

“How Athleticism May Stunt Your Son’s Baseball Opportunities.”

It happens every year in Sioux Falls as well as in other communities across the country.

Scenario:

A young player who has been extremely successful in an organized youth baseball program tries out for his local High School/VFW/or Legion team. Since the young player has always been one of the better players on each team he has played on, the player and his parents are shocked and saddened on his failure to make the cut. Even though his mom and dad profess a degree of bias in their evaluation of their son’s baseball ability, they still have a difficult time understanding how the coach could not have been picked their son for the team.

Why Does This Happen?

Each year kids get cut from their high school, VFW, or Legion team, or they drop out when they are not as successful in baseball as they used to be. The reason? A lack of fundamental baseball mechanics.

The problem comes from young baseball players who are one-dimensional. They have athletic ability, but they fail to have proper body mechanics /fundamental sport specific (baseball) skills. Young players who are one dimensional (i.e. they have athleticism) often have depended solely on their size and speed to be successful on the lower levels of the game. They become successful early on but neither they nor their parents ever feel the need to learn the proper fundamental skills that are crucial in developing the skills that are required to play in high school or beyond.

One dimensionalism in a young player starts to appear around the junior high school years (puberty) when the other kids start to catch up in size, speed, and muscle development. When one adds in the ingredients of specific sport skill development (the 2nd dimension) these late bloomers who are two dimensional, begin to challenge the “naturals” in playing time and better statistics due to better mechanics.

Late maturing players provide a physical as well as a psychological challenge to young athletes who several years earlier, had been taller, stronger, and faster than their peers. These late bloomers have suddenly increased their height, strength, and speed. Physically they are now equals or superiors. Emotionally, this can be very difficult for a young player to accept. Rather than being “king of the diamond” they find themselves being passed by. The fun of playing starts to diminish while their frustration grows leading them to eventually drop out of a sport they once enjoyed success in.

From a mechanical perspective, it is critical that young players learn the proper fundamentals of the game. Parents often fall into the “athleticism trap” and must not be blinded by early success by virtue of early physical maturation with little emphasis on mechanics. Without solid fundamentals, even a player who has a high degree of athleticism may not be able to compete with success. Remember Michael Jordan (NBA Basketball star)? Perhaps the greatest basketball player of all time, Jordan was mediocre at best in the game of baseball. His skills simply were not good enough.

How can a parent avoid having their son be one dimensional? First, they should seek out professionals who can provide them information as to fundamental skill development as well as what skill area(s) their son may be lacking in. Second, take advantage of clinics, camps, and other opportunities that can assist their son in learning the correct fundamentals of the game.

The game of baseball and all sports demand not just athleticism but fundamental mechanics. By focusing on developing sport specific mechanics to compliment natural ability, parents can significantly increase their son’s chances playing baseball throughout their high school years and perhaps beyond.

Playing baseball without the fundamentals is like eating without a knife and fork. You make a mess. – Fundamentals are the most valuable tools a player can possess.

Dick Williams (Former Major League Manager)