// PARENT FIELD GUIDE

BEYOND THE GAME

A Parent's Guide to Raising the Complete Athlete

Straight Talk From True Athlete Performance

// COLOPHON

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This guide reflects the training philosophy and shared coaching experience of True Athlete Performance. It's written for general educational purposes and isn't a substitute for individualized medical, therapeutic, or professional guidance. If your athlete is dealing with pain, injury, or a medical concern, see a qualified professional.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

– **Introduction - Why We Wrote This**

PART ONE: THE FEAR OF INJURY

01 The Truth About Growth Plates and the Growing Athlete

02 The Truth About Overuse

03 The Truth About Early Specialization

04 The Truth About Strength Training for Young Athletes

05 The Truth About Recovery and Sleep

PART TWO: THE FEAR OF BEING OVERLOOKED

06 The Truth About Talent and the “Freak” Myth

07 The Truth About Training Speed

08 The Truth About Choosing a Coach or Trainer

09 The Truth About Club Teams, Travel Programs, and Showcases

10 The Truth About Scholarships and Getting Recruited

PART THREE: WHAT WE BELIEVE

11 Our Training Philosophy - The Complete Athlete Framework

12 How We Actually Train

13 The Parent's Role

– **Conclusion - Final Advice**

INTRODUCTION - WHY WE WROTE THIS

02

Every sports parent we've ever worked with carries two fears at the same time, whether they say it out loud or not.

The first is that their kid is going to get hurt. That the sport they love, the one that lights them up, is quietly grinding down a body that's still growing. That somewhere between the third team this month and the tournament next weekend, something is going to give.

The second fear runs in the opposite direction. It's the worry that their athlete won't get hurt - they'll just get passed over. Overlooked. Left off the roster, the call list, the recruiting board, not because they lack the drive but because nobody ever built them into the athlete they were capable of becoming.

Those two fears pull parents in opposite directions, and most of the noise in youth sports - the showcases, the private lesson upsell, the year-round travel schedule, the miracle recovery gadget - is aimed at exploiting one fear or the other. Sometimes both.

This guide is our attempt to give you something different: a straight, sport-agnostic answer to both fears, built from years of training athletes across basketball, soccer, football, volleyball, track, baseball, softball, hockey, and everything in between. We don't train one sport. We train athletes. What follows is what we've learned actually works, regardless of which sport your kid puts a jersey on for.

We're not going to tell you what you want to hear. We're going to tell you what we've seen work, over and over, with real athletes in real training rooms. Some of it will contradict what a coach, a magazine article, or another parent on the sideline has told you. That's fine. We'd rather be useful than popular.

Bottom line: You don't have to choose between protecting your athlete and helping them reach their potential. Done right, those are the same project.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

03

This guide is built in three parts, and you don't have to read it start to finish to get value from it.

Part One works through the fear of injury - growth, overuse, specialization, strength training, and recovery. If your athlete is currently dealing with pain, a nagging issue, or a packed schedule that's got you worried, start there.

Part Two works through the fear of being overlooked - talent, speed, coaching, club sports, and recruiting. If your athlete is chasing the next level and you're trying to figure out where to invest time and money, start there instead.

Part Three lays out how we actually train at True Athlete Performance, and what your role as a parent looks like alongside that process.

Every chapter ends with a short, practical “What We Recommend” list and a one-line bottom line you can act on immediately, even if you don't remember another word of the chapter. At the back, you'll also find a quick-reference checklist by age, a list of questions worth asking any coach or program, and a short glossary of terms you'll hear thrown around in youth sports.

> **Bottom line: Use it like a reference, not a novel. Come back to the chapter that matches whatever question is on your mind this season.**

PART ONE

THE FEAR OF INJURY

"I'm afraid my athlete will get hurt."

// CHAPTER 1

THE TRUTH ABOUT GROWTH PLATES AND THE GROWING ATHLETE

04

Somewhere between the ages of roughly 9 and 16, most young athletes go through a stretch where their bones grow faster than the soft tissue around them can adapt. Coaches call it a growth spurt. Physiologists call it peak height velocity. Parents usually just notice their kid got clumsy, awkward, and a little sore seemingly overnight.

That awkwardness isn't laziness or a bad attitude. It's biology. Tendons and muscles are playing catch-up to a skeleton that just changed shape and length underneath them, and the growth plates - the soft cartilage at the ends of growing bones - are more vulnerable to stress during this window than at almost any other point in an athlete's life.

Here's what makes this tricky: this is often exactly the stretch when a young athlete is playing the most, practicing the hardest, and pushing to keep up with a body they don't fully control yet. Volume and vulnerability peak at the same time. That's not a coincidence anyone planned. It's just how adolescence and competitive sports collide.

WHAT THIS ACTUALLY MEANS

It doesn't mean your athlete needs to sit out sports during a growth spurt. It means this is the window where attentiveness matters most. Pain, tightness, or a sudden change in mechanics during a growth spurt isn't something to tough out - it's information. A body that's growing fast and getting stressed hard needs more recovery, not less, and it needs someone paying attention to how it's moving, not just how hard it's competing.

GROWTH SPURTS DON'T ANNOUNCE THEMSELVES

Most families notice a growth spurt after the fact - a pair of cleats that suddenly doesn't fit, a kid who's eating everything in sight, a coach mentioning their athlete looks “all arms and legs” this season. By the time it's visually obvious, the athlete has often already been in the higher-risk window for a few weeks. That's part of why we lean on regular movement assessments rather than waiting for a growth spurt to become obvious before adjusting training.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Track growth, not just performance. A sudden jump in height or a stretch of rapid growth is a signal to dial up attentiveness, not a footnote.
- Treat pain, soreness, or a change in movement pattern as a conversation starter, not something to push through. “It only hurts a little” is still information.
- Don't wait for an official diagnosis to slow down. By the time something shows up on an X-ray, it's often been building for a while.
- Work with a coach or trainer who assesses movement, not just outcomes. A kid can look fine in competition and still be compensating in ways that add up.

// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: Growth spurts are temporary. How you handle them isn't - the habits you build during a growth spurt often stick for the rest of an athlete's career.

// CHAPTER 2

THE TRUTH ABOUT OVERUSE

05

“Overuse injury” gets used as a catch-all diagnosis in youth sports, and honestly, we think it's often the wrong term for what's actually happening. Overuse implies the athlete simply did too much. In our experience, the more accurate explanation, more often than not, is under-preparation - the athlete wasn't built to handle the load they were asked to carry, regardless of whether that load was objectively “high.”

Think about two athletes who each play 40 minutes of a game. One has spent the off-season building strength, mobility, and conditioning specific to the demands of their sport. The other has spent the off-season playing pickup games and not much else. Same 40 minutes. Wildly different amount of stress absorbed by connective tissue that was or wasn't ready for it.

The other piece nobody wants to say out loud: a huge amount of what gets labeled overuse actually comes from stacking. A kid plays for their school team during the week and a club team on weekends. Or two club teams at once, because turning down playing time feels like turning down opportunity. The workload adds up quietly across teams that never talk to each other, and nobody - not one single coach - has the full picture of what that athlete's body is absorbing.

VOLUME ISN'T THE WHOLE STORY

Total volume matters, but it's not the only variable, and it's often not even the most important one. Intensity, recovery time between sessions, and how well-prepared the athlete's body is for the specific demands of their sport all matter more than a single number like “minutes played” or “reps completed.” A well-prepared athlete can handle real volume. An unprepared athlete can get hurt on what looks like a light week.

THE “JUST ONE MORE TEAM” TRAP

We understand the logic behind playing for multiple teams - more reps, more exposure, more fun with different friend groups. But we've watched this pattern precede more overuse issues than almost anything else. It's rarely the second team itself that's the problem. It's that nobody involved has the full picture, and the athlete is the only one absorbing the combined total.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Know your athlete's full schedule across every team and program they're part of - not just the one you're most involved with.
- Build preparation, not just participation. Time in the weight room or on movement training isn't competing with sport time; it's what makes the sport time safer.
- Watch for accumulation, not just single events. A string of tired, sore, or “off” weeks matters more than any one hard practice.
- If a coach can't tell you how they're managing your athlete's total workload across the season, ask. It's a fair question, and a good coach will have an answer.

Bottom line: The question isn't “is this too much?” in the abstract. It's “is this athlete prepared for what they're being asked to do?” Those are two very different questions with two very different answers.

// CHAPTER 3

THE TRUTH ABOUT EARLY SPECIALIZATION

06

Somewhere along the way, youth sports culture decided that the fastest path to a scholarship or a pro career was picking one sport as early as possible and going all-in. We understand why that idea took hold - more reps in one sport feels like it should equal more skill. But the athletes who go on to have long, healthy, high-level careers overwhelmingly tell a different story.

Playing multiple sports through the middle school and early high school years builds a more complete athlete. Different sports demand different movement patterns, different types of decision-making, different ways of handling pressure. An athlete who only ever moves in one plane, at one pace, under one set of rules, is missing out on physical and mental development that simply doesn't happen any other way.

There's also a durability argument that gets ignored far too often. Repeating the exact same movements, at the exact same joints, under the exact same stress patterns, month after month, year-round, is one of the more reliable ways to accumulate overuse issues in a still-developing body. Variety isn't a distraction from mastery. For a young, growing athlete, it's often protective.

WHEN SPECIALIZATION MAKES SENSE

None of this means specialization is never right. At some point - usually mid-to-late high school, sometimes a bit earlier for a small number of sports with unusually early physical peaks - a serious athlete with real aspirations in one sport benefits from narrowing focus. The mistake isn't specializing. The mistake is specializing at 11 because it feels efficient, instead of at 15 or 16 because the athlete and the sport are actually ready for it.

WHAT MULTI-SPORT ATHLETES ACTUALLY GAIN

It's not just injury prevention. An athlete who plays a jumping sport, a cutting sport, and a throwing or striking sport across a year is building a broader library of movement patterns and a more adaptable nervous system than an athlete who only ever repeats one pattern. That broader athletic base tends to show up later as better body control, faster skill acquisition in their primary sport, and - often overlooked - more genuine enjoyment of being an athlete generally, not just a specialist in one game.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Encourage multiple sports as long as realistically possible, especially before high school.
- If your athlete wants to focus on one sport younger than most, make sure it's their decision and their passion, not a decision made on their behalf out of fear of falling behind.
- Watch for burnout signs - a kid who used to love their sport and suddenly seems flat, going through the motions, or dreading practice. That's a bigger red flag than a missed rep count.
- Remember that games test what training builds. A packed game schedule without enough training time behind it is a common trap, not a shortcut.

> **Bottom line: The kids who peak too early on a single sport often plateau early too. The ones who build broad athleticism first tend to have more room to grow later, when it matters most.**

// CHAPTER 4

07

THE TRUTH ABOUT STRENGTH TRAINING FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

This is one of the most persistent myths we run into, and it's worth killing directly: properly coached strength training does not stunt a young athlete's growth. That idea has been thoroughly contradicted by decades of research and, frankly, by what we've watched happen with thousands of young athletes ourselves. If anything, the opposite is true - a body that's stronger and more stable around its growing joints is a body that's better protected, not worse.

The injuries people worry strength training might cause are, in our experience, far more often caused by the absence of it. A young athlete with weak stabilizing muscles, poor movement mechanics, and no strength foundation is the athlete who gets hurt sprinting, cutting, jumping, or landing - the ordinary actions of their sport, not the weight room.

