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*Parents **Don't** Owe Their Kids Every Opportunity and  
**Shouldn't** Attend Every One of Their Kid's Games—and that's just for starters*

## **College Athletics Director and Sports Mom Co-authors Bust Myths about Youth Sports in New Book**

College athletics director David King and award-winning author Margot Starbuck, a mom of three teens who play volleyball, basketball, soccer, and baseball, team up to reclaim youth sports from the questionable culture that has grown up around it. They advocate the kinds of sports experiences that can positively shape kids' lives in their new book: *Overplayed: A Parent's Guide to Sanity in the World of Youth Sports* (Herald Press, \$15.99 paperback, April 5, 2016).

"The most important thing in the development of a child's mind, body, soul, and spirit is not whether she plays for her high school's lacrosse team," they write. "Like you, we see the long game. We care who children will be when they're thirty, forty, and fifty years old."

One of the basic myths they debunk is that there's no harm in participating in youth sports. While both King and Starbuck believe that participating in sports offers many benefits to kids, they are alarmed by what happens in today's youth sports culture: overuse injuries, burnout, loss of childhood, misperceptions about true benefit of sport, and damaged relationships.

They offer practical tips for parents who long to balance their children's athletic activities with family life, and who wish to nurture their children's values and faith. Christian parents especially, "who pattern their lives after a guy who taught that we find our lives by losing them, don't need to be anxious that our children get ahead of others."

In *Overplayed*, King and Starbuck debunk seven myths about youth sports—ideas that have circulated so long and with such frequency that many of us don't question them—such as:

### **Myth: Because We Owe Our Children Every Opportunity, We Can't Say No to Sports**

"Parents don't owe children any particular experience of youth sports. What we do owe them is a space to discover who they are and who they're becoming. Sometimes that happens in the backyard and sometimes it happens in organized sports," they write. "As you consider the kinds of sports opportunities you do or don't owe your child, weigh the money, time, physical risk, emotional risk, efficacy of early involvement, and relational implications.

### **Myth: My Child Should Specialize in One Sport**

Early specialization, a function of chasing college scholarships, has resulted in increasing rates of injury. Being a multisport athlete reduces the chance of injury and provides benefits that kids don't otherwise get when they focus on one sport.

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**Myth: Youth Sports Instills Our Family's Values**

While sports can help develop worthy values such as self-awareness, socialization, commitment, and character, a child's experience of sports may also ingrain negative values such as loss of quality family time, detachment from faith community, endorsement of the macho ideal, demonstration of poor behavior, and economic disparity.

**Myth: Good Parents Attend All Their Children's Games**

Parental involvement in and constant presence at kids' sports activities has achieved epic, and problematic, proportions, the authors say—not only because “parents are nutty.” “Being constantly present to our children at practices, scrimmages, and games is predicated on the faulty assumption that our presence is what's best for them. That's simply not the case.”

**Myth: The Money We Are Investing into Youth Sports Will Pay Off**

Many parents invest in sports activities, including private coaching and elite travel teams, in hopes that their children will achieve the holy grail of youth sports: a college scholarship. The reality is that very few kids do. “The kinds of athletes who earn a full ride to college are, and we mean this in the best possible way, *freaks of nature*. They possess truly extraordinary physical capabilities, from the acuity of their vision to the agility of their bodies.”

King and Starbuck urge parents to allow their foundational values to inform decisions about their children and sports: “Sports themselves are neither good nor bad. It is up to us to decide whether we'll use sports or be used by them.” In *Overplayed*, they help parents learn how to set good boundaries and to help kids gain healthy identities—both on and off the field, and whether they win or lose. Their book is chock-full of practical tips and resources, and ideas for kick-starting conversations with kids, other parents, and coaches.

**David King** is director of athletics at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He has given presentations and sermons on the topic at churches, denominational assemblies, and conferences. King has a master's degree in Educational Administration from Temple University and has taught and coached at all levels. Dave and his wife, Deb, have three adult children and two grandchildren.

**Margot Starbuck** is the author of six books, including the award-winning *Girl in the Orange Dress*. She is a widely sought-after speaker and columnist at *Today's Christian Woman* and an editorial advisor for *Gifted for Leadership*. A graduate of Westmont College and Princeton Seminary, Starbuck is the mother of three children and lives in Durham, North Carolina.

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