

Are Young Athletes Being Pushed Too Far?

By Will Thelning

In basketball, hustle is everything. Grit is glorified, and pain is often invisible. But what happens when injuries are ignored? When young players are told to shake it off, to push through swelling, sprains, or even worse — what's really at stake?

As a student here at Christ's College, I see it firsthand. On the court, in training, in our own teams — young athletes give everything they have. But how much is too much? Today, I'm asking a hard question that affects me and my teammates: Are we being pushed too far when it comes to injuries?



The School's Systems and Policies

Christ's College does have formal return-to-play protocols in place, but they depend on the type of injury. For concussions, the process is clear. There are strict rules about how long a player needs to rest and how they should slowly return to physical activity.

When asked what happens when player health conflicts with performance goals, one staff member said:

"We put boys' wellbeing at the forefront. We're process-driven, not outcome-driven. Balance is better — we don't want to push the boys too hard. If they're hurting, they need to stop and listen to their bodies."

While not all coaches receive detailed training in injury prevention, they do have basic first aid knowledge. All staff are required to do first aid refresher courses every two years. This helps ensure that each team has someone on the sideline who understands how to handle injuries when they happen.

For concussion management, this training is also included. The school also assigns a staff manager to each team for extra support and safety.

Still, there are differences between teams. Higher-level squads like the Senior A basketball team are coached with a more performance-focused mindset.

"We do push those boys differently than how we push other boys," one coach admitted.

Athletes Speak Out

To better understand how these policies work in real life, I spoke with several student athletes. Their stories revealed that while some feel supported, many still feel pressure — not always from coaches, but from within themselves.

One student said:

“Last year I suffered a concussion, and I felt the need to play through it to increase my chances of making the tournament squad.”

Another shared:

“My coach pushes me to play through pain — even when I can’t really move properly.”



One player, who needed surgery, didn’t go through with it because of the time it would take to recover:

“There was more pressure on myself than anyone else.”

When asked if their schedules allow enough time to rest, one athlete explained:

“I’m on three different teams. I’m lucky if I get two days a week for rest.”

Players also described feeling hesitant to report injuries, even if no one told them not to:

“I didn’t want to let anyone down,” one said. “It felt easier to stay quiet.”

So what would help them feel safer?

“Just if coaches were a little more clear that they care about your physical and mental wellbeing. That would make it easier to speak up.”

The Coach's View

Coaches face a tough job: they want to win, but they also need to protect their players. When asked how they monitor athlete health and avoid overtraining, one coach explained:



“Each week, players tell me how busy they are. Some are more loaded than others. I also talk with the school physio, which helps me understand what each player is dealing with.”

Having a school physiotherapist is a big advantage. If a player reports pain, they’re immediately sent to the physio to start recovery.

“We currently have three or four boys sitting out while we monitor their injuries. They won’t return until they’re cleared.”

This coach made it clear that he doesn’t feel pressure to keep players in the game just to win:

“I’ve been here long enough that I don’t feel that pressure. The player’s long-term health is the

most important thing.”

However, when asked about educational programs for injury prevention, the answer was less encouraging:

“There’s probably not much in place. It’s something the school could improve. Players are often pulled in many directions — club teams, rep squads, school teams — and it’s easy for them to overtrain without anyone knowing.”

A Medical Opinion

To understand the risks better, I also spoke to a sports medicine professional. They said the most common injuries in youth athletes are joint issues like ankle and knee sprains, as well as muscle and tendon problems caused by overuse.

About 10–20% of players return to sport too early, they estimate:

“If they’re seeing a physio or doctor, they usually follow advice. But sometimes, they’re eager to get back too soon.”

They also said mental health signs are important:

“I listen closely. If a boy seems anxious about returning, that’s often a red flag. I also use tests to check pain and movement ability.”



The Real Cost

The pressure to perform is real — but so are the consequences of playing through pain. Lingering injuries that take months or even years to heal. Lost chances to compete when it matters most. And in some cases, permanent damage that ends a sporting career before it even starts.

Christ’s College has many strong systems in place. There is care, communication, and a focus on student wellbeing — but as this investigation shows, there are also areas to improve. More education on injury prevention. More open communication from coaches. And more support for athletes learning to listen to their own bodies.

So — are young athletes being pushed too far?

For some, yes. And if we want sport to continue to grow strong, healthy, confident young people, then we must start by making sure that health — not just hustle — comes first.