

# THE SPORTING **Parent**

*Everything you need to ensure  
your child succeeds in sport and in life!*



Nathan Parnham

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Edited by John Coomer.

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1st edition, 2021.

ISBN: 978-0-646-83415-3

10% of the royalties on all book sales will be donated to various pathways for Australian sporting youth.

*This book is dedicated to my parents Anne and Mark. Their tireless investments of love, patience and support has enabled me to wake up every day following my passion.*

*To my beautiful Nina, your unwavering peace, calm and guidance keeps me centred. I couldn't have achieved all of this without you.*

*To my son Axel, you give me joy in waking every day.  
May you find happiness in all that you do in life.*



## About the Author

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**N**athan Parnham is a strength and conditioning specialist based in Brisbane, Australia. His career spans over 17 years, including a significant amount of time spent in the development/youth setting before he eventually transitioned into the professional arena. He has worked across a variety of sports with both genders.

His time in the development setting involved establishing athletic development programs in both government (Westfields Sports High School) and private school settings (Newington College/St Augustine's College/Brisbane Grammar School). He also contracted his services to various organisations during this time. Many athletes he worked with in the developmental setting have moved on to great heights, playing professional sport both within Australia and internationally.

Nathan has also displayed his versatility in the professional arena in a variety of sports with both genders. From the Parramatta Eels in the NRL through to the Australian Women's Sevens team.

The postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics proved a pivotal point in Nathan's career. In the midst of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and

on JobKeeper like many other Australians, he was provided with the opportunity to return to his true passion. Shaping our youth of the future!

With a new family of his own, Nathan took a step forward and never looked back. *The Sporting Parent* was born. His goal is to share the lessons he has learnt throughout his career on how to set your child up for success not only in sport, but in life! The outcome is a no-holds-barred 'go to' manual to help parents navigate their way through the confusing world of kids' sport.

## Foreword by Darren Burgess

*(High Performance Manager at Melbourne Football Club and formerly at Arsenal, Port Adelaide and Liverpool Football Clubs, as well as the Football Federation of Australia)*

I first met Nathan in 2000. I was lecturing at Australian Catholic University in exercise science and he was a fresh-faced, first year student. He had an intensity about him that struck me immediately. When I put a note up outside my office asking for volunteers to help with a research project, it didn't surprise me that his was the first name to appear on the sheet. The project involved filming soccer and AFL players during games and involved late night, weekend work. While most 20-years-olds were exploring Sydney pubs and clubs at that time, Nathan was filming for a research project that offered him no personal benefit other than the experience. I knew he would make a successful career for himself in athletic development/sports science from then on.

During his 'uni' years, Nathan demonstrated a passion for helping, not instructing. He probably didn't know the difference back then, but there is one, and it's substantial. In some elite environments you can get away with instructing. Some professional athletes crave it, but kids need helping. They need guidance and empathy. Nathan offers both of those in spades.

It's no surprise to me that most of Nathan's career has been spent working with kids and adolescents in the long-term athlete development (LTAD) pathway. While some of his peers chased careers with elite sporting teams, Nathan has predominantly chosen the less glamorous, less financially rewarding path of working with kids and adolescents. He's dabbled in adult environments, and unsurprisingly was successful at both national (Parramatta Eels, NRL) and international (Rugby Australia, Women's Sevens) levels, but I suspect the call back to his true LTAD passion was too strong each time.

My PhD involved a commentary on what was missing in the talent pathway of Australian team sport adolescents. My conclusion was that we needed more people like Nathan — people who put the kids first, people who know the difference between longevity in the sport and winning on the weekend. People, like Nathan, who want to help. There are too many coaches and too many parents whose only focus is the upcoming game or the upcoming training session — they don't see the bigger picture. The sad reality is that for every Tiger Woods or Lionel Messi (who each dedicated themselves to one sport from the time they were toddlers through to adolescence), there are thousands of kids who have trained as hard, if not harder, and either didn't make it or gave up early due to burn out. You don't hear about the kids that dropped out.