The key word, though, is properly coached. Strength training for a young, still-growing athlete is not a scaled-down version of an adult program. It starts with movement quality - can this athlete squat, hinge, push, pull, brace, and land correctly with just their own bodyweight - before any meaningful external load gets added. Skipping that step and handing a 12-year-old a barbell program built for a college athlete is exactly the kind of shortcut that gives strength training a bad name.

WHAT GOOD PROGRESSION LOOKS LIKE

A well-built program for a young athlete moves in stages: bodyweight control and movement competency first, then light external load with close coaching on technique, then a gradual, patient increase in intensity as the athlete demonstrates they can handle it. It's boring compared to what gets posted on social media. It's also what actually builds durable, powerful athletes over time.

WHAT WE ACTUALLY SEE IN THE WEIGHT ROOM

The young athletes who get hurt in a well-run strength program are rare, and when it happens, it's almost always tied to poor supervision, technique breakdown under fatigue, or a jump in load that outran the athlete's readiness - not to strength training itself. Compare that to the far larger number of athletes we see get hurt on a field or court with no strength foundation at all, and the risk calculation isn't close.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Don't avoid strength training out of fear - avoid poorly coached strength training.
- Ask any program training your athlete how they assess movement quality before adding load. If there's no clear answer, that's worth a second look.
- Expect progression to be gradual. If a program is pushing heavy loads on a young athlete quickly, that's a red flag, not a sign of an aggressive, results-driven approach.
- Strength and mobility aren't opposites. A good program builds both - a strong but stiff athlete is just trading one kind of risk for another.

// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: The safest thing you can do for a growing athlete's body isn't keeping them out of the weight room. It's getting them into the right one, with the right coaching.

// CHAPTER 5

THE TRUTH ABOUT RECOVERY AND SLEEP

08

If we had to name the single most underrated performance tool in youth sports, it wouldn't be a training method, a piece of equipment, or a supplement. It would be sleep. Most of the physical adaptation an athlete gets from hard training - the actual getting stronger, faster, and more resilient - happens during recovery, not during the workout itself. Skimp on recovery and you're leaving most of the benefit of the training on the table.

Teenage athletes, in particular, need more sleep than most families are actually getting them, at exactly the point in life when school, social pressure, screens, and packed practice schedules are competing hardest for that time. It's not unusual for a hard-training teenage athlete to need close to nine to ten hours a night to fully recover - a number that sounds almost fictional against a normal high school schedule, but it's what the body is actually asking for.

Recovery isn't only sleep, either. It's nutrition that actually supports training instead of undermining it. It's genuine down time between high-intensity efforts. It's knowing when a light day should stay light instead of turning into “one more thing” because the schedule allows it. An athlete who trains hard but never truly recovers isn't building fitness - they're slowly digging a hole.

READING THE WARNING SIGNS

Under-recovery doesn't usually show up as an obvious injury first. It shows up as a performance drop that doesn't make sense, a shorter fuse, trouble sleeping despite being exhausted, or a string of minor nagging issues that never quite go away. Those are worth paying attention to before they turn into something bigger.

RECOVERY IS INDIVIDUAL, TOO

Two athletes can do the identical workout and need very different amounts of time to bounce back, depending on age, training history, sleep quality, stress outside of sport, and dozens of other factors. That's why we treat recovery as something to monitor and adjust for each athlete, not a fixed number of rest days written the same way for an entire team.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Protect sleep like it's part of training, because it is. Nine-plus hours for a hard-training teenage athlete isn't excessive - it's closer to the baseline.
- Watch for the early signs of under-recovery: flat performance, irritability, nagging soreness that lingers - not just acute injury.
- Build real off days into the schedule, and protect them the same way you'd protect a game or a practice.
- Fuel training, don't just fuel appetite. Consistent, adequate nutrition matters more for a developing athlete than any specific food trend.

Bottom line: You can't out-train a recovery deficit. Eventually the body sends the bill, and it always collects.

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PART TWO

THE FEAR OF BEING OVERLOOKED

"I'm afraid my athlete will never get their shot."

// CHAPTER 6

09

THE TRUTH ABOUT TALENT AND THE “FREAK” MYTH

There's a comfortable story a lot of people tell about elite athletes: they were simply born different. Better genetics. A gift the rest of us don't have. It's a comfortable story because it lets everyone off the hook - the athlete who didn't make it can tell themselves they just weren't built for it, and the athlete who did can credit fate instead of years of unglamorous work.

It's also, in our experience, mostly wrong. Sports history is full of athletes who were nowhere near the top of their age group as young teenagers and went on to have extraordinary careers - cut from teams, overlooked by scouts, told directly they didn't have what it takes. Meanwhile, plenty of athletes who dominated at 12 or 13 never made it past their local competition, because early physical development isn't the same thing as long-term potential.

What we've actually watched separate athletes over the long run isn't genetic luck. It's the accumulation of thousands of hours of purposeful, well-designed training, paired with a mindset that treats setbacks as information instead of verdicts. Genetics set a range. What an athlete does inside that range - and how wide a range good training and good coaching can actually create - is a much bigger factor than most people want to believe.

WHY THE MYTH PERSISTS

The freak theory survives because it's convenient. It lets a coach who couldn't develop an athlete tell themselves the kid “just didn't have it,” instead of examining their own coaching. It lets an athlete who stalled out blame their DNA instead of asking hard questions about their training. Believing in genetics as destiny is comfortable. It's also a trap, because it gives everyone permission to stop working on the things that are actually within their control.

