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# Youth Sports Specialisation

## From a Sports Physiotherapy Perspective

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## Brisbane 2032

Olympic and Paralympic  
Games Host

*Queensland*

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# What is Specialisation in Youth Sports?

Specialisation is considered when some or all of the following elements are met: (Myer et al. 2015)



Participation in a sport for greater than 8 months of the year that includes regular organized practices, competitions, and/or other structured training.



The athlete may have limited or ended their participation in other sports, or have only ever participated in one sport, to enable focused participation in a single sport



Restricts opportunities or time available for other activities, such as participation in other sports, academics, extracurricular activities, time with friends, and community engagement

*Early Specialisation:* Specialisation in a single sport <12 years old



# Beliefs and Attitudes Around Specialisation

## Athlete

To be better at sport

To make college team

Developing life skills

Having fun

Winning

Increasing chances of playing  
professionally

Increasing chances of obtaining  
college scholarship

*(Brooks et al. 2018)*

## Parental

Parental beliefs strongly  
correlated with specialisation  
status of child

47% of parents believed best  
age to specialise was between  
5-13 years old

Majority of parents believed it  
would increase success

*(Strosser 2021)*

## Coaches

95.1% of coaches find  
specialization at least 'a little'  
concerning

74.3% of coaches at least 'very  
concerned' about parental  
behavior

Coach main driver for intensive  
training in swimming, tennis,  
gymnastics and soccer, all <10  
years old

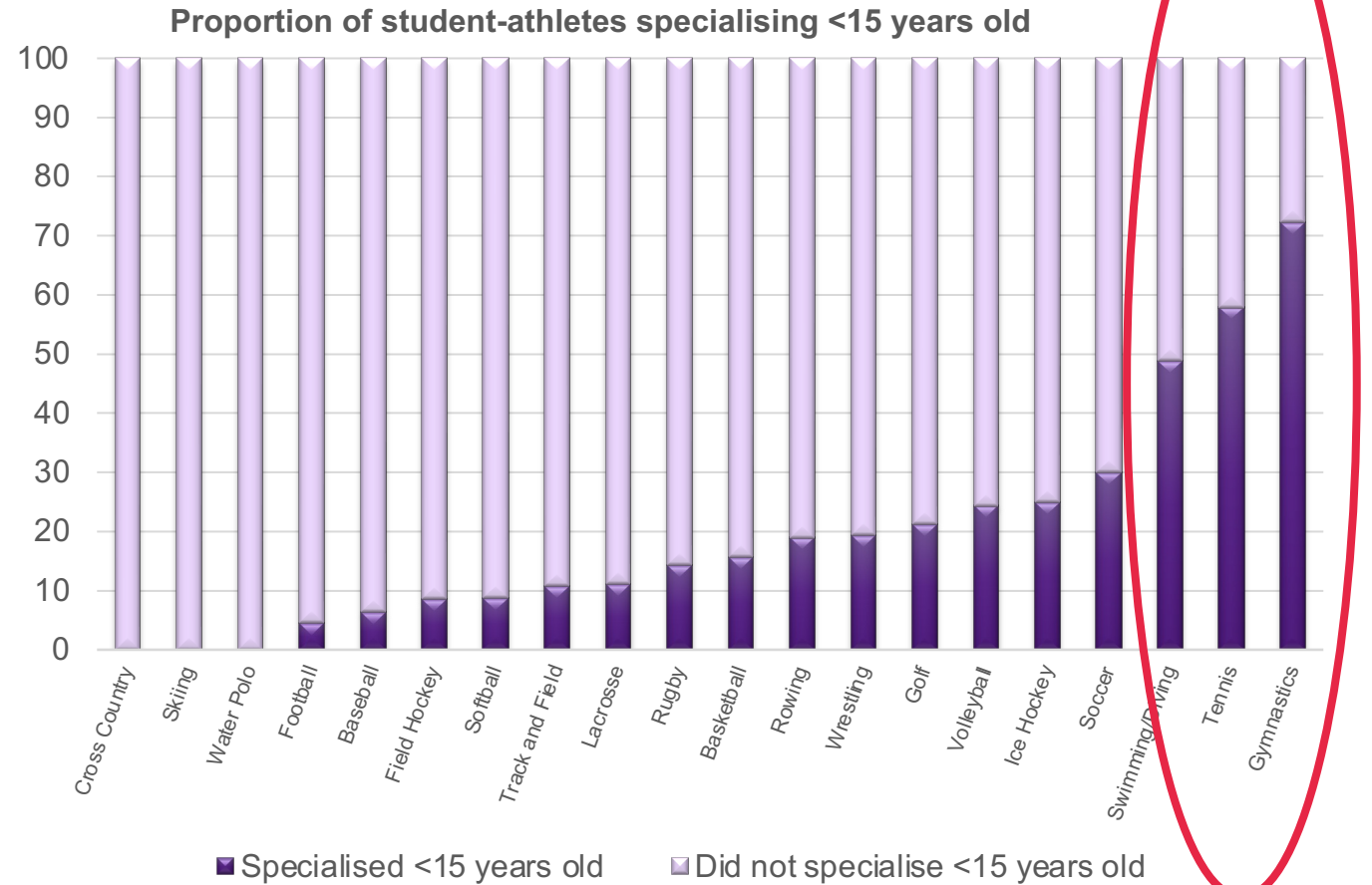
*(Post et al. 2020, Baxter-Jones et al. 2003)*

