



The National High School Basketball Coaches Association is the National Voice of Action for High School Basketball Coaches

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION

POSITION PAPER

A. Title/Topic:

Specialization of high school student-athletes in one sport

B. Suggested Stance/Position for the NHSBCA

It is the opinion of the National High School Basketball Coaches Association (NHSBCA) that the “specialization” trend in America (focusing development in one sport and eliminating participation in all other sports during a student-athlete’s high school years) is detrimental to the total growth of young people and opens up the potential for higher injury rates and stunted development.

C. Brief Background:

Currently in our country there is a movement on encouraging young student-athletes to focus on playing and nurturing development in one sport only and to eliminate participating in all others at their schools. The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (with additional funding from the National Federation of State High School Associations Foundation) recently completed a study revealing that high school athletes who specialize in a single sport sustain lower-extremity injuries at significantly higher rates than athletes who do not specialize in one sport. This study was conducted throughout the 2015-16 school year at 29 high schools in Wisconsin, and involved more than 1,500 student-athletes. The study also showed that specialized athletes were twice as likely to sustain a gradual onset/repetitive-use injury as athletes who did not specialize, and those who specialized were more likely to sustain an injury even when controlling gender, grade, previous injury status and sport. This University of Wisconsin study focused specifically on physical affects specialization causes. The NHSBCA feels that there is also a possibility of some psychological, emotional, and social developmental damage done to young people risking burn-out, alienation from peers, and a misconception surrounding their own personal importance in the school environment.

D. Rationale and other thoughts:

It is the opinion of the NHSBCA that the specialization of high school age student-athletes raises the potential for physical injury in these young people, as well as impeding their psychological, emotional, and social growth during their early years of scholastic competition, and should be strenuously discouraged whenever appropriate. We recommend that school districts create and disperse information on this subject, and make it mandatory for all parents and students competing in their districts to read and internalize this data before making well-informed decisions. This can be accomplished in orientation sessions prior to each season. In addition, because most of this is brought on by the desire to receive athletic scholarships after high school, discussions and information sessions should be conducted regarding the opportunity for potential financial aid upon entering college before students compete in their home district. Naturally, every school will handle these procedures differently, but it should be imperative families confirm they’ve been made aware of this information, while also informed that this position is endorsed by the NHSBCA and the NFHS.

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