LATE BLOOMERS ARE EVERYWHERE ONCE YOU LOOK

Nearly every sport has well-known examples of athletes cut from a team, passed over by scouts, or simply unremarkable as young teenagers who went on to have outstanding careers. It's such a common pattern that it should probably be the default expectation rather than the surprising exception. If your athlete hasn't hit their growth spurt yet, isn't the biggest or fastest kid on the field right now, or got cut from something this year, that tells you almost nothing about where they'll be in five years.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Don't let early results - good or bad - define your athlete's ceiling. Development timelines vary enormously from kid to kid.
- Focus conversations on effort, process, and improvement, not on comparisons to other kids' current physical gifts.
- If a coach's explanation for a plateau is essentially “some kids just have it and some don't,” be skeptical. That's often a sign of a training gap, not a genetic ceiling.
- Play the long game. The athlete who's still developing at 16, 17, and 18 usually passes the one who peaked early and stopped improving.

> **Bottom line: Genetics loads the gun. Years of the right training pulls the trigger. Don't let anyone convince your athlete the second part doesn't matter.**

// CHAPTER 7

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRAINING SPEED

"You can't teach speed" might be the most common myth we hear from parents, coaches, and even some scouts. It's simply not true. Speed is absolutely trainable - what's actually true is that speed is hard to teach well, and a lot of programs that claim to develop it are really just running athletes through conditioning drills that build endurance, not explosive speed.

Real speed development is a blend of technique, strength, and power. Technique - how efficiently an athlete's body moves through acceleration and top-end running mechanics - can unlock speed that was sitting there unused the whole time, just poorly expressed. Strength, particularly in the posterior chain, gives an athlete more force to put into the ground. Power is the ability to produce that force quickly, not just eventually. Train all three and speed goes up in a way that shows up in games, not just on a stopwatch in a controlled setting.

One of the more common mistakes we see is treating speed like a single skill rather than a system with multiple parts. An athlete who's strong but has poor sprint mechanics is leaving speed on the table. An athlete with beautiful mechanics but no power to apply is doing the same thing from the other direction. Good speed training addresses the whole system, not just the piece that's easiest to coach.

A SKILL LIKE ANY OTHER

Think of speed the way you'd think of any other athletic skill - as something with a technical component that can be coached, drilled, and improved, not as a fixed trait an athlete either has or doesn't. Athletes who get dedicated, technically sound speed training routinely see meaningful gains, regardless of their starting point.

HOW WE ACTUALLY COACH SPEED

We start with an honest look at an athlete's current acceleration and top-end mechanics, then build a plan that layers technique work, strength in the right ranges and directions, and power development that trains the body to express force quickly, not just eventually. It's methodical rather than flashy, and that's exactly why it works - speed built this way tends to stick, instead of disappearing a few weeks after a camp ends.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Don't accept “you either have it or you don't” as the final word on your athlete's speed. It usually means the person saying it doesn't know how to coach it.
- Look for speed training that addresses mechanics, strength, and power together - not just conditioning dressed up as speed work.
- Measure progress objectively when possible. Times and metrics remove the guesswork and give real feedback.
- Be patient. Real speed gains, the kind that transfer to competition, build over months of consistent, well-coached work, not a single camp weekend.

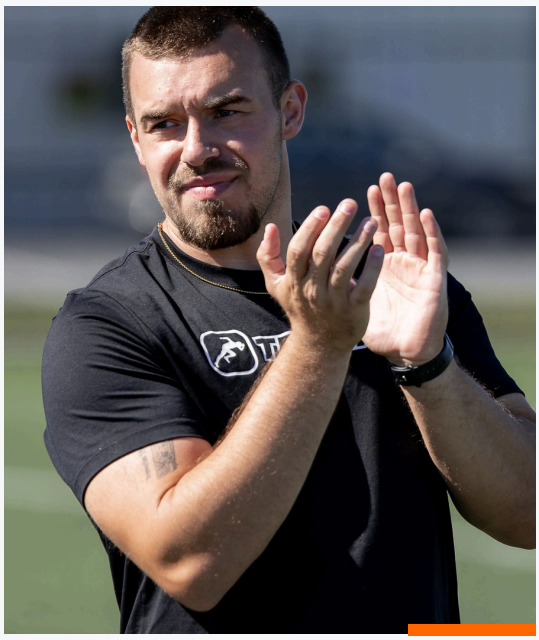
// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: Speed kills in every sport, and speed can be built in every athlete. The only question is whether the training they're getting actually knows how to build it.

// CHAPTER 8

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHOOSING A COACH OR TRAINER

Most coaches and trainers genuinely care about the athletes they work with. We want to say that clearly up front, because it's true, and it's easy to lose sight of in a chapter about how to evaluate them. But good intentions and good coaching aren't the same thing, and like any profession, the quality of instruction varies enormously from one coach to the next.



The uncomfortable reality is that a meaningful share of coaches and trainers are teaching things that are outdated, ineffective, or in some cases actually counterproductive - not out of bad intent, but because they never updated what they learned years ago, or because they're better at marketing themselves than at actually developing athletes. The parent who chooses a coach based purely on convenience, price, or reputation without asking any real questions is rolling the dice.

You don't need to become an expert in exercise science to evaluate a coach. You need to ask a handful of good questions and pay attention to how they answer. Do they talk about assessing your athlete individually, or do they describe a one-size-fits-all program? Do they have a clear explanation for why they coach the way they do, or do they lean on “this is just how it's done”? Do they welcome questions, or do they get defensive when you ask them?

