

The Secret to Developing Well-Rounded Athletes

Over the last year, sports programs have had shortened seasons, if any at all. Because of that, training time for athletes of all ages has dropped significantly. Now, with sports returning to a more normal duration, young athletes are working hard to regain lost skills and recondition their bodies. The problem, however, is that lengthy breaks increase the risk of injury upon returning to training. In addition, when athletes specialize in a sport, they generally only train muscles for that sport. To be truly at the top of their game, young athletes should engage in training that develops all muscle groups through a system designed to meet their athletic and **developmental** needs.

When athletes are on an extended break from their sport, their body deconditions, and they lose cardiovascular power, muscle strength, speed and agility, and other skills. As we generally see, after a "normal" break, athletes go back into training at a high level which usually increases their risk of injury. With COVID, breaks have been longer, and training hasn't been as extensive as it was in prior seasons. Coupled with the lack of cross-training in sports in general, young athletes are currently at a higher risk for overuse injuries, leading to further setbacks. To truly recondition their bodies, they need to take it slow and build skills back in a steadier approach.

One of the most effective ways to help young athletes cross-train is by engaging them in **martial arts**. This versatile type of training strengthens all muscle groups, develops speed and agility, hand-eye and hand-foot coordination, flexibility, balance, and cardiovascular endurance. In addition, the focus required expands **mental acuity, memory, clarity of thought, and confidence**. The multi-dimensional approach to training is beneficial to athletes in any sport. Even better is martial arts is a year-round program. It can keep athletes at the top of their game during the on and off-seasons. This ultimately gives them an edge in their sport.

It's important to note, however, that not all martial arts programs are the same. When working with young athletes, programs should know age-appropriate milestones, brain growth, learning styles, and a myriad of other child development areas. Experience working with children is also essential. The **SKILLZ Child Development Centers** are equipped with all of this and utilize martial arts training to develop skill development. In addition, a game-based learning format is implemented, so students have fun while building the skills necessary for anything from gross motor coordination to more refined, sports-focused abilities.

Utilizing martial arts as a foundation for athletic development is one of the most effective means for cross-training young athletes to be at the top of their game. Steps taken to regain lost skills and build new ones are done steady, which promotes safety and reduces the risk of injury. As knowledge is gained through cross-training, athletes will remain strong mentally and physically during the on and off-seasons.