# Does specializing younger lead to success

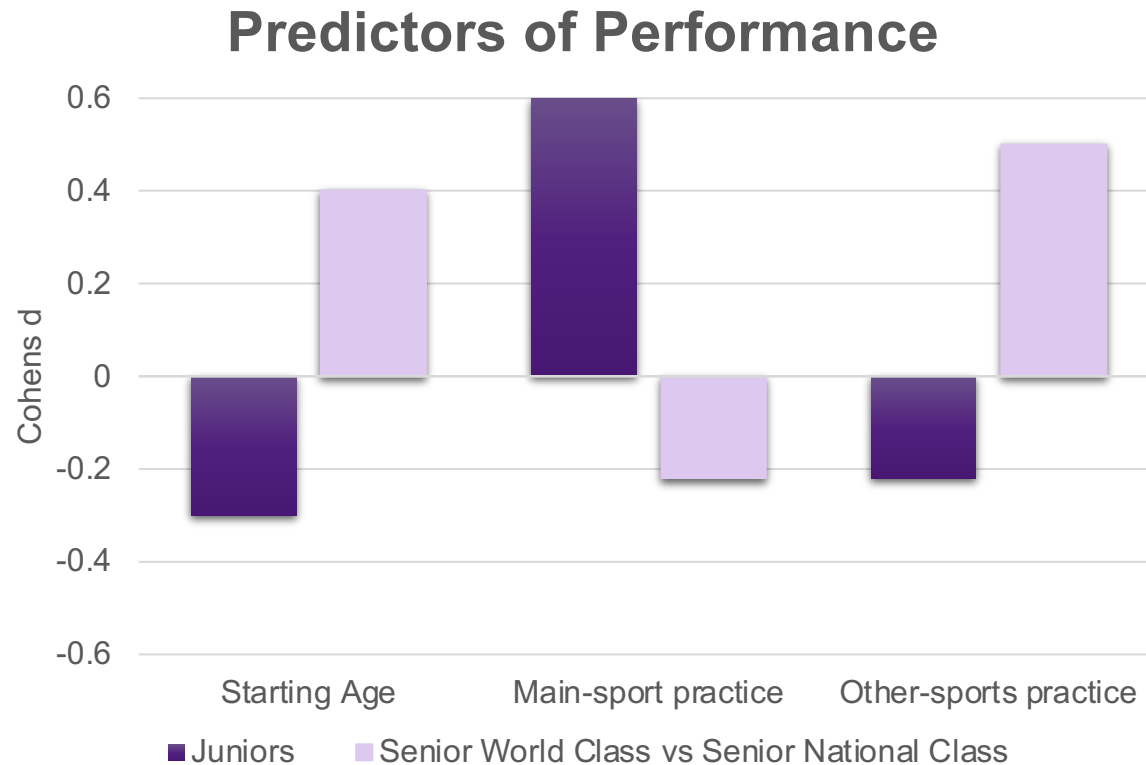
## Early Sport Specialization Among Former National Collegiate Athletic Association Athletes

