

Don't join the club

Select leagues not the best way for athletes to participate in sports

I grew up playing organized sports, baseball, basketball and football. I was never one of the kids who played into the summer with a select team or played year-round with one sport. My parents worked nine-hour days and didn't have the time to shuttle me around Central Texas just to play a game I may or may not stick with.

I played in organized leagues for all three of the sports, but we only had one game and, at most, two practices a week. Money was also a minor issue. While my parents weren't struggling to get by, we couldn't justify the expenses of playing a club or select sport. Playing a club sport could cost up to \$1,000 depending on travel expenses, hotel rooms, event fees and the cost of food. It's time-consuming, it's expensive, and a majority of the time it's the parents pushing their kids to do something they don't want to do.

I played select one year of my life. It was basketball when I was 13 years old. I enjoyed it and I really improved, but in the long run it all went to waste. Our team was bad. We lost almost every game we played because of how much better the other teams were. To make it seem like even bigger waste, I stopped playing basketball the next year.

In my eyes, select sports make more sense as the kid gets older and decides to stick with one sport, but before it seems select is just a waste of time and money. What's becoming a problem now in the youth sports world is that select sports can define someone as an athlete and

person. I remember in little league baseball there were two different leagues. The red league was the league for the higher skilled kids, and the gray league was for the kids who were not at the same skill level as the other kids. You would have a short tryout and then they would put you in one of the two leagues based on what they saw, and apparently whom you knew and how much your parents donated to the league. If you didn't play

is necessary for all kids growing up. I am a firm believer that each kid should play at least a couple years of an organized sport. Not only does it socialize them, but it helps acclimate them into a learning and healthy environment, improves social skills and sets a good foundation for a healthy lifestyle. Most organized sports aren't insanely competitive the way club and select sports are. Some kids cannot be thrust into a hugely competitive environment at such a young age, but some parents insist.

It's become like this with high school sports as well. It's not that kids are being forced to play; it's that the kids are being marginalized based on if they play club sports or not. Many large high schools with a large student population take into account whether or not a student plays club sports or donates money or service when they are

making cuts and assigning students to their teams. This can lead to a great deal of conflict because students don't always have total control over whether they play club sports or whether their family can donate money. It's a method of segregating students by social class and not just their skill level. This can create internal conflict between the school and parents.

At McCallum I've never experienced a problem like this because of the diversity of the school and the different backgrounds that students and coaches come from, but at schools like Westlake and Lake Travis, schools with large student bodies and a bundle of money, it's be-



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coming an increasingly bigger problem. I believe high school sports should be more important to athletes than club sports, but now some clubs try to keep students from playing at their high school hoping to limit injuries and fatigue.

High school sports are part of growing up for athletes. People dream of having success under the Friday night lights and becoming the high school hero. It's not fair to threaten to kick them out of the club because they want to live a big part of their dream.

The odds of your son or daughter playing professional or even Division I sports is slim to none. To think about that in perspective will save a parent a lot of money and time in the long run. When a child is growing up, as a parent you will know if they have potential or not. As they develop, you will see their growth and aspirations, and you will be able to know if the odds are slim that your child will succeed enough in sports to make themselves an earnest living or get the degree of their choice.

Don't misunderstand my point. I am not saying don't follow your dreams. Every young athlete has the dream to play professional sports. I for sure did. But at some point as a parent you might have to sit your son or daughter down and be real with them and tell them they don't have a future in the sport.

Facing reality

Of 1,121,744 high school football players in the country:

1 in 40 end up in Division I football

1 in 325 college players go on to play professionally

Of 535,569 high school basketball players in the country:

1 in 17 end up in college basketball at any level

1 in 525 college players go on to play in the NBA

Of 474,219 high school baseball players in the country:

1 in 9 play end up in college baseball at any level

1 in 44 get drafted to play professionally

stats provided by elitedaily.com

select baseball with the league during the summer or weren't somewhat close with the league administrators and didn't have a parent who donated a significant amount of money to the league, then you weren't going to make the red league. Parents seem to force their kids to play these select sports. There's no reason for 6 year olds to play select soccer. At that age you have to ask yourself, "Are they really gaining much more from playing select soccer rather than soccer at a recreational league?" It's all up to the parents because they're the ones paying the money and chauffeuring their kids around.

In my eyes, playing organized sports