That's where this book, and Nathan, come in. Kids today have more opportunities to excel in sport than they ever have. There are elite academies, private schools, sporting schools, personal trainers, fitness coaches and parents all competing (mostly with the very best of intentions) to assist kids to realise their full sporting potential. The problem is no one is talking to each other, and crucially, no one is talking to parents. Nathan and the contributors in this book have one goal — to provide you with the very best advice for your sporting child. They don't want your registration fees or your tuition money, nor do they want to claim any success stories because they coached 'Superstar Athlete



A' when she was 8. They want to answer your questions and help inform your decision-making with your kids.

I know my Harry (10) and Millie (9) will be following Nathan's (and this book's) advice. Let Nathan and his contributors help your kids too. As a sporting parent I can assure you that both you and your child will be in the very best of hands if you do.



## Preface

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This is a book that had to happen! With close to two decades of experience in the combined developmental and professional sporting arenas, I felt obliged to write it.

To all the sporting parents out there, I applaud you. Firstly, for driving week in and week out to various sporting fixtures across the country. In many instances, for two or three of your kids. Secondly, for making the time to read this book. You're not only taking the time to educate yourself, but by the end of the book you will have empowered yourself to make informed decisions that will help your child succeed not only in sport, but in life!

The term 'sporting parent' has had a negative connotation for too long. It immediately paints the picture of enraged parents turning up ready for battle at their child's weekend sporting fixture. Forget the sport played, the time of year or seasonal variations — white line fever is often real and scary to some extent for the average Australian parent.

But what's wrong with wanting the best for your child if you go about it the right way? Nothing I say! Isn't that what every parent strives for when signing their child up for the various sports on offer throughout Australia? If you're

not striving to provide every opportunity for your child to succeed (and most importantly, to enjoy the benefits of sport along their journey), then what are you hoping for?

If you agree with me, great! This is the first of many parts of your journey. But at times, you may find yourself frustrated, and even pissed off by what you read in this book. But I'm giving you unbiased information in absence of a personal agenda or financial gain.

# Understanding the Game

Where do you start? How do you know where to find quality and reliable information? What products are likely to help your child succeed in their sporting endeavours?

To help you understand the answers to these important questions, I have divided this book into three parts:

Part 1 — How We Have Failed a Generation

Part 2 — Building the Foundations

Part 3 — Working Towards a Brighter Future.

## **Part 1 — How We Have Failed a Generation**

It only seems like yesterday that kids' curfews in Australia were when the streetlights came on. All your mates in the street were beneficiaries of sporting birthday and Christmas presents — whether it was a footy, soccer ball, cricket bat or a netball. Many local telephone poles in Australia were transformed into

basketball hoops. Makeshift skateboarding ramps collated from local building site off-cuts were the norm, as was the practice of boosting the smallest kid over a neighbour's fence to retrieve many a stray ball!

Sadly, that doesn't happen anywhere near as often anymore, and we as parents are largely to blame. The worst part is that it's adversely affected the development of fundamental movement skills in our kids. I explain how it has in Part 1.

## **Part 2 – Building the Foundations**

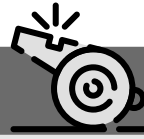
Armed with the knowledge of how you can improve from Part 1, Part 2 will send you on your mission! Building the foundations provides you with the tools to set your child up for success. It is a one-stop shop. Your 'go to' source to overcome the 'I'd love to know how, but where do I start?' question!

## **Part 3 – Working Towards a Brighter Future**

Once you've laid the foundations and you have your plan in place, how do you just be a parent? This might not be a book on how to be the ultimate parent, but it will provide you with the opportunity to implement strategies to increase the likelihood of your child's success. Does that translate to being a better parent? I'll let you decide...

Each Part of the book also has two special features — *Lessons from the Field* and *Think Boxes*.

## Lessons from the Field



To enhance your experience, I thought it might be best to learn from the frontline. This includes parents who were once just like you, along with players, coaches and current practitioners in the field. This ensures that the book doesn't just reflect my coaching opinion, but rather a community to help, motivate and inspire you to be the best version of yourself as a sporting parent. These **Lessons from the Field** excerpts provide opportunities for you to learn from others who have done it successfully and/or who are paving the way for the generation of future stars to come.

## Think Boxes



It's easy to read a book from cover to cover. But how many times have you read a book and really digested all the elements of it? Sure, you may remember a distinct section, or highlight paragraphs or ideas that grab you along the way. But if we truly want to digest the information presented, testing our understanding of it is the only way. These **Think Boxes** will help you to do that. Each one provides you with a moment to pause, reflect how the content applies to you, and whether you would make the same decisions again moving forward.

