



## Off Season Means Off Season

The Law of Unintended Consequences applies to youth hockey players who have ramped up to 12 months of hockey each year and an endless series of games year around.

Many coaches and parents feel that more is better and by spending all of their time at the rink they will gain an advantage over other players. In the short run this may work but like any marathon, if you run to hard early in the race you will run out of gas and falter at the end.

Here are a couple quotes from very qualified experts that are available in a recent issue of *Athletic Management Magazine* <http://www.athleticmanagement.com/news.php> .

*Jack Parker, Head Men's Ice Hockey Coach at Boston University, says he is starting to recruit more athletes from out-of-state instead of Massachusetts high school and club stars who play hockey almost year round. "By the time I see these kids, they are bored, burned out, and often injured," he says. "There are more players ready to play college hockey in California and Texas right now than in Massachusetts because they don't play it year round. Specialization is killing hockey in our state."*

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*Athletic directors attempting to encourage multi-sport participation are often hit with a tough question from parents: "My child is passionate about his sport and playing it year-round is what he wants. What's wrong with that?"*

*"There's nothing wrong with being passionate about something—it's a great thing," says Adam Naylor, Director of the Athletic Enhancement Center at Boston University and a sports psychologist. "But just because a child loves something doesn't mean it's healthy to give them as much of it as they want. Parents need help understanding that kids aren't always the best judges of what's best for themselves."*

Youth coaches & parents need to recognize the value of off season. In Minnesota we are very fortunate that our high school athletics is structured in a way that not only allows for but encourages kids to play two or three sports. Youth hockey is not as lucky as kids seem to slide from winter season to spring season to summer training and then into fall season without missing a beat. Youth coaches are culprits in this increasing trend because they organize the off season teams and activities when perhaps the kids should be doing something besides playing hockey.

There are many things a youth player can learn playing other sports that will enhance their hockey skills. Lacrosse, baseball, soccer and football are great team sports that help to develop well rounded and balanced athletes. Sports like tennis, golf, and cross country all have aspects that can contribute to a developing athlete. A change in seasons and sports allows for kids to refresh themselves and come back to the rink excited to play.

It is hard to change a culture but it can be done one coach at a time. During the winter find a couple opportunities to give your team a few days off. Maybe reduce your scrimmage schedule by a couple sessions and have an intra- team competition for fun. Ask the players what they want to do on those days.

Jack Parker's comments above are very telling of what is happening to our kids. I personally know of two recruited players who went to college to play hockey as freshmen this fall and both decided to quit hockey. Both players cited burnout and many years of too much hockey and nothing else. They both said that playing hockey had quit being fun.

Even though our kids say they want to play every day, parents and coaches should draw the line and insist they do other activities and take at least three months off a year from hockey and make sure they keep the game totals to 50-60 or less PER YEAR NOT SEASON and let kids be kids.

Hal Tearse

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