CREDENTIALS AREN'T EVERYTHING, BUT THEY'RE NOT NOTHING

Playing a sport at a high level doesn't automatically make someone a good coach of that sport - those are related but different skills. At the same time, relevant education, certifications, and a track record of actually developing athletes (not just training talented ones who would've succeeded anyway) are meaningful signals worth asking about directly.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING BEFORE YOU SIGN UP

A few minutes of direct conversation before your athlete starts with a new coach or program can save months of wasted time, or worse. Don't feel awkward asking. A good coach expects these questions and welcomes them; a coach who bristles at being asked how they train is telling you something important before you've spent a dollar.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Ask how they individualize training instead of running every athlete through the same program.
- Ask what they do when an athlete reports pain or discomfort. The answer tells you a lot about their priorities.
- Don't choose based on proximity or price alone. The cost of a poor coach, in wasted time or in injury, is almost always higher than the cost of driving a little further for a good one.
- Trust your athlete's feedback. A coach who makes a kid dread training, even a demanding one, is doing something wrong regardless of results on paper.

Bottom line: Your athlete's development is one of the biggest investments you'll make in their childhood. Choose the coach the same way you'd choose any other important professional in their life - carefully, and with real questions.

// CHAPTER 9

THE TRUTH ABOUT CLUB TEAMS, TRAVEL PROGRAMS, AND SHOWCASES

Club and travel programs, and the showcase events that go with them, aren't good or bad on their own - they're tools, and like any tool, their value depends entirely on how and when they're used. For some athletes, at the right stage, they're a genuine asset. For a lot of families, they've become an expensive treadmill that trades development time for a packed game schedule and not much to show for it.

Here's the piece that gets lost: games test skill, they don't build it. A season stacked with tournaments and showcases, with little dedicated training time in between, is a season spent performing the skills an athlete already has rather than developing new ones. The athletes who improve the most over a year are usually the ones with real training time protected in the schedule, not just the ones who played the most games.

Showcases specifically make the most sense for a fairly narrow band of athletes - typically older, more physically mature athletes who already have measurable, competitive tools and are looking for exposure to close the gap between where they are and where recruiters already expect them to be. For a younger athlete who hasn't yet built the underlying skill and physical tools, a showcase is often an expensive way to confirm what a good assessment could have told the family for free: there's still development work to do first.

DEVELOPMENT BEFORE EXPOSURE

Exposure only matters once there's something worth being exposed. Prioritizing showcases and travel tournaments before an athlete has built real skill and physical readiness usually means the opportunity - the college coach watching, the scout in the stands - arrives before the athlete is ready to make the most of it. Sequence matters.

A SIMPLE GUT CHECK

Add up your athlete's training sessions dedicated purely to development in a typical month, then add up their games and tournament appearances. If the second number dwarfs the first, that's worth a conversation, regardless of how competitive or prestigious the club or travel program is. Winning at 12 was never the actual goal - becoming a better athlete by 16 is.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Ask honestly whether your athlete's current schedule is weighted toward playing or toward training. Most competitive families are more playing-heavy than they realize.
- Save showcases and high-exposure events for a stage when your athlete has real, measurable tools to show off - not as a first step.
- Choose programs based on coaching quality and development philosophy, not just competitive level or reputation.
- Remember that most of what determines a college or high-level opportunity happens well before the athlete turns 16 - in the gym and on the practice field, not on the biggest stage.

> **Bottom line: Travel ball and showcases are the mode of transportation, not the destination. Don't let the packed schedule replace the actual work.**

// CHAPTER 10

13

THE TRUTH ABOUT SCHOLARSHIPS AND GETTING RECRUITED

We understand why scholarships loom so large in a lot of families' thinking about youth sports - college is expensive, and a scholarship feels like it could change that math significantly. But it's worth being honest about the numbers: outside of a small number of sports, full scholarships are rare, partial scholarships are far more common than people expect, and the percentage of youth athletes who go on to play competitively in college at all is a lot smaller than the culture around youth sports sometimes suggests.

None of that is meant to be discouraging. It's meant to reset the goal. If a scholarship is the only reason your athlete is playing, that's a fragile foundation, both financially and emotionally, for years of hard training. If your athlete plays because they love the sport, and skill development is the ongoing focus, scholarship opportunities tend to follow as a byproduct rather than a target that has to be hit exactly.

The other thing worth saying plainly: chase development, and exposure has a way of finding good athletes. Coaches and recruiters are, at the end of the day, looking for players who can help their program. An athlete who's genuinely improved their skill, athleticism, and understanding of their sport tends to get found, sometimes through channels a family never expected. An athlete with a thin skill base but a heavy exposure schedule is a much harder sell, no matter how many events they've attended.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FIT

When recruiting conversations do start, resist the pull to chase the biggest name or the largest scholarship offer without weighing fit. The environment where your athlete will actually develop as a student, a person, and a competitor over several years matters more in the long run than the name on the jersey or the size of the check.