### Trends, Scholarship Attainment, Injury, and Attrition

Caitlin M. Rugg,<sup>\*\*†</sup> MD, MS, Monica J. Coughlan,<sup>‡</sup> MD, Justine N. Li,<sup>‡</sup> Sharon L. Hame,<sup>§</sup> MD, and Brian T. Feeley,<sup>‡</sup> MD  
*Investigation performed at University of California–San Francisco, San Francisco, California, USA*



# Does specializing younger result in success?

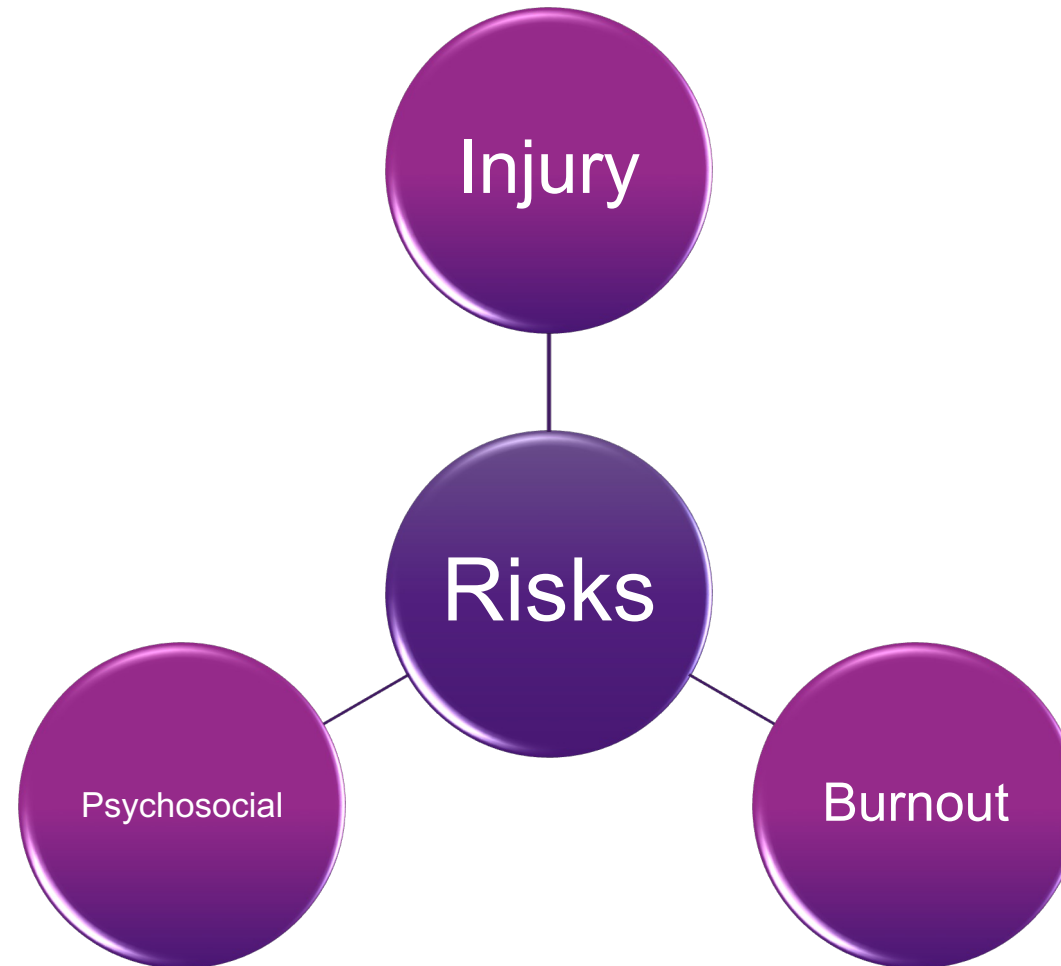


## Predictors of Junior Versus Senior Elite Performance are Opposite: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Participation Patterns

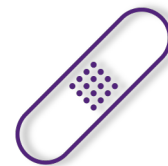
Michael Barth<sup>1,2</sup> · Arne Güllich<sup>3</sup> · Brooke N. Macnamara<sup>4</sup> · David Z. Hambrick<sup>5</sup>

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# Risks of Earlier Specialisation



