

Diversify Your Athletic Lifestyle

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Ever since I began my career training hockey players, I've been fortunate to be surrounded by some extremely gifted athletes from all over the world.

And what I've realized is that their superior talent level, combined with their incredible work ethic, has allowed them to play at the highest level possible - the NHL.

What most of these players also have in common is that their athletic lives weren't limited to just ice rinks while they were growing up; they also played other sports, including baseball, football, lacrosse, soccer, tennis and golf.

Take for example former Anaheim Duck Adam Oates, who was also an outstanding lacrosse player, or Pittsburgh Penguins head coach Dan Bylsma, also a former Duck, who was a great baseball player and also an outstanding golfer.

Chris Drury of the New York Rangers was a pitcher on USA's Little League baseball team that won the world championship back in 1989, and there are several players on the Ducks' current roster who were prolific at other sports. The list goes on and on.

The point is these guys all played different sports while they were young, and that played a major role in their overall development as athletes. They didn't just play hockey or "specialize" in hockey, but the skills they learned by excelling in other sports have helped them develop into professional hockey players.

Today's young players are spending way too much time just playing hockey. It's now a year-round sport for many kids (especially if they're good). There's always the next team to try out for or the camp that "all of the top players in the area" are attending.

What's also interesting to note is how many of these kids have their own "private" lessons. Why? Tell me how taking private lessons is going to help kids become better team players who work hard together to achieve common goals.

With physical education in the United States taking a nosedive, the need to diversify kids' athletic lifestyles is more important than ever. Sports like soccer, football, lacrosse, basketball, baseball, field hockey, volleyball and softball – all of which emphasize teamwork - should also be considered as an important part of a player's growth as person and an athlete.

Even if hockey is your first love, developing speed, agility, quickness, balance and body awareness in other sports translates to the ice. But what I find most important by participating in other sports, especially with the absence of physical education, is a heightened general fitness level – and that can't be underestimated.

Hockey is a team game, and the better ones in the NHL have a bunch of hard-working players who play for each other and put team success before their own. The really good players realize that their team's

success will help them have individual success in the long run.

Playing different sports while learning life lessons in teamwork and accountability, all while having fun, will help any youngster develop into a better hockey player.