

Game On! College Athletic Recruitment

There is a common myth that if your son or daughter excels in a sport that college coaches will come calling and that a scholarship is imminent. The reality today is that most coaches don't have the luxury of a substantial travel budget to recruit students. This leaves students with the responsibility of not only understanding the college athletic recruitment process but also learning to advocate for themselves. Scholarships are available, but students need to reach out for them. Applying to colleges as a prospective college athlete is a process that begins early, so you and your teen need to plan ahead.

A student-athlete needs to develop a college plan earlier than most students. Students may want to register with the NCAA or NAIA as early as the beginning of junior year in high school to make sure they are completing NCAA-required courses, for high school graduation requirements, college admissions requirements, and NCAA requirements may be different. Coaches appreciate that students are planning for success by meeting the league requirements. In addition, students need to verify that the colleges for which they may play will be good places for them academically. Doing some self-reflection and exploration of potential majors and careers before targeting specific colleges can help students focus their attention on schools that are both an academic and athletic fit. Students can put themselves in the driver's seat when they know what they are looking for in a college. This means that academic planning is just as vital as being active in the recruiting process.

Like exploring a college's fit for your student, finding the right team fit can be equally important. The first place your teen can start the process is with his high school or team coach to share his interest and help determine what level of play he should target. It is helpful to learn the differences between NCAA Division I, Division II, and Division III, as well as NAIA and NJCAA. The leagues have varying levels of play and competition by division, as well as distinct levels of time commitment that they require from athletes – it is critical that you and your teen become informed about these differences before setting out to be recruited. It is also important for students to recognize where they fit on a team, which means that they should check the College Media Guides for stats, records and team rosters to determine if they are a good fit for a specific division or college team in terms of their physical abilities, stature, and other sports-specific stats.

To get on the recruitment radar, high school athletes will want to develop a list of target colleges and begin reaching out to coaches. Both parents and students need to understand that although college coaches may not be allowed to reach out to a student because of league regulations, there are no rules that dictate when a student can reach out to a college coach to learn about an athletic program. It is wise for students to develop an athletic/academic résumé as well as a series of email templates to facilitate effective communication with

coaches. Specifically, coaches will want to know hard data about prospective student-athletes (height, weight, sport-related stats, GPA, ACT/SAT scores) and details about specific games prospective recruits may be playing in. Students should realize that college coaches will be anxious to hear standardized test scores and will want to know that students are registered with the NCAA and have gone through the process of planning their high school courses for approval by the league. While it may take a long time for coaches to return an email or phone call, students should keep communicating with them.

Other than a list of facts about your teen, coaches also need an idea of her coachability. Being a good player is not enough; coaches consider how well a player's personality will fit into the team — they also need to know a prospective player's ability to accept criticism. Student-athletes need to have emotional and physical stamina to play at the college level, and coaches will watch closely to evaluate these factors. If your teen is asked to make an official visit to a specific college, she will be evaluated by most of the people she has contact with during this visit. Therefore, it is very important that student-athletes conduct themselves appropriately at all times during the recruitment process. This good behavior extends to social media as well, for coaches will often check students' social media presence to make sure students will represent themselves, the team, and the university as a model student-athletes.

In addition to taking health and conditioning seriously, the prime challenge that most college athletes face is time management— juggling schedules for homework assignments and tests as well as practice schedules and games can be unwieldy without a system to manage it. Work with your student to take on this responsibility as early as possible during the high school years to set him up for success in later.

Lastly, remind your student that all this extra effort will truly be worthwhile — she will have opportunities to travel to new areas, earn respect from the student body, faculty, and community as a college representative, add impressive experiences to her résumé, and perhaps most significantly, create life-long connections with teammates and coaches. Game on!