WHAT ACTUALLY MOVES THE NEEDLE

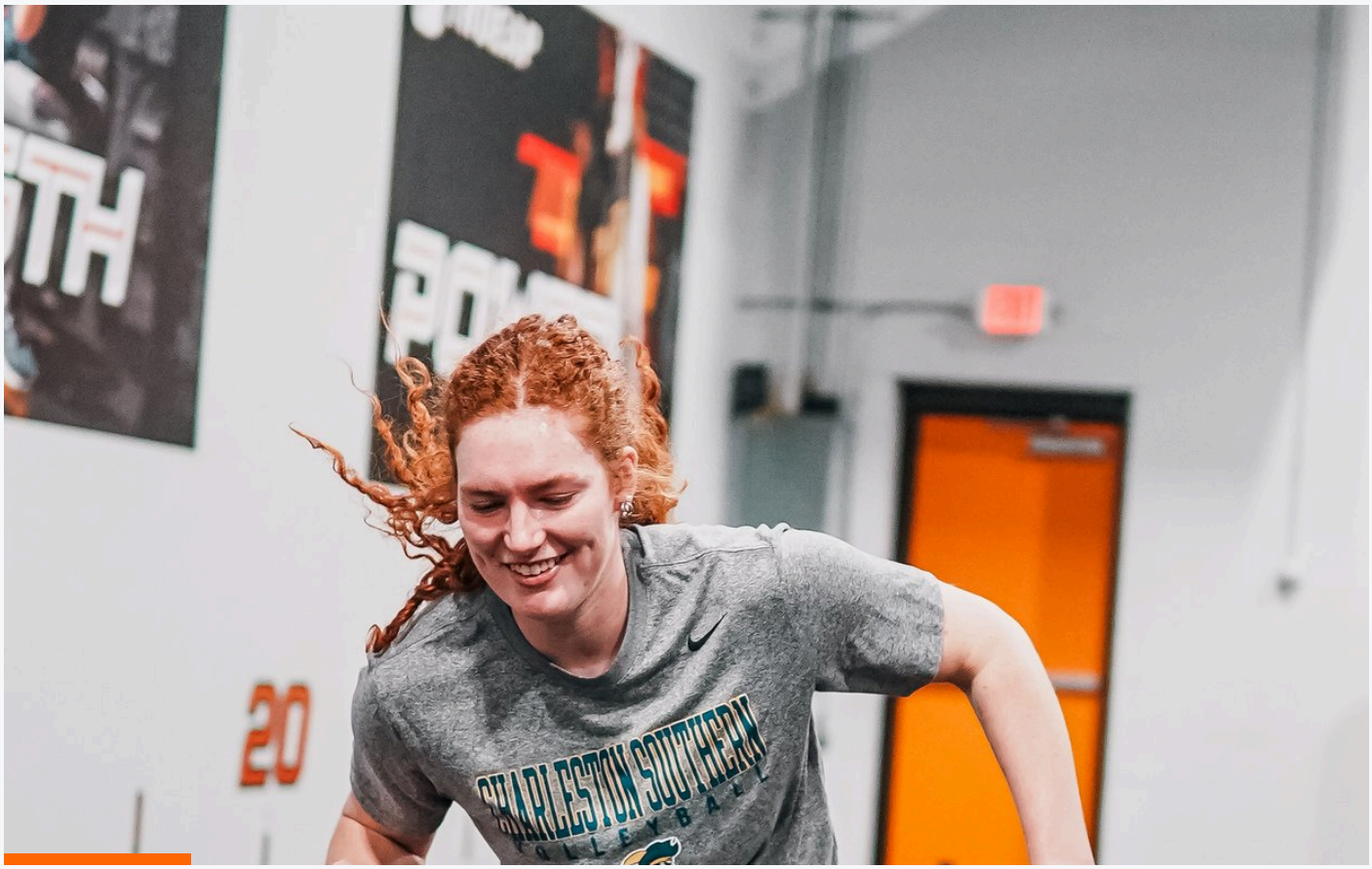
In our experience, the athletes who end up with the strongest recruiting outcomes are rarely the ones who attended the most events. They're the ones whose measurable tools - speed, strength, sport-specific skill - improved the most from one year to the next. Recruiters and coaches at every level are looking for trajectory, not just a current snapshot. An athlete who's demonstrably better this year than last is telling a college coach something a single showcase performance never can.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Keep the scholarship conversation in perspective - it's a possible outcome of good development, not a guarantee, and not the point.
- Prioritize programs and schools where your athlete will thrive as a person and a student, not just as a competitor.
- Focus your athlete's time and energy on skill development. Exposure without skill rarely converts into real opportunity.
- Be wary of anyone selling exposure or ranking services with promises that sound too certain. Nobody can guarantee outcomes this far in advance.

// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: The scholarship, if it comes, is a result of years of good development - not a shortcut around it.



PART THREE

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The True Athlete Performance approach to building the complete athlete.

// CHAPTER 11

14

OUR TRAINING PHILOSOPHY - THE COMPLETE ATHLETE FRAMEWORK

Everything in this guide points back to one core belief: developing a great athlete isn't about one dramatic breakthrough. It's about building several layers of capability, in the right order, so each one supports the next. We call this the Complete Athlete Framework, and it's the lens we use with every athlete we train, regardless of sport or age.

LAYER ONE: FOUNDATION

Before we build power or speed, we look at how an athlete moves. Do they have the mobility, stability, and structural health to handle training safely? This layer includes movement screening, addressing imbalances, and making sure the body an athlete brings to training is ready for what comes next. Skipping this layer to chase faster results is the single most common mistake we see in youth training.

LAYER TWO: ATHLETICISM

This is where we build the raw physical qualities that transfer across every sport - strength, speed, power, and work capacity. We train these qualities deliberately and progressively, always tied back to what the athlete's body has shown it's ready to handle.

LAYER THREE: SKILL TRANSFER

Athleticism only matters if it shows up in competition. This layer connects the strength and speed we've built to the specific movements, decisions, and demands of the athlete's actual sport, so the gains made in training translate to performance in games.

LAYER FOUR: MENTAL PERFORMANCE

Confidence, focus, resilience after failure, and the ability to perform under pressure aren't soft add-ons - they're trainable skills, and we treat them that way. An athlete who's physically ready but mentally unprepared rarely performs to their capability when it counts.

LAYER FIVE: IDENTITY AND CHARACTER

At the top of the framework is who the athlete becomes through the process - their work ethic, their coachability, the way they handle both winning and losing. This is often what parents remember most, years after the playing days end.

Bottom line: Skip a layer to save time, and it shows up later as a ceiling, an injury, or a kid who was talented but never quite got there. Build them in order, and the ceiling keeps rising.

// CHAPTER 12

HOW WE ACTUALLY TRAIN

15

Philosophy is only useful if it changes what actually happens in a training session. Here's what that looks like in practice at True Athlete Performance.

WE ASSESS BEFORE WE PROGRAM

Every athlete we work with starts with an assessment - of movement quality, physical capability, and injury history - before we write a single workout. We don't hand out a generic program and hope it fits. It doesn't, not for long, because no two athletes' bodies, histories, or goals are identical.

