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Parent's Guide to AAU Sports

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Parent's Guide to AAU Sports

Abstract

"Do your kids play sports? Do they participate in AAU sports, the nationwide entity where 38 various sports are offered? Here is a parent's guide to AAU sports and seven questions to consider."

Posting about children participating in sports from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/a-parents-guide-to-aau-sports/>

Keywords

In All Things, AAU, Amateur Athletic Union, club sports, children and athletics

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

A Parent's Guide to AAU Sports

 [all in all things.org/a-parents-guide-to-aau-sports/](http://allinallthings.org/a-parents-guide-to-aau-sports/)

Chad Hanson

The topic of AAU sports is broad and I must keep it narrow. AAU sports is a general term that could refer to the specific entity of the [Amateur Athletic Union](#) where 38 sports are currently offered. Within the official AAU entity, there are local or state chapters such as [AAU Iowa](#) where 12 sports are currently offered. AAU could also be used improperly to describe “club” or an affiliated grouping of youth sports teams representing a region (not a school). For example, [USA Volleyball](#) has over 5,300 junior clubs registered that compete for a national championship in different age and skill divisions each summer.

The narrow theme that I wish to engage is: **Should my son or daughter play AAU sports?**

To address these questions, let me present some questions below and add further thoughts within each question category. My hope is that the reader will find some helpful guidelines on which to base a wise and Biblically grounded decision for your son or daughter. The following is not an exhaustive list and is not in ranked order:

1. How much total time (daily, weekly and monthly) will this require of my child?

In the Biblical context of 1 day rest for 6 days labor, will the practice and tournament schedules honor that Biblical order? Some AAU sports and seasons have a few practices per week and local tournaments only on Saturday's. Some could practice a few days per week and also play in consecutive 2 or 3 day tournaments on the weekends (usually over a holiday weekend such as Memorial Day). The length of an AAU season is also important to consider. Some AAU sports could last 6 weeks from start to finish, while others could last for 6 months from start to finish. Naturally, there are more repetition opportunities for the longer seasons.

2. How much financial expense (up-front cost vs. implied cost through my child's involvement) is required for participation?

There might be an up-front cost of \$100 per month for a child to play an AAU sport (some more expensive, others less expensive), but that may only cover the gym rental and uniform cost, tournament entry fees, and maybe also the coach salary. There are implied costs such as: spectator admission fees at the gymnasium door, hotel rooms, gas, food, souvenir purchases, airline fees if traveling to a distant tournament, and additional lessons that could surface from your child wanting more playing time or a greater role on their team. I have heard of some families paying over \$10,000 for one “club” season, without implied costs factored in. The family justified that expense with the rationale that their daughter would get a college scholarship to play that sport. They were using her college savings to pay for her high school club experience.

3. What will the development and growth (physical, emotional, spiritual, social, mental) benefits be for my child by participating in this AAU program?

Luke 2:52 and 10:27 suggest that God wants us to continue growing and developing in all areas of our lives through love. Will my child grow godlier by his or her participation in this sport? Will my child be encouraged properly in areas of teamwork, accountability, trust, skill development, tactical strategies, goal setting, perseverance, commitment, selflessness, diligence, self-control, responsibility, leadership, communication, and more? Is the person that will lead my child someone my child can respect for the right reasons? A reminder here for all of us parents: the coaches who spend time with our children in the sports context end up having a great impact on their development.

4. What kind of overuse or repeated physical motions will my child be undergoing in order to participate in this AAU program, as distinct from their school sponsored sport?

There is great athletic and health value for a child to play different sports instead of 1 sport year-round. Rest for certain muscles, bones and joints is very important for the long-term health of the child. Many AAU sports programs are managed during the off-season of the school sport. This can lead to structural problems as the muscles and joints need rest after 3 months of the school sport. The AAU season can change that rest opportunity by continuing the frequent use of the muscles and joints in the same motion required by that sport.

5. Does my child want to participate or do I want my child to participate in this AAU sport?

It is possible that the hidden motivation of signing a child up for the AAU season is out of anxiety that your child will miss out on a college opportunity unless they play year round. However, there are many different, and often times better, ways to expose your child's athletic talent in front of a college coach. You could consider filming a practice or school sports match and sending a DVD to a college coach. YouTube has created a great platform convenient for both college coach and prospect to share video footage. Attending some specific sports camps of the colleges of interest can be an important way to increase exposure. If your child doesn't stand out in a sports camp and get noticed by the college coach in his or her junior or senior year, then maybe they are not meant to play that sport at that level. It is important to ask yourself: Does my child want to get practice and play AAU or am I, the parent, requesting they get more practice in the sport?

6. Is this particular AAU program or coach a good fit for my child?

Parents and players who have previous experience with the same coach or the same AAU program, can provide some beneficial insight into what you might be considering for your child's participation. They might respond to your financial questions in a positive manner and justify the "college savings" as rationale for their son or daughter to participate. However, you might be in a different position and unable to view "college savings" as the rationale, or unable to justify playing on Sunday's, etc. Again, this is your decision, but the experience and perspectives of others can help you feel solid about your decision.

7. How will this AAU sport benefit or conflict with the training and philosophy of the school program? Will these benefits outweigh the conflicts?

There can be a great tension for an athlete when they are being taught to perform a skill differently by different coaches. But, regardless of individual techniques, I believe that all athletes are best prepared for higher levels and mastery of skill when they are trained to become aware of controlling their body in space (a concept known as proprioception). What matters is the on court (or on field) result (what I call "the outcome"). Every repetition that the child gets is one more rep to improve the outcome. The more your child can develop quality outcomes via different methods, the more adaptable they will be when they enter college, where the college coach will likely do things differently than previous coaches.

While receiving coaching from multiple coaches, though, it is important to remember that each coach will likely want things done her way. If the school coach is asking you to do something one way, then do it that way while playing for that team. If the AAU coach is teaching a different way to do it, then do it that way while playing for that team. Coaches tend to factor the ability to follow their particular system into decisions about playing time; giving each coach what she wants will likely increase playing time opportunities. However, if questions about playing time do arise, parents should not raise those questions for their child. A middle school or high school aged athlete can ask those questions directly at a discreet and respectful time. And, a great way to ask the question by the athlete is, "How can I help my team become more successful?"

There are many more considerations to evaluate and perhaps with enough prodding, I can draft a second installment. My attempt was not to answer the questions for you, but to help you think better about AAU

sports and whether your child should participate.

What are your thoughts on AAU or club sports and what other factors should we consider for today's youth programs?

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