# Risks of Earlier Specialisation



Only slightly higher risk of overall injury



More likely to suffer 'serious' overuse injuries



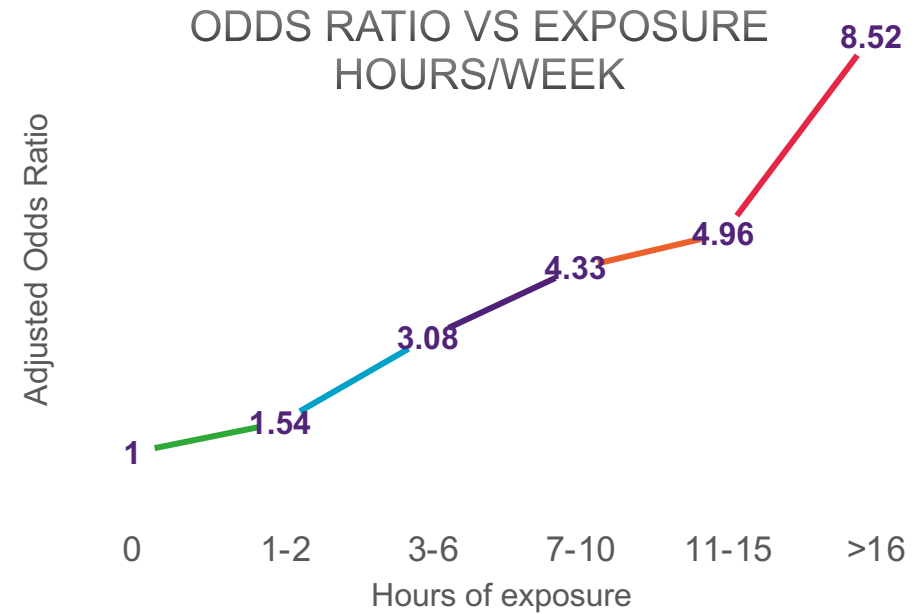
Volume is key



# Risks of Earlier Specialisation

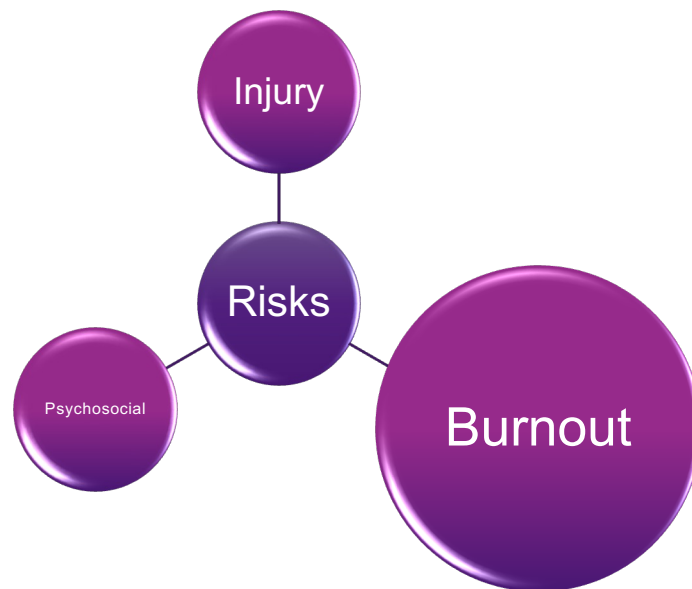


Volume is key



(Rose et al. 2008)