WE INDIVIDUALIZE WITHIN A STRUCTURE

There are proven principles that apply broadly - progressive overload, movement quality before load, recovery built into the plan - and we don't reinvent those for every athlete. What we individualize is how those principles get applied to the athlete in front of us: their current level, their sport's specific demands, and what their body has told us it needs.

WE TRACK PROGRESS OBJECTIVELY

We measure what we can measure - strength, speed, power output, movement quality - so both the athlete and the family can see real progress, not just a coach's opinion that things are going well. Objective feedback keeps everyone honest and keeps training decisions grounded in evidence instead of guesswork.

WE BUILD IN RECOVERY, NOT JUST LOAD

A program that only adds is a program that eventually breaks something. We plan recovery the same way we plan training - deliberately, and as a real part of the process, not an afterthought squeezed in whenever there's time left.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ATHLETE

- An honest starting-point assessment before any real training begins.
- A plan built around their specific needs, not a template used for every athlete in the building.
- Clear, measurable markers of progress along the way.
- A pace of progression that respects where their body actually is, not just where we'd like it to be.

// CHAPTER 13

THE PARENT'S ROLE

You can't be your athlete's coach, doctor, agent, and biggest fan all at once without something suffering - usually the relationship, sometimes the athlete's love of the sport itself. Knowing which role to play, and when, is one of the most valuable things a sports parent can figure out.

SEPARATE PRACTICE FROM PERFORMANCE

Development happens in training. Competition is where an athlete gets to test it. Judging an athlete's progress purely on game-day outcomes, especially at younger ages, misses most of what's actually happening - and it teaches a young athlete to measure their worth by a single unpredictable data point instead of by consistent effort and improvement.

PRAISE EFFORT AND PROCESS, NOT JUST RESULTS

Athletes who are praised primarily for outcomes tend to become more afraid of failure over time. Athletes praised for effort, resilience, and improvement tend to take more risks, recover from setbacks faster, and stay in love with their sport longer. This is one of the most well-supported findings in youth sports psychology, and it's also just common sense once you see it in action.

BE THE CALM IN THE CAR

The ride home after a game is one of the most quoted moments in every athlete's memory of their youth sports career - for better or worse. A parent who offers calm, unconditional support after a tough performance builds trust that pays off for years. A parent who turns that ride into a breakdown of every mistake teaches their athlete to dread the car as much as the game.

ADVOCATE WITHOUT OVERRIDING

There's a real difference between advocating for your athlete's health and safety - which is always appropriate - and managing every decision a coach makes on their behalf, which usually isn't. Learning where that line sits, and holding it, is one of the harder parts of this job. It's also one of the most important.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Ask about effort and experience after games, not just the score. “Did you have fun?” and “What did you work on?” go further than a stat line.
- Let your athlete own their sport. It should be their pursuit, not a family project riding on their shoulders.
- Speak up for your athlete's health and safety without hesitation. Speak up about playing time, positions, or coaching decisions much more sparingly.
- Model the perspective you want your athlete to have. If you treat every game like it determines their future, they will too.

> **Bottom line: The parents whose kids look back on youth sports with joy, not resentment, are almost always the ones who protected the love of the game first and let everything else follow from there.**

CONCLUSION - FINAL ADVICE

17

If you take one thing from this guide, let it be this: the two fears you carry as a sports parent - that your athlete will get hurt, and that they'll never get their shot - aren't actually in tension with each other. The same approach that protects a growing body also builds a more complete, more durable, more capable athlete. Development done right serves both fears at once.

That approach isn't complicated, even if it isn't always easy. Assess before you program. Build the foundation before you chase the highlight. Protect recovery like it's part of training, because it is. Choose coaches who ask questions about your athlete instead of handing out the same plan to everyone. Praise effort over outcome. Play the long game, because the long game is the only one that actually exists in athletic development.

We built True Athlete Performance around these principles because we've watched them work, across sports, across age groups, across athletes with wildly different starting points and different ceilings. The training methods can flex to fit the sport and the individual. The principles underneath them don't change.

Your athlete's path won't look exactly like anyone else's. That's not a problem to solve - it's simply the nature of developing a human being, not manufacturing a product. What we can promise is that a thoughtful, individualized, patient approach to their development will serve them far better than chasing shortcuts, no matter how good those shortcuts look from the outside.

// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: Protect the body. Build the athlete. Trust the process. In that order, and given enough time, the results tend to take care of themselves.

- True Athlete Performance

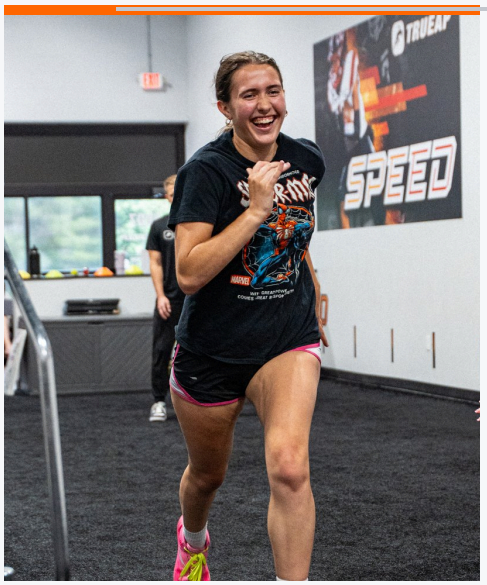
PART FOUR

QUICK REFERENCE

Tools to come back to all season long.

APPENDIX A - A QUICK CHECKLIST BY AGE

Every athlete develops on their own timeline, and this is a general guide, not a rulebook. Use it as a starting point for conversations with your athlete's coach, not a substitute for individual assessment.



