

# At what age should a soccer player peak?

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It's obvious by the ever-younger ages of select teams that many coaches, team managers and parents do not know when a soccer player should peak. Pre-teen teams are too young to have youngsters put into open try-out situations where they may be cut and put onto a team where they have to earn their playing time. In many places in the U.S.A. adults want to encroach into even younger age groups with too much-too soon. Even to the extent of such silly things as under 8 travel teams. Anyone who condones such an environment for children is motivated by greed, trying to take money off of well-meaning, but unsuspecting parents. Or they are stating to the world that they have no clue as to when a soccer player is supposed to peak. They must want these kids to sign a professional contract at age 9 and then play in the under 12 World Cup. They knowingly or unknowingly subscribe to the earlier and more is better mentality. This of course is educationally unsound.

It is no wonder then that so many youth soccer players are "burned out" by the time they are 15. For many players the "burnout" occurs even earlier. They are the victims of adults who are keen on winning the next under 8 jamboree or (heaven forbid) an under 12 regional cup championship.

Even when the adults organizing children's soccer understand the above pitfalls and make the effort to avoid them many still do not fully grasp the timeline for the development of a soccer player. Since the majority of soccer players in most communities are children and teenagers they think that soccer is a kid's game when in fact it is an adult game. Because of this basic misunderstanding of the game they think that soccer players are supposed to peak somewhere in the age range of 13 to 16. In fact soccer players peak in their mid to late twenties for field players and perhaps the early thirties for goalkeepers. Indeed adolescence ranges from age 15 to 23 in a person's biological growth. Soccer players do not peak athletically until they are in their twenties, not to mention their tactical awareness and emotional control. Once the adults comprehend this realistic age of reaching the fruition of a fully developed player they soon understand the sound logic behind a proper player development scheme. It begins to make sense that too much too soon will in fact harm the players more than help. The adults (coaches, team managers, club, state, regional and national administrators and parents) become realistic about why children should play small sided games, why select try-outs should be held off until the teenage years, why U10 and younger teams should not make out of state trips or play in tournaments, why there should not be records kept of results until the players are in the U15 age group, why overuse injuries occur in younger and younger children when they play the same game too often, why kids are jaded towards the game by age 13, why players and soccer families experience burn-out from all the trips, tournaments, etc. As a team sport soccer is a late specialization sport. The time frame for the development of soccer players is considered long-term athlete development.

Please read the full article on athlete development in the USA Olympic Coach magazine, Spring 2004, volume 16, number 1 at: [http://www.usolympicteam.com/education/coach\\_spring04.pdf](http://www.usolympicteam.com/education/coach_spring04.pdf).