

Baseball is America's pastime, a marvelous sport that attracts a variety of fans. Baseball is a sport that is loved and played through generations of baseball aficionados. But baseball is more than just a game, the old arguments and grudges with your family are forgotten. It's just boys turned men with their loved ones rooting on their favorite team. Baseball can bring and keep families together, even help draw them back through strain and strife. Although baseball is a family sport, the same sport that unites family members can cause injury in young children. Many amateur and high school baseball coaches are destroying America's future baseball stars. They lack knowledge on proper throwing mechanics, try winning at all costs, do not abide to pitching regulations set by different baseball leagues. The resulting effects are injuries and surgeries in children and teenagers usually suffered by Major League baseball players. The solution to a problem such as this one is to export good sense.

Many coaches care more about victories than the physical condition of their players. In 2003, Jeret Adair, a 15-year old pitcher for his elite traveling baseball team started a total of 64 games; he pitched more games than a professional pitched in an entire season. (Relin). A year later, Adair had to undergo reconstructive surgery from tearing a ligament in his elbow. In addition, James Andrews, Adair's doctor, performed similar surgery on 50 other high school pitchers (Relin). The USA Baseball Medical and Safety Advisory Committee has issued pitch count guideline for pitchers ages 9 through 14. It recommends, for example, that 13 and 14-year-old pitchers not throw more than 75 pitches a game, 125 pitches a week, 1,000 pitches a season or 3,000 pitches a year. But

those guidelines are widely ignored, and arm problems are on the rise as the summer game becomes a year-round game and players play in multiple leagues. "It's almost like a youth epidemic now, where kids are throwing too much and playing on too many teams and they are playing year-round," said Dr. Thomas Gill, chief of Massachusetts General Hospital sports medicine service and former medical director of the Red Sox. In Massachusetts, of 18 local varsity baseball coaches surveyed, 11 say they know of high school and American Legion coaches who use certain pitchers too often, putting them at risk of arm problems later. Many doctors, researchers and parents say culture has shifted to children playing sports at greater intensity beginning at a younger age. Today many young athletes concentrate on one sport and play it year-round, which causes underdeveloped muscles to "wear and tear," which can ultimately affect their ability to pursue an athletic career (Angle). It is extremely important for parents to be able to keep track of how much their son or daughter is throwing and to make sure that they are controlling it and that the athlete is controlling what their workload is pitching.

Youth baseball is a universe away from Major League ball, but youth coaches try to play the role of a professional coach. In John Reed's book, "Youth Baseball Coaching", he states that 98% of youth baseball coaches are incompetent, meaning they have no positive effect in their team's performance. Coaches in Little League and High School baseball teams are confused on their coaching roles. They feel like they have to bring intensity to the dugout or else they are not looked as efficient coaches. The goals between a youth baseball coach and professional coach are distinctly different. The goal of youth baseball coaches is to teach players to develop character, and work in groups through positive modeling. On the other hand, the primary goal of professional baseball

coaches is to win at all costs. Unlike youth coaches, professional coaches are compensated for wins, and they are allowed to make big league moves such as: matching up lefty and righty pitchers to face batters and calling for strategies to bunt or to hit and run. The main problem is that most youth coaches do not understand the true nature of baseball. (Reed) In fact, about 75% of youth baseball coaches actually hurt their team's performance by encouraging incorrect mechanics, and by lowering their players' confidence with criticism (Reed). It takes ten seconds to destroy a child's confidence by telling him what is "wrong" with his wind-up. Youth coaches need to stop coaching as if they are preparing their players for the Majors, especially when coaching young pitchers.

Coaches are not the only culprits for causing injury in young pitchers, endorsement deals and parents are the ones to blame too. In an article by author, David Relin, he contends that contract endorsement deals are the primary result of "the simple pleasure of playing sports being buried beneath cutthroat competition" (Relin). Endorsement contracts come with large sums of money, and who does not love money more than parents? According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, only one in 13,000 high school athletes will ever receive a paycheck from a professional team. Maine's former commissioner of education, J. Duke Albanese states that trying to attain an endorsement contract is causing parents to push their children towards unrealistic goals. Supporting Albanese's statement is director of the National Institute for Sports Reform, Dr. Bruce Savre, he acknowledges the fact that there is a horrible imbalance between children and the adults operating youth sports. Because of endorsement contracts, parents want their kids to play in leagues that operate like breeding centers for

future professional athletes. Overall, parents are pushing their children to extreme limits without there being a definite chance of ever coming across a sports contract.

Although parents may push their children to get a sport's scholarship, or land a sports contract, the children who are being pushed by their parents are ages ranging from 12 to 18. The children are much older and can speak up for themselves. Perhaps the player may also want to receive a scholarship or go to the MLB and has set extreme goals for themselves.

There are many factors that result in injury of young players. Coaches want victories and have their ace pitcher starting every game. Coaches have taught their players bad pitching mechanics causing for their player to place more stress on their arm when they throw. Parents want their kids to be trained like they are professional athletes. Solutions to this issue is having a rule in all youth baseball leagues to require the coach to have taken a class and a test on the basic fundamentals of baseball, including pitching mechanics. Also, there should be a rule mandating all coaches in youth leagues to keep a pitch count of every pitcher on the team and requiring the coaches to show the umpires the amount of pitches their pitcher has thrown, if the pitcher has thrown too many pitches he can be sent to play a fielding position or rest in the bench. This rule will prevent the coach from overworking his or her pitcher. All in all, young children should not have to suffer an injury just because their coach wants to win or their parents want them to land big contracts.

