

## **Fall Ball – Productive or Counter Productive?**

**By Adam Sarancik**

Whether to play baseball in the fall is one of those subjects that it seems people are either adamantly for or adamantly against. And yet, as with most subjects, the truth is that for some people it can be the right thing to do and for some they could better invest their time doing something else.

As with all subjects about coaching, I analyze it from a person-athlete-player perspective.

The most important thing a student-athlete must do is to achieve and keep balance in their life. If playing baseball out-of-season is going to keep a person immersed in sports to the exclusion of discovering and developing themselves in areas outside of athletics, it is always the wrong thing to do.

If a person is to discern what will be the best career path for them, they must invest the same amount of energy, dedication, and perseverance as they invest in sports in experiencing whether they have talents and interests in music, art, technology, science, etc. beyond just taking a class or two in those subjects in school. They should participate in school clubs and extracurricular activities in those other areas. If they discover they have talents and interests in one or more of them, every year they should do informational interviews about them and get job shadows, internships, and jobs in them.

If a student-athlete has balance in their life and if their goal is to have as much fun as possible while in school whether or not they optimally develop as an athlete, then playing Fall Ball can be a great choice. If a baseball player is elite, and has already determined the best colleges for them based on their career aspirations, and those colleges are holding baseball prospect camps or their recruiting coaches are attending showcases in the fall, then training beyond the summer season may be necessary to prepare the athlete to be at their best at that time.

However, as a practical matter, in almost every other circumstance, playing fall baseball is not the best choice for a player's time.

As an athlete, it is much better for a baseball player to choose to train in the fall to be bigger, stronger, faster and more agile. The best athletes have the most potential to be the best players. Optimum athletic development is a year around process requiring a periodization program of strength and conditioning both in-season and out of season. Of course, it also requires an equal amount of dedication and consistency to nutrition, hydration, rest, and quality sleep.

The maximum athletic and strength gain part of the process takes a minimum of 4-5 months every year for 4-5 years, is very intense, and is physically and mentally demanding. Therefore, except for the most elite and gifted athletes, this 4-5 months should not coincide with playing another organized sport full-time, particularly if balance is going to be maintained in their life. For the same reasons, playing one organized sport year around is also a bad choice. Participating in multiple school sports at other times of the year can be very advantageous if there is an athletic development component to the coaching of the sport beyond just playing to win games. However, in my experience, this is the exception, not the rule.

If a person chooses to play fall baseball, not all choices are good ones. Fall baseball can get very casual about protecting the health of the athletes. The extra demands on time can cause deficiencies in nutrition, rest, sleep and academic study. Many times, the same care and attention to detail regarding dynamic movement, stretching, and arm care routines, and pitch counts are not done as well in the fall as they are during the regular season. All of these things can lead to illness and injury.

The quality of fall baseball coaching may not be high and may be self-serving. It may simply prioritize winning games and not athletic and player development. The individual skills of the players may not improve and the players may be pigeon-holed into specific positions and not be given an opportunity to expand their versatility.

For a limited few, playing baseball in the fall can be a wise use of time. For most student-athletes, however, better choices can be made for their development as people, athletes and players.

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