

Ralston, J. (1986, September). Raising a Star: Are we Pushing Child Athletes too Far? McCalls.

OVERVIEW

Herb (a former minor league baseball player) and Marilyn Kosten of Memphis were pleased, as most parents would be, when their daughters showed unusual tennis precocity. By 1973, twelve year-old Julie was state champion. But no one realized how good the younger Lori, eight, had become until she faced her sister in the Memphis twelve-and-under girls' tournament. The more-aggressive Lori put so much pressure on her sister that Julie fainted and defaulted the match.

The article describes tense family meetings and the pressures that grew in a family whose life completely revolved around tennis. Marilyn gradually came to feel left out and turned to her own business. Julie tried to keep the family happy and together, as older children often do.

Herb and Marilyn now believe that it was a mistake to let thirteen year-old Lori leave home for Nick Bolletteri's elite tennis academy in Florida. Pressure to become the best tennis player finally left Lori burned out at age fifteen and unable to pick up a racquet for two years.

Lori still feels that something is missing in her life, but has returned to giving tennis instructions. Herb is still involved in the national tournament for eighteen year-olds and under. "I think the greatest mistake was not putting more of a premium on education. Lori changed schools eight different times, but that's what you have to do. I still think there are a lot of good values in athletics." Marilyn finds it amazing that the family has been able to hang together. She reveals, "The wounds haven't all healed. But almost."

The article concludes with some suggestions for developing talent in young people:

* Get an expert's opinion (for example, D.H. Feldman's *Nature's Gambit: Child Prodigies And The Development Of Human Potential*). Realize that developing a child prodigy "is going to change your whole way of life and it may not turn out the way you dream."

- o Make decisions carefully.
- o Limit publicity.
- o Do not neglect education.
- o Assign responsibilities.
- o Love the individual, not the star.
- o Separate your own aspirations from your child's.

IMPLICATIONS

1. As quoted in the article, "Whether it's a matter of starting, quitting, or becoming more involved, parents should respect their children's feelings: they should help, encourage, but never force."

2. Success demands sacrifice, but growth and wholeness are more important than success at an early age.

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