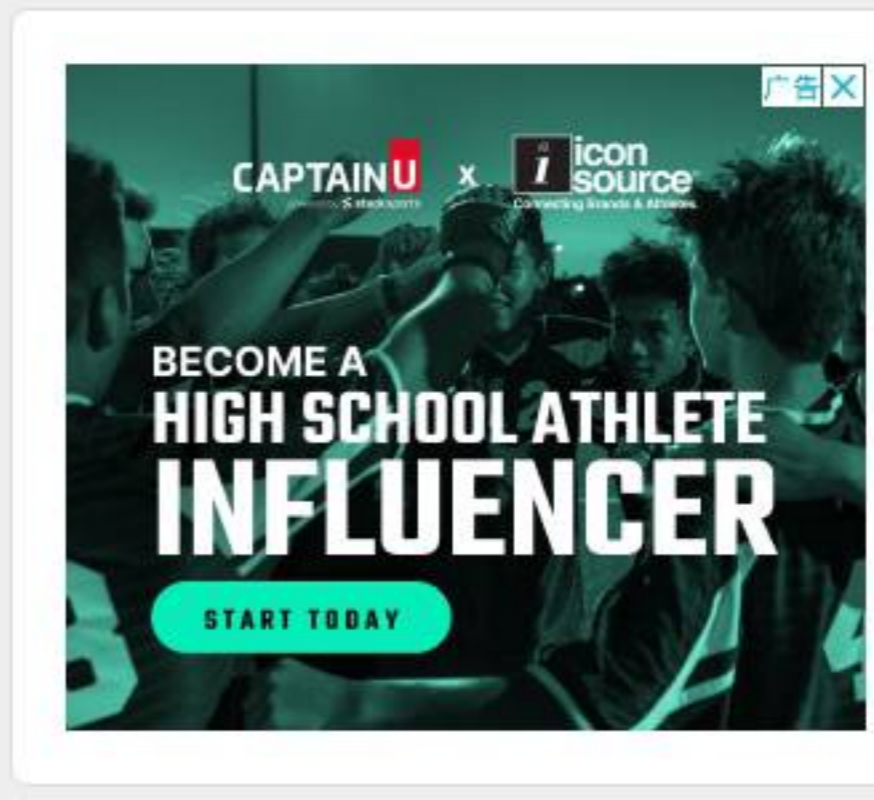
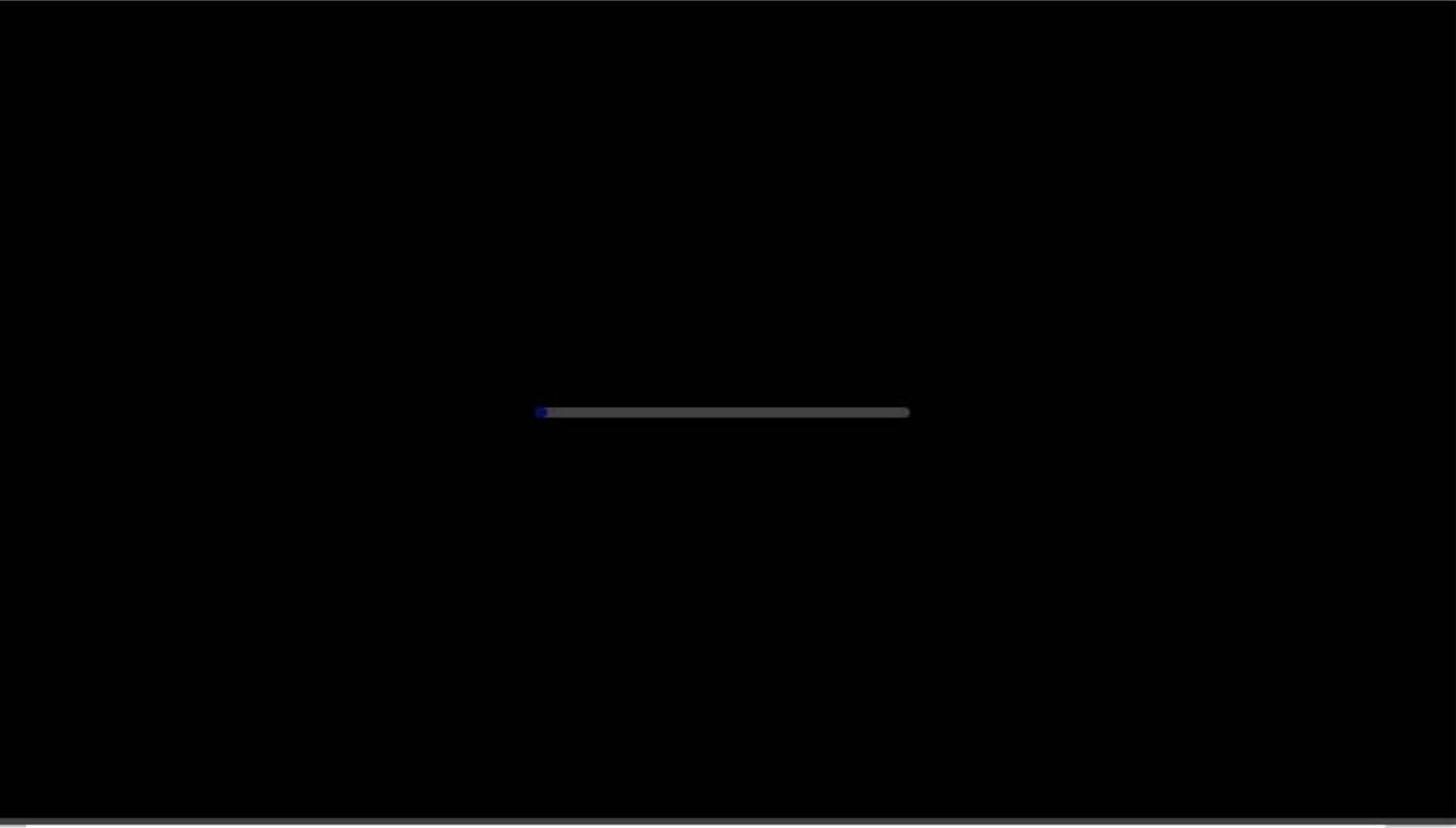




