

The Realities of Your Child Playing One Day Playing Professional Sports

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For many kids today, becoming a professional athlete and enjoying the many perks of such a career - including celebrity-status, being on television, having their own sports card, or even being featured on a video game – is the dream of a lifetime! Most pro athletes enjoy the benefits of lucrative contracts, receive celebrity-status almost everywhere they go, live in big houses, drive expensive cars, and wear beautiful jewelry and pricey clothes. With that being said, is it any wonder why your son or daughter may be dreaming of one day going pro?!

Sadly, while all these factors are attractive to want to become a pro athlete, the reality is that for every young person who one day “makes it,” thousands of other kids fail to ever come close to fulfilling this dream. In order to further illustrate this point, take the following data into consideration: For every 30 million kids who annually play youth sports, only 5-7% of them will ever play past high school into college; and of all the current college student athletes across the country, less than 2% will ever play professional sports! Yes, you heard that correctly – 98% of the college student athletes you see on television will never play professional sports (and keep in mind, just playing at the college level is better than 93-95% of all high school athletes). If these numbers startle you they should, as most people I talk to believe that while making it to the professional sport level is certainly challenging, rarely do they ever expect the numbers to be that dramatic.

It is vitally important you know these realities as they should impact many, if not all, of the decisions you face when raising your child with sports in his or her life. Without knowing these statistics, many parents end up spending enormous amounts of time, energy, and money sending their kid to camps and clinics, purchasing athletic enhancement products and services, and worst of all – permitting their child to spend an unhealthy and disproportionate amount of time playing sports while academics, non-sport activities, and social interests fall by the wayside. When families are not educated on the realities of playing professional sports, they often end up very confused, hurt, and sometimes even angry when all of a sudden their child’s sport career ends after all the time and money that was spent over the years. In essence, many young athletes feel as though they are being fired from a job they love, at a very early age in life, the day their sports career end.

Children who invest a great deal of their life to sports at the cost of developing their overall self-worth, personal identity, and other outside interests leave themselves at great risk for a disruptive period in their life when they one day face sport retirement (an inevitable transition for all athletes – professional or not). In fact, research studies have shown that the more a child identifies him- or herself as *only* an athlete, the less he or she develops confidence in all other areas of his or her life. In other words, kids who only know themselves as an “athlete” quite often see little or no self-worth beyond sports. This athletic identity development becomes risky business when sport retirement occurs, as oftentimes young athletes are unprepared and find it very difficult to redefine who they in life are without athletics playing a substantial role.

It is important for all parents to know the realities of playing professional sports and discuss these facts with their children. Obviously, the challenge will be to keep the child excited and interested to play sports, while simultaneously keeping in check that the child doesn’t devote his or her life entirely to sports at the cost of greater self-development through other educational, social, musical, and artistic expressions. Having an optimal balance between sports, school, and other activities is the best advice for healthy child development.

Try to find time to sit down with your family and discuss your son or daughters aspirations with sports and see how realistic his or her goals are for the future. When the time is right, try to find ways to educate your child about the realities of playing sports into high school, college, and professionally. As you have this discussion, try to encourage your child to set goals in sport, but at the same time enjoy the process of playing sports and all the life skills that are learned by competing. With this approach, even if your child doesn’t “make it,” he or she will still become a better person because of the role sports has had in his or her life!

Dr. Chris Stankovich, known as “The Sports Doc” for his segment on Ohio News Network and featured column in Columbus Parent magazine, is a national expert in the field of sport psychology and offers an entire line of peak performance educational training products for student athletes, coaches, and parents. Please visit www.drstankovich.com to learn more.