Not only is sport a journey through your child's development, but with this book you as a sporting parent too can grow as a part of that development! Be an active participant in the process — this is an opportunity where you have everything to gain and nothing to lose!

Understanding your role as a sporting parent and the impact of your decisions will not only help you make better decisions in future, but increase your child's likelihood of success. It's often when we stop, reflect and evaluate our own actions as sporting parents that we are empowered to become better people and parents along the way.



# Contents

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About the Author	1
Foreword by Darren Burgess	3
Preface	7
Understanding the Game	9
 <b>Part 1 — How We Have Failed a Generation</b>	 15
Chapter 1      Every weekend in Australia	17
Chapter 2      Work, life, balance	28
Chapter 3      Technology	33
Chapter 4      Fundamental movement skills	41
Chapter 5      Taking ownership	52
 <b>Part 2 — Building the Foundations</b>	 57
Chapter 6      Specialisation	59
Chapter 7      Sport selection	70
Chapter 8      Elite academies	86
Chapter 9      Understanding the hierarchy of schools, institutes and sporting bodies	92
Chapter 10     The elephant in the room (children and resistance training)	110
Chapter 11     Supplement use	123

Chapter 12	What does development/maturation mean?	136
Chapter 13	Injuries and what they truly mean	148
<b>Part 3 — Working Towards a Brighter Future</b>		161
Chapter 14	Building resilient youth	163
Chapter 15	Parent/child friendships	181
Chapter 16	Framing	186
Chapter 17	What do you truly want for your child? (Professional sport vs active for life)	192
Chapter 18	Sport and the lessons of life	198
Conclusion		209
Endnotes		211

Part 1

# **How We Have Failed a Generation**



# Chapter 1

## **Every weekend in Australia**

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Being a parent is tough, let alone being a sporting parent. In many instances the upcoming Saturday weekly sporting fixture turns into a meticulous project to ensure that your child/children and their kit and equipment are packed, primed and delivered on time. When that mission is successfully completed, you have to do it all again the next weekend... and on it goes for another 4 months or so... and that's just one sporting season for one sport.

It can feel like an endless road trip across the State to a venue, especially if you get there and your child realises they've forgotten their boots or mouthguard. Argggggghhhh!

Every week in Australia approximately 3.2 million children (69%) participate in organised sport outside schooling hours.<sup>1</sup> That's a big market for everyone from school recruiters, private sporting academies, talent scouts and trainers. An estimated \$2.3 billion is also spent yearly on children's sport and physical activity participation fees. The niche market that is youth sport has never been so strong.

And guess what? You're in it! Waist deep in it. Your pockets are heavily lined just to participate in it, before you even start thinking about it shaping your child's future.

Yet with all the latest technological resources and coaching opportunities at their fingertips (literally at the click of a button), as well as endless fields and facilities popping up from both your local council and privately funded organisations throughout the country, how have we got it so wrong with kids' sport?

Many of our kids are ill-equipped to even take part in weekly sporting fixtures, let alone at an elite level.<sup>2,3</sup>



Injury rates are through the roof! In fact, in New south Wales between 2005 and 2013, there were 20,034 hospitalisations for sports-related injuries for children aged between 5 and 15.<sup>4</sup> And over a 10-year period from 2005 to 2015 in Victoria alone, anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries increased by 148%, with 98% occurring between the ages of 10 and 14!<sup>5</sup>

When you and I were growing up, a knee reconstruction would have been a big deal. Dang! In fact for that to happen there would have to have been some serious s&\*t go down! Or one hell of a car crash!

These days kids are missing season upon season for simply stepping ‘unexpectedly’ or having the inability to slow themselves down... but what about getting them to — wait for it, slow down and change direction at the same time?

I know, right. It’s laughable at first, but it’s simple things like this that have been lost to our youth of today. It leads to excessive hospital bills and plenty more gaming time while ‘rehabilitating’ (if you want to call it that, because you, I and anyone involved with kids knows that the likelihood of them completing rehabilitative exercises is non-existent on their own, especially trying to expect them to do them daily!).

