

Too many pitches can damage young arms

Dear Mom and Dad,

Why did you let me throw 200 pitches in a little league baseball game? The doctor said I have to get surgery on my elbow now because I threw too many pitches. I told you my arm hurt, but instead you both rolled your eyes. You told me to be “tough and quit whining.”

You told me little league would be fun. What part of my arm hurting so bad that I cannot sleep at night is fun? How am I going to finish my homework?

Fun would be being able to use my body the rest of the year for other sports and games. I wish I could ride my bike. I don't want to play baseball again, ever.

Thanks for living your life vicariously through me. Thanks for using me so you could brag about how good I am at baseball. Thanks for giving in to peer pressure and for not really thinking things through.

Love, Scarred Son.

Although this particular letter is fictional, the experience is not. We do not often hear these types of stories because they go against the narrative that sports are

inherently fun. As a result of this type of experience, young athletes quit, undergo major surgery, and report conflict with their parents.

With baseball season in full swing, now is a good time for some tips on how to avoid bad experiences. One of the leaders in research on baseball pitching is the American Sports Medicine Institute.

For more than 20 years, ASMI has been conducting research on baseball, in particular pitchers and youth athletes. The ASMI's Position Statement for Youth Baseball Pitchers offers several recommendations.

For example, they recommend all youth pitchers limit the number of innings pitched in games to less than 100 per calendar year. Since many youth pitchers participate on school sponsored teams and summer leagues, racking up more than 100 innings in a year is possible, if not likely.

The ASMI also recommends youth pitchers

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take more rest in between starts as the number of pitches per game increases. That is, the more you throw, the more rest you need to heal.

Throwing, like other bodily movements, results in trauma to the body. If too much trauma occurs, then debilitating injuries may result. Pitchers, parents and coaches should recognize the signs and symptoms of pain and fatigue.

This is often a challenge as even young athletes are taught to ignore pain in order to be tough or to not let the team down. Since youngsters learn to fight through the pain, they can also learn that no pain is sane after all.

One of the major differences between youth and professional pitchers is that the latter are able to throw with the same technique more consistently. Youth pitchers' mechanics are more erratic.

It appears that strength and pitching experience would account for these differences. This difference means young pitchers should spend more time working on mechanics and engaging in strength and conditioning.

Further consideration needs to be given if a pitcher also plays in the field. For example, the ASMI recommends the pitcher should not also be a catcher. The pitcher-catcher combination often results in an increased total number of throws.

These seemingly common sense

recommendations may seem a bit restrictive to overzealous parents, coaches and league directors. To the young athletes who want a good sports experience and protect their short- and long-term health, these recommendations are a home run.

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