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Should Child Athletes Lift Weights? By Jimmy Pritchard Published On: 2022-02-11



For decades, there has been debate over the appropriate age for youth to begin resistance training. The old wives' tale that it will stunt a child's growth, claims that it reduces flexibility, and even worse, can cause serious injury. Fortunately, the majority of these claims have been debunked by research.

Start Lifting Now

First, rather than using the term resistance training, I prefer "performance training." Unless you are a bodybuilder training purely for aesthetics, your training is likely aimed at enhancing performance, thus should be treated as such.

As Gray Cook says, "never add strength to dysfunction." One does not simply reach a magical age and suddenly begin back squatting. It is quite the opposite. As we age, we tend to drift further away from our natural ability to move efficiently and effectively unless we train properly.



Earn The Right To Add Load

Whether you are ten years old or 40, you must earn the right to add load by mastering the movement pattern in an unloaded fashion. Youth must master movement patterns such as squatting, hinging, stepping, crawling, and lunging before even sniffing a barbell.

While all this information is excellent for understanding the safety and efficacy behind training for youth athletes, it's most important to understand why it helps improve athletic performance. Unfortunately, there is a misconception that youth athletes will get all the stimulus they need to improve strength, power, speed, endurance, etc., via participation in team sports alone however this is not the case.



Cute child lifting gold barbell on blue pastel background. He is a determined and successful child.

Strength Training Program Guidelines

Here are some guidelines when considering strength-training programs:



- An coach-to-child ratio of no more than 1 to 10.
The coach should have an approved strength-training certification and experience with kids and strength training.
Warm-up with at least 5-10 minutes of aerobic activity and dynamic stretching.
Cool down with less intense activity and static stretching.
Begin with one set of 8-15 repetitions of 6-8 exercises that focus on the major muscle groups of the upper and lower body and core.
Kids can start with bodyweight exercises (sit-ups and push-ups) and work on technique without using weights.
For best results, do strength exercises for at least 20-30 minutes 2 or 3 days per week.

One Caveat About Lifting Weights

A rather alarming misconception is that age must be placed on specific exercises or programs. Everybody matures, progresses, and learns differently. I've instructed athletes as young as 10 to perform barbell front squats because they were ready.

Although it's still crucial, greasing the groove and becoming as neurologically efficient as possible ranks even higher in the hierarchy of youth athlete necessities. Treat training in the weight room much like a skill that you intend to improve on the practice field.



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