

[THE SCHOLARSHIP CHASE](#) [Northern California soccer](#) [When is it time to pick just one sport?](#)

- Tom FitzGerald, Chronicle Staff Writer

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For many a teenaged soccer player, the vexing question is whether to concentrate on soccer and dump another sport (or two) that he or she also loves. The decision might disappoint another batch of teammates, not to mention an anxious coach.

At the level that college prospects play, there's little patience for the seasonal commitment. It's year-round, with a little time off for good behavior.

Kendra Perry, 16, a junior at Livermore High, says she'd love to play softball in college, but that's not going to happen. She "retired" from that sport two years ago because of the demands of top-level soccer. She's a midfielder for the Pleasanton Rage under-18 team and plays on a regional Olympic Developmental Program team, that next month is headed for a tournament in Boca Raton, Fla.

One of the most hotly recruited girls in the Bay Area, she's leaning toward Santa Clara.

"I miss softball," she said. "But I liked playing soccer better, and I wanted to go to college."

It's not an easy decision for many kids, and Bay Area college soccer coaches differ on when youngsters should make the concentration move, stressing that it depends on the individual.

"By the time you're in ninth grade, if you want to compete at the next level, you're going to have to start focusing on soccer," USF men's coach Erik Visser said. "Ten, 20 years ago there wasn't much of an emphasis on focusing on one sport, but now with the expectations of parents, it's becoming more competitive.

"Maybe it's not ideal developmentally, but this is the real world. At the 15-16 age group, the weeding out is already done. There's an under-14 national team. There are 15- and 16-year-olds on national teams who are asked to move to Bradenton, Fla., to attend the soccer academy. I don't know if it's good, but it's the way it is."

The pressure is mounting for some kids to decide much earlier where to focus their energies.

"Some kids are making that decision at 8, 9, 10 years old, and that's too early," Stanford men's coach Bret Simon said. "It should be about what a kid wants to play. If a sport is not enjoyable, all the potential in the world won't make that a good experience. Kids who are concentrating on soccer because of their parents or friends -- and their heart really isn't in it -- are making a mistake. Do what you like to do."



As players move into middle school, though, they may fall behind if they aren't playing soccer most of the year. Among top high school players -- because of the time soccer requires -- it's rare to also excel at another sport.

"If you're only playing four months a year, you're competing against someone who's been doing it 12 months a year -- there's a big difference there," Cal women's coach Kevin Boyd said.

"It used to be that players could do that (playing multiple sports) because they were so athletically gifted, but nowadays the athleticism in soccer is extremely high. It's not like you can be a great athlete and just step in and be better than other kids if you don't have the technique. That doesn't fly."

The risk of year-round soccer is burnout. At clubs throughout the Bay Area, some players need a break or need to quit soccer entirely.

Boyd spoke of a top player on an East Bay club who was so exhausted from the year-round grind she had to take a break. He was confident she would bounce back. "She'll be a Division I player," he said.

Others will put their soccer cleats in the closet for good.

Some clubs pressure their players not only to drop other sports but to skip playing soccer for their high schools.

"That's ridiculous," San Jose State men's coach Gary St. Clair said. "There are so many social aspects that they miss by doing that. It's shortsighted. The benefits (of playing on high school soccer teams) far outweigh the drawbacks."

Dave Siracusa, the San Jose State women's coach, says middle school and high school is "their only time to play other sports. I would never try to limit somebody's athletic experience. ... I want players that are well rounded."

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