

Put Your Auto Search Into Overdrive.

SFGATE.COM **CARS**.COM

TEST DRIVE IT TODAY

SFGate.com

[SFGate Home](#) ▪ [Business](#) ▪ [Sports](#) ▪ [Entertainment](#) ▪ [Travel](#)[Jobs](#) ▪ [Real Estate](#) ▪ [Cars](#)SFGate News Web by 

San Francisco Chronicle



CW Nevius

High Hopes Usually Lead To Hard Fall

C.W. Nevius, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, December 10, 2000

Tony Gigliotti, of Danville, has nine children ranging in age from 6 to 30 years old. He's been watching, coaching and driving kids to Little League baseball and youth soccer games for more than 20 years.

And in that time, he was asked, how many parents thought their child was going to earn a college scholarship?

"All of them," he says cheerfully. "I know with my first three (kids) I did.

Literally, you go into denial."

Ask someone like Cal women's soccer coach Kevin Boyd and he laughs too.

"Oh God," says Boyd. "Constantly. There is an awful lot of it. They've got little 11-year-old Jenny, and they want a college scholarship. If that is the reason they are playing, it is a very stupid reason to be playing sports."

And what about the Little Leaguers, the kids with the \$100 baseball bats and \$70-an-hour pitching and hitting guru? The early results are there, no doubt about it, but how long do they carry over?

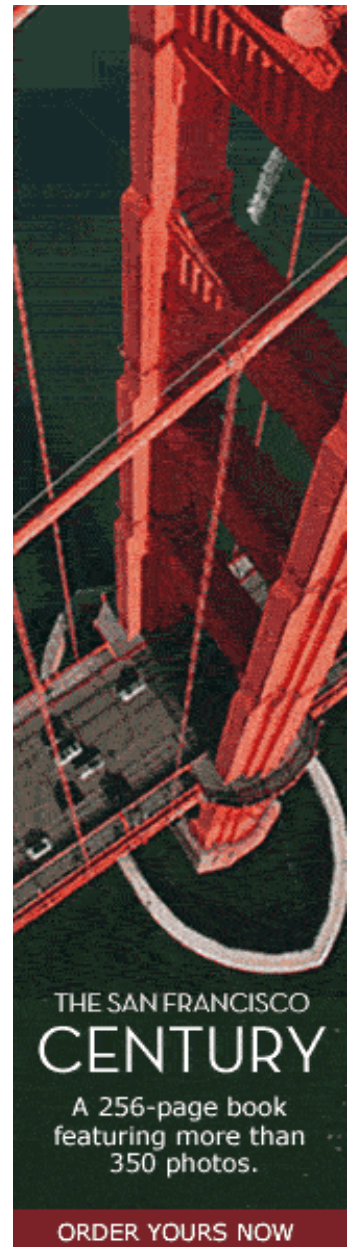
"I would guess that I have taught over 75,000 kids in clinics and

- [Printable Version](#)
- [Email This Article](#)

Live Scores and Stats

- [Baseball \(AL/NL\)](#)
- [NFL](#)
- [College Football](#)
- [Tennis](#)
- [Golf](#)
- [NHL](#)
- [NBA](#)
- [WNBA](#)
- [College Hoops \(M\)](#)
- [College Hoops \(W\)](#)
- [Soccer \(M\)](#)
- [Auto Racing](#)
- [Boxing](#)
- [Horse Racing](#)

Top Autos

From
R.A.B. Motors**Mercedes Benz**2002 M-Class
\$25,988**Mercedes Benz**2003 M-Class
\$31,988**Mercedes Benz**2002 M-Class
\$32,275**Mercedes Benz**2003 M-Class
\$31,988**Mercedes Benz**2001 S-Class
\$31,988**Mercedes Benz**2001 S-Class
\$21,988**Mercedes Benz**2001 C-Class
\$29,988**Mercedes Benz**2002 C-Class
\$39,988**Mercedes Benz**2001 C-Class
\$37,988**Mercedes Benz**2002 S-Class
\$48,988**Mercedes Benz**2003 S-Class
\$49,988**Mercedes Benz**2004 S-Class
\$56,988

instruction," says former major leaguer Erik Johnson, who runs EJ Sports, a respected baseball skills program. "I would say no more than 1 to 5 percent ever play college baseball. And it is closer to 1 than 5."

"Back in the '80s," says Grady Fuson, director of scouting for the Oakland Athletics, "there was a 12-year-old kid who could throw the crap out of the ball. He was 5-10, 180 pounds and he just overwhelmed everybody. I remember seeing him in high school, he was 5-10, 240. He looked better in Little League. "

Well, sure, but you don't understand, the parents say. My kid is different. He or she has been working since 5 years old, every clinic, every practice. Just wait until you hear his/her numbers.