# Risks of Earlier Specialisation



No difference in career length

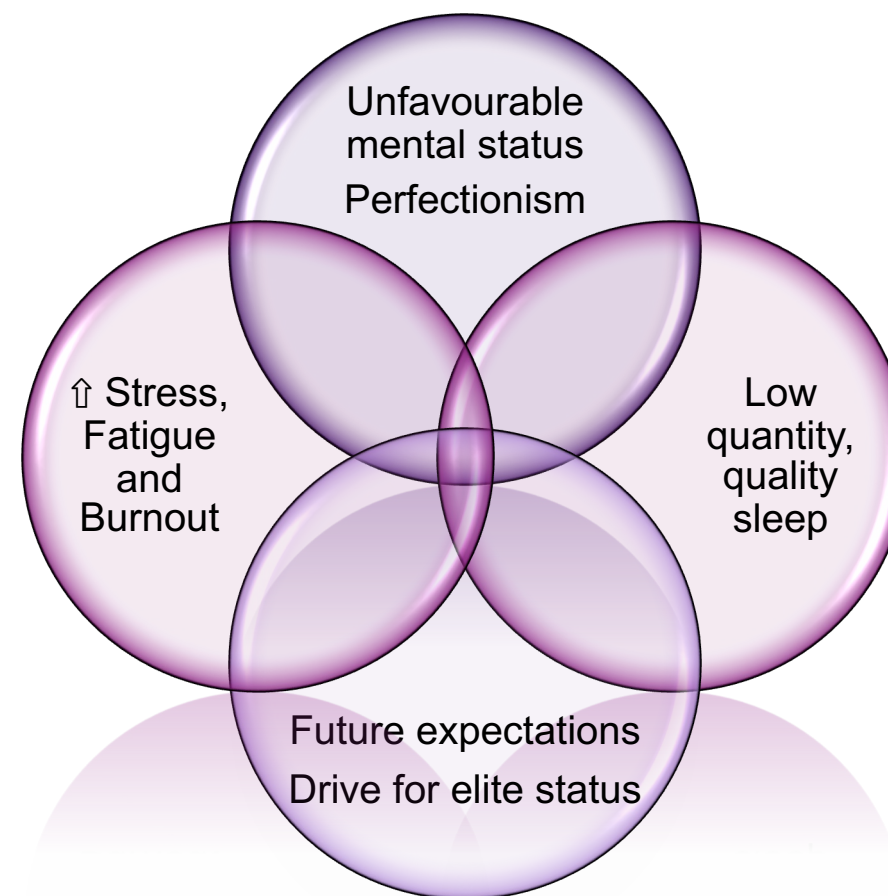


Higher rates of burnout

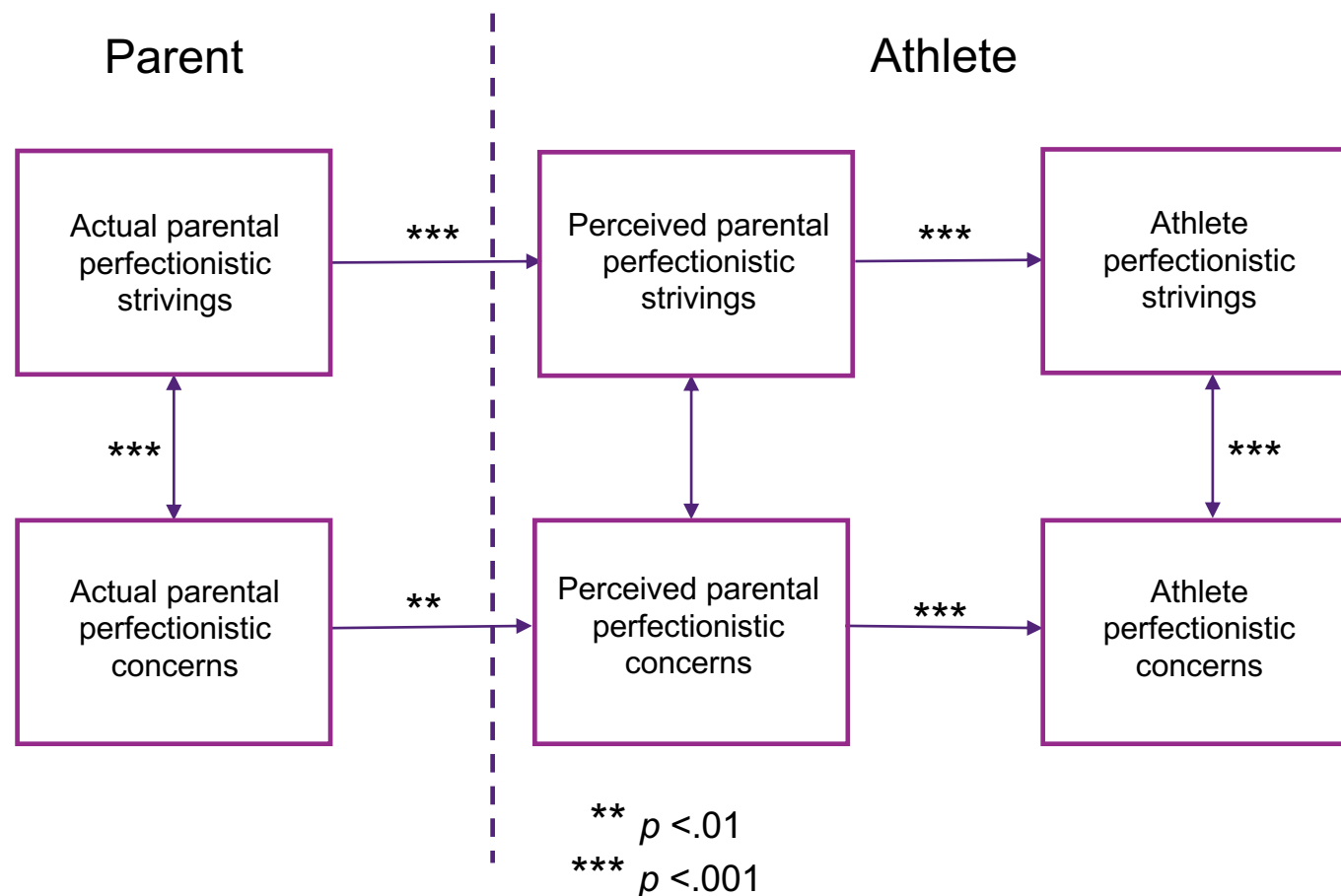
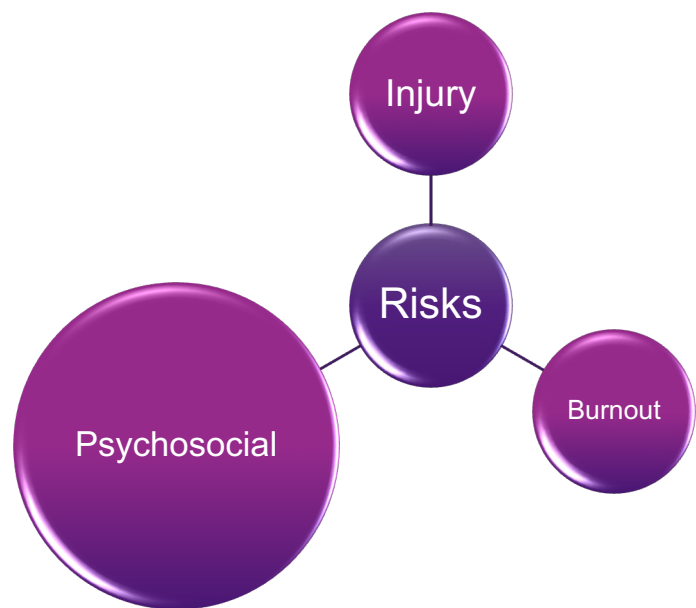