Being a sporting parent, we can no longer refer to ‘this generation’ and all ‘their’ faults as a tokenistic opportunity to highlight their inadequacies while failing to acknowledge our responsibility for contributing to the problem. Not only have ‘we’ created them, but we have shaped the choices they make, the behaviours they display, and their need for the next latest and greatest ‘thing’ (whatever that may be) on the horizon.

Armed with the knowledge and tools in this book, you should be able to help

your child to participate successfully in their chosen sporting endeavours, whatever sport/s that might be. Ideally, there'll be lots of them. But most importantly, you'll be able to help them to enjoy the opportunities and lessons that sport itself provides throughout their journey.

## Lesson from the Field #1

### Casey Dellacqua



Casey Dellacqua is a household name in Australia for tennis but she also has a diverse sporting background. Her successful professional tennis career spanned more than 16 years and saw her amass various titles in both singles and doubles. She also represented Australia at the 2008 Beijing Olympic games.

Casey achieved a career-high singles world ranking of 26, and 3 in doubles. She retired in 2018. She has a family of her own with partner Amanda and remains actively involved in tennis throughout Australia on a variety of levels. Casey shares invaluable insights into her journey as a professional athlete and now sporting parent.



#### **Growing up in Australia, how did you first get involved in sport?**

I played just about every sport you could be offered as a kid growing up in Australia. Sport was inherent in me, growing up with my Dad having played AFL in the former WAFL competition and my Mum having played softball, tennis and netball.

I loved kicking the footy with my Dad!

As a kid, as far back as I can remember I was always being dragged around so my



Mum could continue to play sport. Weekends were pretty much spent following my parents to watch my Dad play footy.

My grandparents on my Mum's side even played tennis down at the local tennis club.

I really loved that aspect of being involved in a local sporting community.

My own participation in sport originally stemmed from those that my parents played. I played tennis, netball, T-ball, swimming, basketball... pretty much anything I could. It wasn't until I was about 13/14 years old that I stopped the majority of them and started to divert my attention towards tennis.

As I began to enjoy and take tennis more seriously, it was more the State coaches in WA at the time who encouraged me to go further. At that age it was important for me to not only play regularly but to compete with other girls my age.

Other girls were already travelling internationally, and I came to a crossroads. To progress further. I had to sacrifice other sports. With my coaches encouraging me, that's exactly what I did.

**You're a household name for tennis in Australia. Growing up in a different generation to the modern athlete, do you see a distinct difference?**

On the whole I feel like competitive sport has changed. Particularly with girls and their drop- out rates. There's been a big shift.

Speaking with a lot of my friends who have teenage girls, their interests are different. They prefer to go for walks or do certain types of physical activities that are different to competitive sport.

They're still leading an active lifestyle and making healthy choices, but it's very different to how I grew up and what I engaged in – competitive sport.

Growing up, all my friends regardless of their ability or sport played in competitions. They were active members of their local sporting club.

It almost seems like there is a real distinct divide between performance and participation in sport these days.

With tennis, a lot of players and parents feel like they need to specialise young. Because of that we fail to establish an effective pathway that encourages teenagers to remain engaged in sport for longer.

They may drop off and go to their local gym and do group fitness classes instead of staying in a sport.

Because it's very realistic for girls to now follow their dreams and accomplish success in sport, they tend to only see it one way. That you can either make it and succeed in a sport or be left with a grey area in the middle. This grey area leaves individuals dropping out if they're not competitive at a high level. They give up playing their sport.

To me that's a big loss because there's so many opportunities that are by-products of just participating in sport, without competing at a professional level.

I feel there's even a difference from State to State with tennis now in Australia. If we can embrace young athletes of today participating and being a part of their local tennis club community, they may eventually take the professional path.

Tennis centres in certain States are run very much like businesses. There is little sense of a collective community connection in them.

If we shift towards that community environment, you tend to grow a passion and love for the sport. A lifelong passion that encourages you to participate, regardless of the level.

So many of my friends I grew up with like Alicia Molik and others who have achieved great things in tennis still play today at their local club.

It's just different today though... You see so many parents just drop their kids off to play tennis and there's no parental involvement, even from a volunteer perspective. I remember growing up with my grandparents working in the canteen. These things still happen today, but more so in the regional areas and less and less in metro areas/capital cities.