No, says Boyd, you listen to some numbers.

"I have over 1,000 players who write us each year," he says. "This year we are recruiting 12, some of whom are not included in that 1,000. We will sign five -- and some years not that many. Those other kids? They may play but not at a comparable school. People think they are going to hand-pick their school. That's not how it works."

"It's simple math," says Gregg Heinzmann, director of the Youth Sports Research Council. "There are at least 30-40 million kids of all ages playing sports right now. In grades 9-12, that drops to 6.2 million. There are only about 300,000 playing in college, Division I through III. And in the pros there are only a few thousand. So the odds of getting a scholarship are 1,000 to 1, and in the pros, 100,000 to 1."

But wait, my kid can throw a baseball 90 mph. Yeah, says Fuson, take a number.

"We've got more kids than ever who can light up a (radar) gun, more kids who can touch 90 mph," he says. "Everything is hard and harder. These guys are pitching at 120 percent of maximum effort level. That's what you don't see in the big leagues. Throwin' it 93 mph isn't going to get them out. Throwing it 90 and putting it right in the spot, that gets them out."

The real shocker is that, with all the camps, clinics and instructors, the results may be lackluster at best. Keith Lieppman, A's director of player development says, "I think less instruction is better at the younger levels. That's why a lot of times the Dominicans are easier to work with. They haven't had a lot of instruction."

Oh yes, the Dominicans. How is it possible that the Dominican Republic, an island of no more than 5.6 million people, can produce such a glut of major-league players? In the Athletics organization, a full 30 percent of the players are Latin, most of whom come from the Dominican Republic.

There is the obvious answer, of course. Lieppman says they "seem hungrier," which is certainly logical since the standard of living is far below what Americans would expect. Baseball is a way to make the big time.

But that's only part of it. If the American system was such a success, the Dominicans should be lifting weights, working on bat mechanics

Mercedes Benz

2003 S-Class
\$55,988

Mercedes Benz

2001 C-Class
\$63,988

Mercedes Benz

2002 C-Class
\$71,988

[See more from this dealer](#)



- [About Top Autos](#)
- [View All Top Autos](#)

and playing carefully organized tournaments supervised by parents.

Instead, they have a simpler plan. They just play. I will never forget looking out my hotel window late one night in the Dominican and seeing kids playing baseball on the asphalt parking lot. Why? It had lights.

"If you have never been down there, it just blows your mind," says Fuson. "You go to a park in the Dominican and you will see 10 kids playing catch, running around like scatbacks. They are active, live athletes.

"You go to our parks, and No. 1, you don't see 10 kids period. Then you see our kids and they are so thick and slow at 18 that they are already cooked. You don't see active, live bodies."

That's the dirty little secret. For all the work, an awful lot of athletic potential has to do with the tools your body was born with. Take the fanatically devoted soccer hopeful who never misses a workout and can bounce the ball for hours without ever letting it hit the ground. Two words -- wanna race?

"Speed is what will tell you what level you will play at," says Boyd. "If there is an athletic gift you want, speed is it. Speed kills."

And what should you do to boost your speed?

"Thank your parents," Boyd suggests.

The real crusher is when reality hits, and mom and dad realize that the dream isn't going to happen. In many cases the kids just quit, either burned out or bored. Or, they may get the word that they are simply not good enough.

Lieppman has begun to notice a new trend with the elite few who manage to get a professional baseball contract. They get their signing bonus, they report to a minor-league team and they quit.

"They just take their bonus and run," Lieppman says. "I'll get a call and they'll say, 'I'm done,' after half a year. That is something that has increased more rapidly. They think they are going to make it in six months. They want it yesterday."

The reality, of course, is that the vast majority of these high hopes are long, long shots from the very start. If parents knew as much about the odds when their kids were 5 as they do when they turn 18, they probably never would have gotten so carried away.

"And," says Dr. Judy Young, executive director of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, "they could afford to put their kids through college for what they were paying for clinics and instruction."

- [What's This?](#)

[Pitching Machines](#)

Your Information Source We Got What You Need!

epitchingmachines.net

[Baseball Hitting Drills](#)

Train like a Pro, Hit Like a Pro! Totally Baseball Hitting Drills.

www.Baseball.TrueLocal.com

[Free Baseball Bats](#)

Free \$250 Sports Authority, Champs, or Dicks Sport for Bats. 100% Free!

www.InternetOpinionGroup.com



[Get up to 50% off home delivery of the Chronicle for 12 weeks!](#)

[Back To Top](#)

[©2006 San Francisco Chronicle](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)