Reduced sense of accomplishment  
Exhaustion  
Sport Devaluation

# Risks of Earlier Specialisation



# Risks of Earlier Specialisation



# Is there benefits to sampling?



Life Skills



Long-term  
Physical activity  
engagement



Healthy Identity



Academic performance



Bone Health



Diverse Group of  
Friends



Motor Control

# What do the organisations say?





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# Managing the Specialised Youth Athlete

LONG WALKERS

# Managing the Specialised Youth Athlete

## Recommended

Workload hrs/week  $<$  Age  
Freeplay  $>$  Competition  
Monitoring every 4-6 months

## Moderate Risk

Moderately specialised  
Suspected Low-risk injury  
Monitoring weekly to monthly

## High Risk

Highly specialised  
Suspected high-risk injury  
Monitoring daily to weekly



# Managing the Specialised Youth Athlete

## Training the specialised youth athlete: a supportive classification model to keep them playing

Neeru Jayanthi <sup>1</sup>, Heather Saffel,<sup>2</sup> Tim Gabbett <sup>3,4</sup>

*British Journal of Sports Medicine* 2021;55:1248-1249.



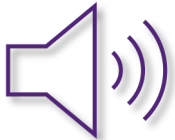
# Take Home



Early specialisation  $\neq$  success



Increased chances of 'serious' over-use injuries



Volume is key



Monitor for signs of psychosocial behaviours



Continued monitoring of athlete is essential in management



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# Thank you

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Image 2: Brisbane Olympics Adapted from inhouse by bid committee Retrieved from [https://logos.fandom.com/wiki/Brisbane\\_2032](https://logos.fandom.com/wiki/Brisbane_2032)

Image 2: Nadia Comaneci Adapted from Wally McNamee Retrieved from <https://bestlifeonline.com/nadia-comaneci-olympics-gymnast-now-news/>

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