reported a statistically higher incidence of sport-related, musculoskeletal injuries than college and professional athletes.

In addition, “the professional athletes polled in our study were statistically less likely to promote or encourage early sports specialization,” said study author Michael G. Ciccotti, MD, chief of sports medicine at the Rothman Institute in Philadelphia, and professor of orthopaedic surgery and director of the Sports Medicine Fellowship at Thomas Jefferson University. Only 22 percent of professional athletes said they want their own child to specialize in a single sport during childhood or adolescence, and only 62 percent believe early sports specialization aids in performance.

Among the other study highlights:

- 45.2 percent of high school athletes, 67.7 percent of collegiate athletes and 46.0 percent of professional athletes specialized to play a single sport during their childhood and adolescence. Single sports specialization occurred at an average of 12.7 ±2.4 years, 14.8 ±2.5 and 14.7 ±2.4 years, respectively.
- Current high school, college and professional athletes spent a comparable number of months each year training to play a single sport: 8.5 months ±3.4 months (high school athletes), 10.0 ±2.6 (collegiate) and 8.8 ± 3.3 months (professional athletes); and playing in games and tournaments, 6.1 months ± 3.3 months, 7.2 ± 3.2, and 7.8 ± 2.5, respectively.
- Only 61.7 percent of professional athletes said they think specializing in one sport helps an athlete to play at a higher level versus 79.7 percent of high school athletes and 80.6 percent of collegiate athletes.

“This data challenges the notion that success at an elite level requires athletes to specialize in one sport at a very young age,” said Dr. Ciccotti. “And while the link between early specialization and injury has yet to be clearly defined, our data may have important implications with respect to injury prevention in youth athletes.”

[Study abstract](#)

[2017 AAOS Annual Meeting Disclosure Statements](#)

For more information on preventing youth sports injuries, visit STOPSportsInjuries.org.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

With more than 39,000 members, the [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons \(AAOS\)](#) is the world's largest association of musculoskeletal specialists. The AAOS provides education programs for orthopaedic surgeons and allied health professionals, champions and advances the highest musculoskeletal care for patients, and is the authoritative source of information on bone and joint conditions, treatments, and related issues.

Visit AAOS at:

Newsroom.aaos.org for bone and joint health news, stats, facts, images and interview requests.

ANationinMotion.org for inspirational patient stories, and orthopaedic surgeon tips on maintaining bone and joint health, avoiding injuries, treating musculoskeletal conditions and navigating recovery.

Orthoinfo.org for patient information on hundreds of orthopaedic diseases and conditions.

[Facebook.com/AAOS1](https://www.facebook.com/AAOS1)

[Twitter.com/AAOS1](https://twitter.com/AAOS1)