



Too Many Games

Posted on June 25, 2013 by [Alan Stein](#)

I am in my 14th year as a full-time, professional basketball-specific strength & conditioning coach.

This is my calling for 2 reasons:

I love the game of basketball

I am passionate about positively influencing young people

My mission is to share my philosophy of safe, purposeful and productive training with as many players and coaches as possible. I want to be a global authority on improving basketball athleticism.

But as far as my actual legacy, I want to pioneer change to the current youth development model in the United States. That's how I want to be remembered professionally.

I certainly don't think the system is totally dysfunctional. But it absolutely needs some repair.

In the U.S., we tend to measure our basketball prowess by Olympic Gold Medals and NBA All-Stars. And by only using that barometer, we're doing just fine, right?

But that doesn't paint the full picture.

So the real question is, are we successful because of what we do or in spite of what we do?

As I see it, there are 3 main culprits that are holding back youth basketball development:

1. Too many games (and not enough development)
2. Too much focus on rankings and exposure
3. Too little emphasis on coaching education (primarily at the younger levels)

This post will focus on problem #1. Follow up posts will tackle #2 and #3, so make sure you check back.

I know tons of kids across the country who play more games in a calendar year than LeBron James.

That is a fundamental problem for 2 reasons:

1. Wear and tear on their growing bodies
2. Lack of emphasis on development (skill work, movement training, etc.)

NBA players have a distinct off-season. College players have a distinct off-season. Youth and high school players don't (anymore). Does anyone else see that as a problem? With the rise of



AAU/club basketball in the spring and summer... as a popular Nike t-shirt boasts... 'There is no off-season.'

As far as wear and tear is concerned, the human body is similar to car. No matter how expensive a car is, or how well you take care of it, when it starts to hit 150,000+ miles on the odometer... it begins to have problems. Many times these problems are minor... but they are problems nonetheless. The same holds true for a

basketball player's body. No matter how good of shape a player is in... if they play too much... they will start to have issues. Sore knees. Tweaked ankles. Tight lower back.

Young players are putting too many 'miles' on their bodies! They are wearing their bodies out. This contributes to both overuse injuries (tendonitis) and acute injuries (ACL tears). The fact that 9th graders can be seen icing their knees is a travesty. That should be reserved for old folks like me!

While I don't have the medical expertise to back this up, I firmly believe that Derrick Rose and Russell Westbrook's knee injuries (among a dozen others) can be partially attributed to the fact their tendons, ligaments and joints had too many miles on them! As athletic as they were, their foundation was made of cards.



They obviously have the best of the best now (access to elite strength & conditioning coaches, athletic trainers, equipment, etc.), but they certainly didn't for the first 20 years of their life.

In addition to wearing players out, playing too many games hinders development and stunts progress. Many youth and high school players that I've talked to spend 80-90% of their time playing games and only 10-20% working out and training. That ratio is backwards!

Players should spend the bulk of their time in the gym, working on their game. They should be going through purposeful skill development and performance enhancement workouts. Games should be the icing on the cake... not the cake itself!

This issue is particular sensitive to me because I travel the world conducting my Cutting Edge Clinics as way to preach the gospel of sound training. I can't tell you how many times I've had a parent or coach tell me, 'We'd love to attend, but we have games that weekend.' To which I reply, 'Do you have games the weekend before?' (Yes) 'Do you have games the weekend after?'



(Yes) 'So to clarify, you would rather play another set of games than to set aside one day to learn the drills, exercises and concepts that will lessen the occurrence and severity of injury to your players and allow them to perform their basketball skills at a higher level?'

Sadly, still many of them choose games over development.

This needs to be the first paradigm shift to correcting our current youth development model.

Now, I don't want to be that guy. You know the guy... the one who puts his feet on his desk, crosses his arms, and tells everyone what the problem is. I want to find solutions!

So what do I suggest?

I think parents and coaches need to reevaluate their off-season plans and restructure their schedules to focus more on development (working out and training) and less on playing.

I think players need to take control of their own destiny and make the effort to get better... on their own... without referees and jerseys.

I think the NCAA should strongly consider steps to regulate the number of games youth players should be allowed to play in.

And me? I will keep spreading awareness on this issue through every platform I can.

In my next post I will offer my thoughts on rankings and exposure.

Please share this blog with the parents and coaches that need to hear it.

The movement has already begun...

Alan Stein

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<http://www.About.me/AlanStein>