The difference in team sports is they rely on volunteers for their sport to survive and prosper. But in a largely individual sport like tennis, parents aren't heavily involved at that grassroots participation level. It's coach driven instead with a business model to support it.

What works best is establishing connections and communities that encourage young players to play and remain in the sport for the love of it!

### **What do you see as the biggest challenges for the modern athlete?**

- **Technology/social media**

There's no doubt about its impact, having started my career where you had to take a phone card overseas to remain in contact with your parents to where we're at now. Social media and other media put extra pressure on the athlete. It's hard enough

being an athlete dealing with the pressures you place on yourself, let alone extrinsic life pressures being accentuated through the use of technology.

- **A balanced lifestyle**

Being an athlete and dealing with all the other relationships you have outside of sport is particularly important in setting yourself up for life after sport. Athletes need to make sure they're setting themselves up outside of sport.

This requires balance and mixing in circles from all walks of life. I believe the better balance you can have not only in your work but also in your relationships will inevitably set you up for success down the track.

You can have it all! From being a really top level player to being a good person simply by being kind and having a good work/life balance.

But it can be hard for the modern athlete with all of life's expectations.

- **Early specialisation**

These days I feel the expectation that 'if you don't specialise early you're not going to make it' is dangerous.

There's no doubt about it, there comes a time where you need to go all in... but it doesn't mean you specialise at all costs from the beginning.

I try to look at things with my own kids and what I would let them do. When I was 13 years old I won a trip to an academy in America through the Hopman Cup. My parents took me to the airport and put me on a plane. Would I be able to do that with my own kids – I don't know. At 16, I went to the Australian Institute of Sport and lived my dream of wanting to be a tennis player.

**With your playing experience and time on tour, have you got any specific advice for sporting parents irrespective of the stage they're at on their journey?**

I always had unconditional love and support from my parents from the very first day I picked up a racquet.

If I could give one bit of advice to parents it would be exactly that. Continually provide that unconditional love and support throughout their journey.

I was also fortunate to have parents that played high-level sport. I'm really grateful they pushed me to a point where I got the best out of myself. They knew how to challenge me as an individual with my personality traits to build qualities that enabled me to succeed.

There's a definite need for parents to talk to their kids about their sport. But I never felt my Mum or Dad were ever putting me down. I felt they were always supportive and encouraging regardless of where I ended up with my tennis.

For example, when I was 14 years old my Dad went and bought the beep test on cassette. It wasn't to pressure me into doing anything I didn't want to do. But simply to provide an opportunity where I would challenge myself.

With that love, support, and guidance they were able to get the best out of me – but it was never demanded.

**You're a parent to three amazing kids (Blake, Andie and Jesse). Will there be any specific approach to how you view sport in their lives? And will there be any differences in how you approach Blake and Jesse vs Andie?**

I've always been passionate about women in sport and the ability to have equal

opportunities. Having a daughter it just becomes more apparent and clear that I want her to have the same opportunities. As we've evolved as a society over the years there won't be (and shouldn't be) any difference how I approach sport with all my kids.

My eldest is interested in everything. He loves sport and wants to play anything he can. We're happy to provide as much opportunity for him to explore everything. At his age, there's no need or rush to push him towards any sport in particular.

The sports we suggest he play are very much those we played when we were young. The flipside of that for me is that I wouldn't have thought much about football (soccer). But his mates at school play and he loves it! We support any of his suggestions and are open to him guiding us on what he wants to have a go at.

He's playing tennis and the fun part of it are the simple things. Just playing out the front of our place on the street or taking him down to the local park.

Amanda and I want him to play as many sports as possible. It's just good for kids overall body awareness!

Andie is already doing gymnastics and she's only 4! She was keen to do it so we enrolled her. I'd love her to try numerous other sports too, including some form of team sport.

Our journey as sporting parents has been fun. We're still learning and exploring things along the way.

It's interesting because our eldest (Blake) has only just stopped gymnastics. It's the one sport he didn't do with any of his mates. I think it just got to the point on Mondays that he began not wanting to go to gymnastics anymore. It was more that his mates weren't doing it too.

Blake's also displayed some great running ability so we just shifted and transferred the time he would have spent in gymnastics over to athletics.

