

Train athletes for all seasons

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Participation in high school sports continues to rise—and ideally, those athletes are participating in more than one sport.

According to a report from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), the number of participants in high school sports increased for the 28th straight year in 2016-17, with more than 7.9 million athletes participating. That includes the largest one-year increase in girls participation in 16 years to 75,971 athletes.

Seven of the top 10 boys sports saw participation increase, including soccer, outdoor track and field, and cross country. Overall boys participation increased by about 18,500 athletes.

Participation in 11-player football decreased by about 26,000 players, although the numbers of schools offering the sport increased by 52.

Safety issues in football continue to be publicized, but delving into multiple sports in high school, instead of focusing on just one, continues to be the right choice. According to a report last year, "Studies have shown that the rates of injuries and burnout are significantly higher for athletes who pour all of their time and energy into one sport while their bodies are still developing."

That same report also noted that college football coaches Urban Meyer and Dabo Swinney prefer multi-sport athletes.

Those two know a thing or two about the caliber of athletes to recruit. Meyer has won three national titles, including with Ohio State in 2014, and Swinney led Clemson to the national title last season.

Participation in multiple sports teaches young athletes how to adjust to different roles. On the local level, it's always exciting to watch a player star in a sport for two or three months, then

quickly adjust to becoming a role player in another. It's a valuable life lesson. Players who can make the needed adjustment will likely contribute to a successful team.

The NFHS encourages participation in multiple sports, claiming that college coaches want athletes who can think, move and deal with adversity.

Playing multiple sports also helps athletes physically, the NFHS said. "Athletes can learn or enhance their hand-eye coordination, balance, endurance, explosion, communication and athletic agility by participating in a variety of sports."

The high school fall sports season is right around the corner. Local fans will be thrilled to watch many of those athletes also excel in sports during winter and spring.