

Name _____

READ CLOSELY AND SHOW EVIDENCE OF THINKING BY ANNOTATING. Remember that annotations are about the words you write, not the underlines/highlights!

One-sport student athletes and the tide of overuse injuries

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff

Leo Anderson was in the middle of a baseball game when he threw a ball he had just caught, heard a crunch in his elbow and fell to the ground.

That sound was a growth plate in his elbow breaking, and it ended the 15-year-old's season last spring. A growth plate is the new area of rubbery cartilage growing at the end of bones.

Doctors said the break was caused by overuse, and the Illinois teenager needed surgery to place a pin in his elbow to stabilize it. Anderson, a catcher who had been trying out pitching, wore a cast for 12 weeks before his comeback this fall, playing for the Slammers club team in Lake County, Illinois. The freshman at Lake Forest High School also had physical therapy until November and says he hopes to play for his high school team in the upcoming spring season, in addition to his other team.

However, his father, Bill Anderson, said he now closely monitors his son's play, and that the injury was a warning. Leo, like many youth athletes, plays baseball 10 months of the year. "Quite honestly, it just didn't occur to me that he was overusing his arm."

Year-Round Sports

Doctors say overuse injuries in youth sports have increased significantly in the past decade. They blame it on kids focusing on one sport at a young age and playing it year-round, sometimes on multiple teams at once.

"Sports specialization has led to almost an epidemic in sports injuries," said Dr. Elizabeth Matzkin. She is the surgical director of women's musculoskeletal health at a Boston hospital and assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Harvard Medical School. Orthopedics is the surgical field related to bone and muscle working together.

"Kids are fatigued, and they're not strengthening the way they should be," Matzkin said. In the past decade, she's seen overuse injuries in young athletes that she used to see mainly in adults.

"Over the past 10 years, you'd maybe see the occasional high school ACL tear. Now you're seeing it in 12-, 13-year-olds," she said.

Matzkin is referring to an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury. The ACL is a major ligament in the knee that can tear. The injury to the ligament, a strong band of tissue connecting bones, occurs more often in sports with sudden stops, jumps and changes in direction.

With such injuries happening at 13, Matzkin asks, "are you going to have arthritis when you're 30?"

Old Injuries Renewed

While doctors and physical therapists say they can treat the injuries, some worry what will happen when young athletes grow up. Old injuries can turn into chronic problems.

"We can get you back playing your sport ... but what we can't do is prevent your arthritis in your knee," Matzkin said. Then "you're seeing young women in their 30s who can't keep up with their kids in the backyard."

Doctors say it's largely up to parents and coaches to help prevent these injuries through cross-training, or changing sports, and rest.

That message can be hard to follow in the increasingly competitive field of youth sports. More parents seem to hope for college scholarships and even professional play for their kids, said Dr. Andrea Kramer, an orthopedic surgeon at the Illinois Bone and Joint Institute. She works in pediatrics, which refers to treating children and adolescents, and operated on Leo Anderson.

Kramer said she's seen more overuse injuries in recent years, and at younger ages.

"I'm seeing kids from 7 on up for overuse injuries," she said. The injuries are sprains, breaks, stress fractures, which are tiny cracks in bones, and other problems causing "much more increased pain at a much younger age" than she used to see, and span many sports.

Kramer said children are at risk for these injuries because they are still growing and growth plates are shifting, and she advises young athletes and their parents to vary sports and exercise, and stresses the importance of rest. Societal pressures seem to play into the desire for high achievement in sports, often leading to overplay, Kramer said.

"If we could convince people to not specialize in one sport at a young age, it would help a lot," she said.

Too Much Too Soon

For Leo Anderson's arm injury, the tipping point seemed to be when Leo, a catcher since childhood, started private pitching lessons, plus his regular team practices, which begin in October and last through July. His dad said rainouts last spring caused more back-to-back games, also contributing to his son's overthrowing.

"Looking back it was pretty obvious," Bill Anderson said. "I'm (now) much more hypersensitive to Leo having a sore arm."

Anderson and Leo's coaches, doctor and physical therapist, are now monitoring Leo's play to make sure the injury is healed and prevent another overuse injury.

Ed Tolzien, co-owner of the Slammers, said he and his staff "strongly encourage our kids to cross-train and play multiple sports" to prevent overuse injuries. About 70 to 75 percent play a sport other than baseball, he said.

Many baseball leagues and the Illinois High School Association limit the number of pitches players can throw in a game and season to prevent injuries. Tolzien said his coaches keep a close eye on players, who are also given strength and conditioning exercises. The team also partners with Illinois Bone and Joint to make sure players get proper treatment and learn more about injury prevention, he said.

Matzkin said education of coaches and parents is also necessary to prevent overuse injuries. She has helped start the OneSport Injury campaign as a reminder about the risk in playing one sport too much.

"Sports are beneficial, but playing the same sport more than eight months out of the year can be detrimental," Matzkin said.

WRITE A REFLECTION

One paragraph that reflects on what the writer said

- **Here's where you summarize the main points of the article**

One paragraph that reflects on the writer's style

- **Think about the techniques the writer used, his/her word choice, the way the text was organized, the quality of the evidence (if applicable), tone**

One paragraph that reflects the reader's thoughts on the content of the article