Friendships also certainly play a big part in what sports kids are drawn to. While I've largely come from an individual sport, I loved doubles and other opportunities in my career like Fed Cup to play in a team because I just thrived! I enjoyed my sport more when I could celebrate victories with my team or others directly involved.

Fulfilment for me came from the traits and life skills that you learn when you're playing in a team. You're always playing for something more than yourself. I think that's a really important thing that's transferable to life!

**At the end of the day, what will you define as success for your kids' participation in sport?**

As a sporting parent I would define success as them choosing a sport they love competing in and for them to stay in that sport over their lifetime.

Sport is a vehicle for so many invaluable life lessons and contributions to communities around the world.

To find a sport you're passionate about that makes you want to stay involved irrespective of your accomplishments along the way... that to me is the true definition of success!

## Chapter 2

# Work, life, balance

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If you're like me, you'll remember back to how hard your parents or parent worked to provide you with every opportunity to just participate in sport... let alone succeed at it.

The ironic thing is it's taken me all this time to realise how many sacrifices my parents made. Believe me, my participation didn't come easy. My Mum was a strong woman trying to juggle a business (3 retail shops) as well as my 3 other siblings and their sporting/social commitments.

My Dad was also a hard worker managing another business. Looking back, my Mum and Dad did an outstanding job in keeping us kids involved in so much sport and off the streets.

They separated in my early twenties. I can only imagine how tough these commitments are for single parents, especially those with multiple kids — #respect!

Nothing was ever a given in our household. The latest shoe release, sportswear



item or piece of equipment (whether a tennis racquet, golf club, skateboard or BMX) would only be a one-off birthday or Christmas present. If something materialised outside of those days, it was pure magic!

Aussies are privileged to know, understand and respect hard work. These traits are also an essential prerequisite for a sporting parent. As I highlighted earlier, kids' sport isn't cheap and it's big business. So, what do those facts mean to you and the society we live in?

They mean big hours, long weeks and less time off (which actually translates to limited family time, in case you hadn't realised it). In some instances, both parents are also pursuing careers, promotions and overall life goals.



In many instances this is exactly what provides opportunity for our kids. But let's be honest here — more time working means less with your kids! This can't be replaced by simply booking them into your local 'elite' academy because you think it's not only the best for them, but because you try to justify to yourself that 'it's exactly what they need!'

Bu-bummm.... Epic fail!

As a sporting parent, I'm sure the thought has entered your head... more than once... that organised sport is the way to go. How good is it?! You can drop your kids off, pick them up, and in many instances even schedule your work or family errands around it. What's wrong with that? It's a win/win right?!

Unfortunately, sporting life just doesn't work that way. I'll even go a step further and say that this sentiment is one of the key reasons we are failing a generation. Organised sport has become such a hot commodity that our kids have forgotten to play. And by 'play', I'm referring to unstructured play. I'll talk more about unstructured play in chapters 6, 12 and 14 of this book.

Sporting life is about exploring learning. Failing, overcoming and understanding the process. As a sporting parent, you need to explore learning too! Your participation throughout this journey (and by 'participation' I'm referring to your active engagement, not scheduling coaches, academies, off-seasons, pre-seasons or anything that resembles what the pros do because little Johnny might be the next big thing — so is little Sally next door too). Stop kidding yourself!



## Think Box

- Does your child participate in supplementary organised sport? (For example, squads, academies, private coaching, strength and conditioning sessions). Yes / No
- Does your child only participate in scheduled sporting activities?  
Yes / No
- In one week, how many times would your child participate in unstructured/free play? (for example, going to your local park/courts with a friend or friends).
  - 0
  - 1-2
  - 3-4
- Most importantly, how many times in the last month have you participated in any form of play/sport with your child? (For example, kicking a footy at the park).
  - 1-3
  - 4-5
  - >5

Balance is crucial to your child's success, not only in sport but in life.

Scheduled sport provides structure to your child's week. Kids crave structure. But if structure is all that exists, what happens when they get bored? We've created a generation that fails to keep themselves amused!

Encouraging your child to get outside and play at the park inspires creativity and learning. It can encourage a better understanding of specific sports through modifications in rules and environmental dimensions, as well as self-regulated social cohesion with other kids.