AGES 6-9: BUILD THE LOVE OF MOVEMENT

- Prioritize fun, variety, and general movement skill over structured competition.
- Expose your athlete to multiple sports and physical activities - climbing, swimming, tumbling, chasing games all count.
- Keep organized practice and game time modest. This is a sampling stage, not a specialization stage.
- Watch for enjoyment as the primary metric of success at this age, not performance.

AGES 10-13: BUILD THE ATHLETIC BASE

- Continue multiple sports where possible; resist pressure to specialize early.
- Introduce basic bodyweight strength and movement training with qualified coaching.
- Watch closely for growth-spurt timing and adjust training intensity accordingly.
- Start teaching your athlete to recognize and communicate pain versus normal training fatigue.

AGES 14-16: BUILD TOWARD SPECIALIZATION

- This is a realistic window for narrowing focus, if the athlete's interest and physical readiness support it.
- Introduce progressive, coached strength training with real external load if not already underway.
- Begin more formal speed, power, and sport-specific skill development.
- Start honest conversations about goals - recreational, competitive, or college-track - since this shapes training priorities.

AGES 17-18: BUILD TOWARD THE NEXT LEVEL

- Training should closely mirror the demands of the athlete's target level of competition.
- If college recruiting is a goal, prioritize measurable, current tools over accumulated exposure history.
- Recovery and injury management become even more critical as training intensity peaks.
- Keep perspective conversations going - identity outside of sport matters more than ever at this stage.

Bottom line: These are general patterns, not hard deadlines. A late bloomer following a slightly different timeline isn't behind - they're just on their own path.

APPENDIX B - QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING ANY COACH OR PROGRAM

19

You don't need to interrogate anyone. A short, direct conversation is enough to learn a lot about how a coach or program actually operates.

ABOUT THEIR APPROACH

- How do you assess an athlete before you start training them?
- How does training differ for two athletes at different stages of development?
- What does a typical week of training look like, and how does that change across a season?
- How do you decide when to progress an athlete to more advanced or more intense work?

ABOUT SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION

- What do you do when an athlete reports pain or discomfort during a session?
- How do you communicate with parents about how training is going?
- Do you coordinate with an athlete's other teams or programs to understand total workload?
- What's your background, education, or certification in training young athletes specifically?

ABOUT FIT

- What do you enjoy most about coaching this age group?
- Can I talk to a current or former athlete's family about their experience?
- How do you handle an athlete who's struggling with confidence or motivation?
- What does success look like to you, for an athlete at my kid's stage?

> **Bottom line: Pay less attention to how confidently someone answers and more to whether the answer is actually specific. Vague, generic answers to specific questions are a signal worth noticing.**

APPENDIX C - A SHORT GLOSSARY

20

A few terms you'll hear thrown around in youth sports and training conversations, in plain language.

PEAK HEIGHT VELOCITY (PHV)

The period during a growth spurt when an athlete is growing in height at their fastest rate. A useful marker for adjusting training load and attentiveness to pain.

MOVEMENT SCREEN / ASSESSMENT

A structured evaluation of how an athlete moves - squatting, hinging, rotating, landing - used to identify limitations or imbalances before building a training plan around them.

LOAD MANAGEMENT

The practice of tracking and adjusting how much physical stress (volume, intensity, frequency) an athlete is exposed to, with the goal of matching stress to their current capacity.

POSTERIOR CHAIN

The muscles along the back of the body - glutes, hamstrings, and lower back - that play an outsized role in speed, power, and protecting the body from many common sport injuries.

SAMPLING YEARS

A term used in athletic development for the childhood years, typically before the early teens, when broad exposure to multiple sports and movement types builds a foundation for later specialization.

WORK CAPACITY

An athlete's ability to sustain effort and recover across a training session, game, or season. Distinct from raw strength or speed, and highly trainable.

PERIODIZATION

The practice of planning training in structured phases across a season or year, so intensity, volume, and focus shift deliberately rather than staying flat or random.

APPENDIX D - WHEN TO SEE A PROFESSIONAL, NOT JUST A COACH

21

Most soreness and fatigue in a training athlete is normal and resolves with basic rest and recovery. Some signs, though, are worth a visit to a physical therapist, athletic trainer, or physician rather than waiting it out. This isn't a diagnostic tool, and it isn't a substitute for professional judgment - it's a prompt to take the next step sooner rather than later.

SEE A PROFESSIONAL IF YOUR ATHLETE HAS...

- Pain that persists beyond a few days of rest, or that returns as soon as activity resumes.
- Pain that changes how they move - a limp, a hitch, favoring one side, altered mechanics.
- Swelling, visible asymmetry, or a joint that feels unstable.
- Pain that wakes them up at night or is present even at rest.
- A sudden drop in performance or velocity/speed that doesn't have an obvious explanation.
- Any injury involving a pop, sudden sharp pain, or inability to bear weight or continue.

A SIMPLE RULE OF THUMB

If you find yourself asking “should we get this looked at?” more than once about the same issue, the answer is almost always yes. Waiting rarely makes an unclear situation clearer on its own, and early attention is nearly always cheaper - in time, money, and missed development - than late attention.

// BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line: We'd rather see a family get an issue checked out and hear “it's nothing serious” than skip the visit and find out later it wasn't nothing.

ABOUT TRUE ATHLETE PERFORMANCE

22

True Athlete Performance works with young athletes across sports to build the physical foundation - strength, speed, power, and durability - that supports a long, healthy athletic career. We partner with families who want their athlete developed the right way: assessed as an individual, trained with a plan, and coached by people who care as much about who that athlete becomes as what they achieve.

If this guide raised a question specific to your athlete, we'd rather talk it through directly than leave you guessing. Reach out to your local True Athlete Performance coaching team any time.