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# When Should My Kid Specialize

When it comes to sport specialization, coaches are one of the first people consulted by parents and families of athletes for their opinion. This can be a challenging position to be in as a coach as it requires balance of your personal values and opinions with those of the families. Coaches are there to support athletes and parents in making these decisions instead of making them for them. Each athlete is an individual and a variety of points should be considered, as each athlete has different needs. As a coach, it's important to take your knowledge of the sport and the individual athlete to help support families in their decision-making of when to specialize.

As a coach, you get to see the athlete in action! Here are some items to consider that will help assess if an athlete is ready to specialize:

1. Do they have clearly defined long-term goals/ambitions as a golfer?
2. Are they motivated to train outside of parental pressure?
3. What is their why? Why do they love golf and what makes them continue to want to perform at an elite level?
4. What is the maturity level of the athlete?
5. What are the strengths and areas of growth for this athlete?
6. Does the athlete identify primarily as a golfer or any other way? Does that ever get in the way (e.g., extreme anger after making a mistake)?

## SCORECARD

As a coach, it is important to reflect on your views and experiences with specialization. Not only does your personal golf journey and beliefs impact your view, but so can past experiences with your athletes. How have your views on specialization been formed?

- What are your personal beliefs on specialization?
- How have you educated yourself on this topic?
- Do these beliefs ever get in the way of other parents' opinions?

- Are there certain things you look for as a coach to determine if an athlete is ready for specialization?
- How would you know if an athlete is not ready for that step?
- What are some of the benefits you've seen from early specialization? What are the drawbacks?
- What are some of the benefits you've seen from holding off on specialization? What are the drawbacks?

## FOLLOW THROUGH

What are your experiences with conversations like this? If you've had them, how did they go? If you haven't what thoughts or points would you like to share with the athlete and their family?

**“One thing about the question of specializing, however, is that it doesn't mean that as a golfer you shouldn't as a young player train with the right information, and practice and prepare rigorously. It's completely fine. And in fact, we would encourage parents and young players to prepare to train to get the right type of coaching at an early age, and that can be done at a pretty high level of intensity while also leaving some room for diversity of other experiences and other sports.”**

- Kevin Blue, Ph.D., Golf Canada Chief Sport Officer