Remember when a simple game of force 'em back<sup>6</sup> turned into tackle footy in the street? I'm pretty certain there weren't sufficient numbers to make a legal team when I played in my neighbourhood, or that the street dimensions didn't translate exactly to our weekend sporting fixture. But we played anyway.

The best athletes in the world haven't got there through pre-programmed movement patterns, countless repetition or single sport participation as youths. Instead, they have learnt through fun, exploring different equipment, and via varying environmental constraints (in other words, they have taken a multi-sport approach). This approach drove them to better understand and eventually become obsessed to find the answer or to perfect a certain skill/technique/part of their game as they got older. I'll talk more about the multi-sport approach in chapter 7.

The irony is while you as an adult might be seeking your child's glossy finish and perfected skill by pursuing a jam-packed schedule for them, this is exactly what is limiting their freedom. The freedom to explore, learn and acquire along the way!

Don't get me wrong, structure certainly has its place, but you also need to provide a balance for both your child and yourself. Balance your own weekly schedule as well as your child's to ensure you can be an active participant on their journey.

If you answered a) to questions 3 and 4 in the *Think Box*, maybe it's time to find that balance...

## Chapter 3

# Technology

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Let's be honest. If you're like me, the time it takes you to create a GIF (ask your son/daughter) could probably be better spent elsewhere.

What about trying to figure out how to add a story to your Instagram for the first time!

Or Tik Tok?! Hahaha seriously??? (Facepalm)

But that's not what this is about.

If you have ever found yourself yelling... Umm... I mean telling your child to 'put the iPad down!' or 'Get your face outta the screen!', you've probably realised it's a dead-end argument.



Perhaps you're a new (or soon-to-be) parent frowning upon others at your local cafe. The 'I'm never going to let my child spend that much time on their device!' brigade... only to realise at the first sign of trouble that 'it's just easier' or 'it's the only way we can get some peace and quiet!'

... whichever side of the fence you find yourself on, you're losing an uphill battle.

It's not that kids are choosing to glue their faces to screens. Technology and society as a whole (from the educational system through to social interactions) shape it that way. This dependence on technology is having an effect on kids' 'hardware' (brains) and it's affecting their *ability to move*.

Unfortunately, whether you like it or not, their daily lives are driven by the use of technology. It's not the other way around. Schools across the country are becoming increasingly dependent on technology. So much so that it's a rarity for their syllabus to function without it.

If you don't believe me, ponder this question — if there was a blackout today, how much work could I actually get done? We all work in different professions, but seriously, ask your child the same question about schoolwork. The reality is many teachers would have difficulty coming up with a lesson that doesn't use technology in some capacity.

For an excellent read on the effect technology is having on our youth of today, I suggest you read *Teen Brain* by David Gillespie.

There is one thing for certain — technology isn't going away any time soon. The time spent using it in our daily lives is only going to increase. This unfortunately results in less time for kids to play. Less time to explore new opportunities. Less time to adapt to new environments. Less time to understand rules. Less time

to socialise with friends... while playing. Less time for sporting activities. Less time away from the screen. Period.

Our kids' ability to move is largely dependent on their opportunity to play. In fact, many of the inadequacies in our youth of today can be attributed to their reduced time/opportunity to play.

### ***The physical cost of technology dependence***

How we move in our development years comes down to our exposure to movement. Think running, jumping, hopping, kicking, catching, and throwing. Many professionals label these as 'fundamental movement skills' or 'physical literacy'.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

These skills are ingrained early in your child's athletic journey. Sure, there will be movement adaptations along the way, such as during puberty (more on that in chapter 12), but ingrained, early movement patterns are what's most important. Early exposure promotes movement efficiency (coordination) and therefore a better, faster and more adaptable individual.

Limited early exposure to movement on the other hand results in poor running mechanics or the inability to even jump, let alone hop. Throw a ball in there for extra confusion. As parents, we're often quick to point out they can't kick or throw very well. Really?!



Our doctors and hospitals throughout the country are becoming busier with injuries sustained as a result of poor physical literacy. Fingers crossed your child doesn't ever need an operation. Unfortunately, the chances of that happening are increasing.

Strength and our body's ability to adapt and overcome is a result of the stresses placed on it. Fundamental movement skills are what strengthens your child's bones, muscles, and tendons. It's not your child's ability to stack weight on a bench press!

