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One of the most difficult battles that high school athletic programs are facing is convincing student-athletes to participate in multiple sports instead of “specializing” in one particular sport year round. Many student-athletes and parents are being told that their child has a better chance to attain an athletic scholarship or be recruited by a better collegiate program if they specialize. Every student-athlete’s situation is unique, but overall, there is very little data to support the notion that it is beneficial to student-athletes to specialize over playing multiple sports in high school.

The most overwhelming argument in favor of student-athletes playing multiple sports in high school is to simply examine the current college sports rosters. There are many websites dedicated to compiling data on this topic, but one in particular is www.trackingfootball.com. According to their most recent research, 80% of student-athletes on NCAA Division I Football rosters in 2016 played multiple varsity sports in high school. Interestingly, the four teams that qualified for the College Football Playoff, had an average of 84% of student-athletes that played multiple sports in high school.

At Butler we are blessed with many great student-athletes. We are fortunate this year to have six senior student-athletes who will receive some athletic related scholarship money. Of those six students-athletes, one will earn letters in three Varsity sports this year and four will earn letters in two Varsity sports. In the 2015-2016 school year, Butler won the GWOC North All Sports Trophy, and I believe that a great deal of that success is due to our student-athletes playing multiple sports at the Varsity level.

There are also health and injury related concerns to specialization in youth and adolescent sports. Recently, the American Society for Sports Medicine has stated that youth and adolescent athletes who play mostly one sport year round have a significantly higher risk of prolonged injury due to repetitive overuse of joints as well as a much higher risk of burnout.

According to the NCAA, the reality is that only 3% of all high school athletes will receive ANY athletic related scholarship money, and less than 1% of high school student-athletes will receive an NCAA Division I athletic scholarship. There is a great deal of value in encouraging our student-athletes to participate in school sports, competing with their friends, and representing their school and community in a positive way. Whether a student-athlete is looking to continue their athletic career at the collegiate level, or wanting a fun high school athletic experience, all signs point to the benefit being a multi-sport athlete.