

# Good and bad to playing sports as a kid



A coach who knows what she is doing is critical to an athlete's physical wellbeing. Lindsay Davenport having been a professional tennis player is able to use her experience to coach Madison Keys. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

**By Kathryn Reed**

Steelers linebacker James Harrison made headlines this summer when he made his sons give back trophies they earned for

participation in sports and not for actually winning something.

“Getting a trophy saying you are an all-star when you came in last place is counterproductive,” Walter Morris, Lake Tahoe Community College sports psychologist instructor, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It is counter productive for kids’ motivations. It contributes to a sense of entitlement.”

He added this could lead to believing because you do the homework or show up for an interview that a good grade and job are automatic.

There are more natural rewards that come with sports at an early age that go beyond being physically fit.

“Between 6 and 12 is when they start motor learning. That period of time carries over for the rest of their lives. Sports promotes balance, body awareness, and flexibility,” Alan Barichievich, physical therapist and director of Barton Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Sports can teach kids about their body, how to care for it, self-esteem, eye-hand coordination and other benefits.

A growing trend, though, is parents are starting their kids in organized sports at an earlier age. More are specializing in a sport. The era of a three-sport high school athlete is gone.



While pros like Madison Keys get coaching regularly, Barton Health is helping local coaches learn more than the sport. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

This leads to young muscles getting overtaxed. Overuse of muscles can lead to injuries, especially in young bodies that are still developing. However, those who play multiple sports are using various muscles in different capacities.

The other thing that limiting oneself to a single sport can do is lead to burnout, which in turn can translate to a sedentary life as one ages.

“I played softball in college at Notre Dame and I played five sports in high school. I’m a huge advocate to try to keep that going,” Caroline Barichievich, a physical therapy supervisor with Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said she feels resistance from the mainstream to have kids not specialize in a sport at an early age.

Plus, with traveling teams there often isn’t an off-season or the opportunity to play another sport.

"There is no sport I would tell a kid not to do if they want to do it, but there needs to be good coaching, and understanding of the inherent risk of potentially getting injured," Alan Barichievich said.

Through the years the Barichievichs' clients keep getting younger.

"We are seeing young people more than we used to. In our generation most didn't start sports until 8, now they start at 4," Caroline Barichievich said. "The competition is now elevated because you are playing for a greater number of years. With competition you are going to have more injuries."

Their bodies are being asked to do more than they were designed to do, according to the health professionals.

A bit of an irony is that once injured the athlete – young or old – has to slowdown. Oftentimes therapy will include doing a sport they hadn't done – like cycling or swimming. Looking at form is part of PT so ideally the injury doesn't recur.

An injury can also give a kid a break.

With so few people going on to play in college, let alone at the professional level, the drive by parents to have a child excel in one sport confounds many.

It's not just sports that cause concussions. Falling from the monkey bars can have the same result. What is different today from a generation ago is the awareness of concussions and the potential lifelong impact.

Local coaches are invited to the sports physicals Barton does so they can see and understand the movement analysis. If there are poor mechanics, this might be a precursor to a torn ACL. Prevention is just as critical, if not more so, than rehabilitation.

Like sports psychologists, the physical therapists see sports

as a positive beyond the physical.

“Sports teach life lessons, how to adapt, how to accept failure, how to accept success. That is just going to bode well for any type of life experience or career,” Caroline Barichievich said.