Dads, you probably hit the bench press as a teenager trying to get the size of



Arnie. Just wait for it, your child will be coming at you full tilt sooner than you know it asking for one for Christmas!

Strength inadequacies not only limit your child's ability to accomplish efficient movement patterns, they also significantly increase their likelihood of injury.

Did I mention the importance of play?...

### ***The mental/emotional cost of technology dependence***

The physical cost of technology is one thing. But to ignore its mental/emotional cost in shaping our future generation would be a travesty.

The physical costs are large enough for you to want to make a change to your parenting. But pause and reflect on the enormous mental impact technology is having on the development of your child's character as well. How they view the world will likely stop you dead in your tracks!

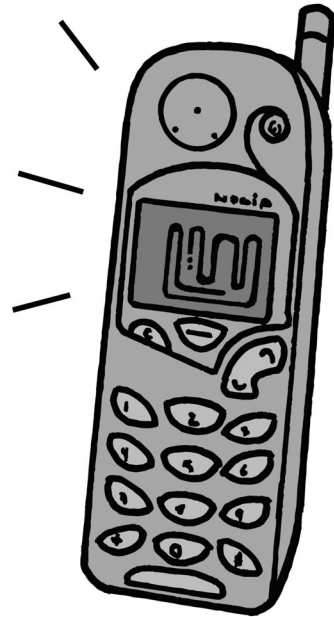
Technology (and in many instances the design of it or associated apps) increasingly demands a child's attention. Their immediate success or accomplishments in using it can be addictive. The greater the success or fulfilment, the more they want to use it. Simple.

If you're like me, it only seems like yesterday when you would wait patiently for what felt like an eternity for the dial-up internet to connect. Oh, but wait! Then a family friend would call the home phone just to say g'day to Mum or Dad and it would 'ruin your life' when the internet dropped out. Your parents would think, 'what's the big issue?!'

Your idea of technological advancement back then probably meant having *snakes* (the game) on your phone... or perhaps the ability to change the colour of your phone case to 'scream' your independence!

The youth of today are viewing the world through a different lens. All at the click of a button! They can choose what delivered food to order, find an answer on Google, check the weather, find their way home, or perhaps test the social acceptance of an outfit, action or ...

Social engagements may still be present... online... but *real time* engagement is very different!



Our kids can spend up to 12 hours per weekday on screen time (includes TVs, computers, smartphones, tablets, and video consoles) and in excess of 6 hours per day on weekends! This translates to an average of 31 — 43 hours per week for kids aged between 6 and 18. And did you know that Australian adults spend on average up to 5 hours per day on screen time too?<sup>11</sup> Surprised?

As parents, we are often quick to complain that our kids' lack resilience. Or the ability to commit and see things through. Technology plays an important role in that. Without the immediate success that technology offers, why would anyone want to take the long road?

Delayed gratification is the precise ingredient that enables success for sporting participants. But technology has diminished (and in many cases eradicated) delayed gratification for the youth of today. As technology continues to

evolve and your child's dependence on it increases, so too will their desire for instant gratification. The by-product of technological advancements is very likely to be your child's lack of grit and a desire to chase easy solutions and/or accomplishments.

Sport (and its valuable lessons learnt along the journey) is important to set your child up for success. Emotional intelligence is a by-product of sporting participation. Unfortunately, the lack of social connection as a result of increased screen time reduces the opportunity for kids to learn lessons through sport and playing with their friends. They are ingredients to set them up for success.

## Think Box



- Are you able to confidently say how many hours per week your child spends on a device?

Yes / No

If you answered 'No' (or would like just one example), you can check their phones:

- \* iPhone – Settings > Screen Time (this will provide a daily breakdown of usage).
  - \* Android – Settings > Digital Well-being and Parental Controls > Tap the presented duration/time (this will provide a daily breakdown of usage)
- Where does your child fit? (factoring in all devices combined)
    - a) < 20 hours
    - b) 21-25 hours
    - c) 26-30 hours
    - d) > 30 hours

Technology and its use is likely to hinder your child's physical and mental/emotional well-being. As a sporting parent, it's important to be aware of that and to have a plan in place to minimise its negative impact, because technology isn't going away anytime soon!