Children are joining organized sports teams at younger ages than ever before. Young athletes are specializing earlier in competitive sports, creating the concern for burnout. These athletes and their parents are looking for guidance from their trusted pediatricians. The pediatrician is an important part of the athlete’s “sports team” in terms of acting as a resource or center point in coordinating care. Families want help in identifying if their athlete may be “doing too much,” which may affect long-term emotional and physical health, and even school performance.1

In this issue of Pediatric Annals, the contributors explore popular matters concerning young athletes today, such as children participating in long-distance running and weight management counseling for wrestlers. The authors also review how to identify and evaluate an athlete who was doing great in a sport previously but has seen a decrease in athletic performance and has lost interest in outside hobbies and friends. Another article discusses the identification and treatment options for secondary amenorrhea and specifically how this relates to the female athlete.

More children seem to be participating in long-distance running, sometimes wanting to join their parents or caretakers on their running workouts or partake in their own independent long runs.

In the article, “Anticipatory Guidance for Long-Distance Running in Young Athletes,” Drs. Kwabena L. Blankson and Joel S. Brenner explore the question: is it safe physically and psychologically to allow children to run long distances and to participate in half and full marathons? Frequently, parents will also ask questions regarding the quality of a good running shoe. The authors present this matter in a concise and succinct form that will be useful to the general pediatrician.

A patient who is a wrestler may ask for formal clearance to wrestle at a weight class lower than what the school-based weight certification program allows. Drs. Lisa Woodroffe, Jesse J. Donnenwerth, and Andrew R. Peterson do an excellent job of shining a light on the somewhat mysterious process of determining a wrestler’s appropriate weight class in their article “Weight Management Counseling for Wrestling Athletes.” Wrestlers and their parents recognize that the pediatrician has the important role of keeping them “in balance,” which includes helping the wrestler stay euhydrazed and properly “fueled” with the right nutrients and foods, thereby maximizing athletic performance on the wrestling mat.

In sports, there is much discussion about maximizing performance. But what about an athlete whose performance has plateaued or is declining, has chronic pain, and has lost interest in school and friends? This topic is discussed in an informative article by Drs. Mary L. Solomon and Amanda K. Weiss Kelly. After reading the “Approach to the Underperforming Athlete,” the pediatric health provider will recognize the signs and symptoms of overtraining syndrome and understand the importance of rest, sleep, and diet for an athlete. This article includes tips on when (timing before competition) and what (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats) to eat before and after activity.

If a female athlete comes to the office for a preparticipation physical and participates in an aesthetic sport such as gymnastics, figure skating, or dance, the topic of possible amenorrhea must be explored. In their article, “Amenorrhea in the Female Athlete: What to Do and When to Worry,” Drs. Kate Berz and Teri McCambridge present a fantastic review of secondary amenorrhea and how it specifically relates to the female athlete. They remind the practitioner of clues obtained in the history and physical examination...
results that may indicate low energy availability. They also list screening devices and questionnaires that may help the practitioner further identify low energy availability and possible eating disorders.

In 3 of the 4 articles presented in this issue, proper rest and nutrition are stressed so that burnout may be prevented in these young athletes. It is our hope that the articles expand the knowledge of pediatric clinicians so they may better fulfill their roles of educator and health care provider to young athletes, protecting them physically and emotionally so they may be healthy and happy playing sports for many years.

We are thankful for the contributions of the authors, many of whom are recognized authorities in the field of pediatric sports medicine.

REFERENCE

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She is co-editor of and also co-author of several chapters in Pediatric Sports Medicine: Essentials for Office Evaluation, a book also published by SLACK Incorporated, which is filled with practical pearls for the busy pediatric practitioner and residents in training.

Dr. Wong completed her sports medicine fellowship at Jersey Shore Medical Center and Rutgers University. She received her medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine and finished her pediatric residency at the University of California, Los Angeles. She has been active on the lecture circuit, giving talks to medical students, residents, nursing, and physical therapy students. Dr. Wong has been the team physician for the Inland 66er’s, a minor league baseball team in San Bernardino for 8 years. Dr. Wong also provides medical coverage for local community sports events.

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He completed a 6-year term as an elected member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Executive Committee on Sports Medicine and Fitness, and currently edits the biannual newsletter for that group. He has authored many medical publications, and speaks regularly on sports medicine topics around the country. His interests include concussion management, overuse injuries, performing arts medicine, and injury prevention strategies/programs.

He regularly delivers sports medicine lectures and mentors residents at UC Irvine/Children’s Hospital of Orange County. He is also the co-founder of the Orange County Concussion Consortium which brings together concussion providers from many disciplines for networking, referral, community and continuing education.

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