

SPORT SCRAPS: Multisport Matters

By Ron Weese

The term 'scrap' has a number of meanings. Most commonly used, 'scraps' are left-overs; bits and pieces left on plate or on the floor after the real business of building or creating something worthwhile is over.

The scraps have value, however. In sport, a 'scrap' is a colloquial term that represents a disagreement as in 'there was a scrap on the field.' This column will represent both uses of the term and it will review those scraps through the sport lens.

My first scrap is about multi-sport.

This is becoming an important discussion, not only in our community, but across the country and the globe. Twitter is on fire about it and this week's Sport for Life Summit in Gatineau has workshops and themes running through it on the topic. So, what is the fuss? Early sport specialization; that is, the focus on one sport, has been shown to be harmful to kids. Harmful in building positive relationships through sport, harmful physically from an over-use perspective and harmful from a skill developmental level as kids play one sport and learn only those skills related to that sport.

Notwithstanding much scientific evidence that shows that focusing on one sport is not the way to stardom or even excellence in any sport, it still happens. Parents point to the 'common sense' that when their seven-year old has been identified as 'talented' with a sport potential suggested, they should concentrate their efforts on that sport. Research disagrees. This common sense is really 'common nonsense.'

Playing a single sport all year round, participating in high game-to-practice ratios that focus on winning games, sport-specific off-field training and a host of other sport specialization characteristics is just not good for kids or sports.

Learning many fundamental movement skills that occur in a variety of sports is proven to be the way to build an athlete. The sport literature is full of examples.

By the age of ten, children should be able to run, skate, swim, hit or strike a ball with or without an implement with both hands and feet, jump and hop, fall and recover on slippery and stable surfaces. If they can't, they may never develop those skills with expertise. Why limit their window of trainability by focusing on one sport?

Parents, coaches and organizations should be promoting multi-sport participation by every child up to the age of 12. Three or more sports played in multiple environments is the goal annually. Once they learn to enjoy one sport over another, or they show an aptitude for it, reducing the sports offered to just a few after 12 years of age is suggested.

Sport Aurora Members represent a wide-variety of participation options and it is the parents' responsibility to introduce their kids to as many as possible and as early as possible to help build a multi-skilled, confident child who can and will 'play' for life.

If your coach or organization suggests sport specialization at an early age and wants extra practice and competition, then consider the benefits of putting that extra time and your family's resources in a variety of activities.