

LIKE FATHER, TOO SOON?

THE STRIKER WAYNE ROONEY HAS ENROLLED HIS 16-MONTH-OLD SON IN SOCCER SCHOOL IN THE BID TO MOULD HIM INTO THE NEXT BIG FOOTBALL STAR. IS ROONEY GONE LOONEY? WE FIND OUT

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Should you teach your child to swim, before he learns to walk? Or how to kick a ball, before he even knows what a goal is? Manchester United superstar striker Wayne Rooney certainly seems to think so. He has enrolled his 16-month-old son, Kai, in SocaTots, a soccer school to ensure his football skills are honed in from an early age.

So city parents approve of setting a career goal to such levels? "I recently read somewhere in Australia, kids as young as 18 months are enrolled in swimming classes," says to-be dad Ruchi Mehta (30). "They might not be able to walk, but by the time they learn to walk, they are already good swimmers," Mehta adds, recalling a video she had seen and mentioning that a child's development can start as early as zero years.

So there is no harm in trying, but parents should not hastily enroll their kids in classes just because other parents are doing the same," says Mehta.

Divya Singh, mummy of 16-month-old Hiya, says, "Teaching aggression or how to win at this age is just wrong. A fun soccer class is well and good, but one that takes into consideration long-term goals is not ideal at this age."

READY

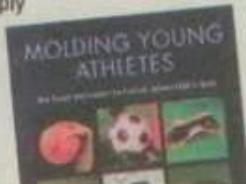
Ravi from Disha Learning Centre, a centre that also runs the Gifted Learning Centre for children with super-

rior intelligence is against Rooney's move. "Children's motor skills are underdeveloped (at this age) and the child can develop pains and aches that can have a negative impact. Instead, in this case, Rooney should expose his son to football games and CDs to inspire interest."

SS Vasthi, martial arts trainer with Mira Road-based Ashmita Club says, "Professional gymnast and karate professionals have to start training early if they want to stand out. We generally enroll kids when they complete three years of age for karate, as they are more flexible and their bones are tender, so they can be easily moulded at that age. It's tougher to reach a certain level of excellence in professional sports when you start training at a later age."

IN PRINT

In Molding Young Athletes, youth coach and mentor, Darrell Erickson lists guidelines for parents and coaches to develop self-confidence, perseverance and survival skills for children. Published by Purington Press Available on www.amazon.com For Rs 240, shipping charges apply



Manchester United's English forward Wayne Rooney holds his son, Kai, after the English Premier League football match between Man U and Stoke City at Old Trafford in Manchester, last year. PIC/AFT

EXPERT SPEAK

When you decide to bring a child into the world, it is your responsibility as a parent to ensure they grow into well-adjusted adults. I find Rooney's decision ridiculous. Even if the aim is to develop the child's motor skills and coordination, a child that young requires only love, nurture and play to do so. In this case, it seems like the father is trying to live vicariously

through the child or is selfishly hoping for the kid to turn out to be just like him, which is a recipe for disaster. Even if the child has the talent and innate genius, it is the parent's responsibility to nurture it with the willing participation of the child, so that the potential can be unfolded in a healthy manner. The way Rooney is going about it is insensitive.



Laxmi Parmeswar, clinical psychologist and family therapist