SPECIALIZATION IN SPORTS

(APPENDIX K)

"Young athletes who were injured tended to have more intense specialized training in one sport," Dr. Neeru Jayanthi, medical director of primary care sports medicine at Loyola and senior author of the study was quoted as saying. "We should be cautious about intense specialization in one sport before and during adolescence. Parents should consider enrolling their children in multiple sports."

Doctor Jayanthi's study provides ne support for an American Academy of Pediatrics 2000 policy statement on intensive training and sports specialization in young athletes. The academy said kids should be discouraged from specializing in a single sport before adolescence. Young athletes "should be encouraged to participate in a variety of different activities and develop a wide range of skills."

The study included 85 young athletes who were treated for sports injuries and a comparison group of 69 uninjured athletes who came to Loyola for sports physicals.

Researchers graded athletes on a six-point sports-specialization score: trains more than 75 percent of the time in one sport; trains to improve skill or misses time with friends; has quit other sports to focus on one sport; considers one sport more important than other sports; regularly travels out of state; trains more than eight months a year, or competes more than six months.

On the six-point scale, the average sports-specialization score of uninjured athletes was 2177, while the average score of injured athletes was 3.49. The study found that 60.6 percent of the injured athletes specialized in one sport. (Athletes who sacred above 3 on the six-point scale were considered specialized.)

Uninjured athletes spent a total of 8.8 hours a week playing organized sports, while injured athletes spent 11 hours.

Injuries in young athletes include minor conditions such as muscle strains and knee cap pain, overuse injuries such as rotator cuff tendonitis and OsgoodSchlatter disease (painful lump below the kneecap) and severe injuries such abnormalities in knee cartilage and stress fractures in the spine.