

8 Steps to Getting Recruited

It's every high school athlete's dream: That someday all those endless practices, tiring scrimmages, overpriced equipment and exhausting games might translate into a chance to play sports on the collegiate level.

But with less than 10 percent of all high school athletes playing their given sport at an NCAA-member institution, and just a third of those receiving an athletic scholarship, it's crucial that players and parents learn all they can about this confusing, difficult and oftentimes frustrating process known as recruiting.

No matter what any one person or organization claims, nobody can guarantee you or your child an athletic scholarship. But it's our hope here at Active.com that this recruiting resource, along with additional information you gather along the way, can help you take control of the recruiting process and ultimately make an athlete's dream come true.

No.1: Take the Right Classes

Long before college catalogs clog mailboxes, and recruiting videos are viewed, a student-athlete takes classes in their freshman year of high school that directly affect their NCAA eligibility.

Because eligibility standards continue to evolve--in 2008 the NCAA increased the number of English and math courses required by one--it's an athlete's responsibility to make sure their class schedule fulfills NCAA core course requirements.

The best way to make sure you meet all requirements is to schedule an appointment with a high school guidance counselor to ensure your course schedule is in-line with the approved high school core course list. (It's a good idea to do this each year as high school curriculums can change as often as NCAA compliance standards.)

Quick Tip: Let your guidance counselor "guide" you in your high school course selections--starting with your freshman year and continuing throughout your high school career.

No.2: Register With the NCAA

It used to be called the NCAA clearinghouse, but now it's the NCAA Eligibility Center that students must register with to validate their status as an amateur athlete. (This is to ensure an athlete isn't secretly playing defensive back for the Denver Broncos during their high school career.)

The process is relatively pain-free; all you need is \$50 and a Social Security number. But don't leave it to the last minute. Every year a few student athletes miss out on the chance to play collegiately, because they fail to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Quick Tip: Register with the NCAA by your junior year.

No.3: Make Your List(s)

Before you compile a list of 200 schools you would just die to play for, remember the function of the list is to help you focus your search going into your sophomore and junior year, not overly complicate the process with unrealistic expectations.

"One: a list of their dream schools, two: a list of schools that they could realistically get into and three: a list of fallback schools in case something happens at the last minute."

Quick Tip: Make three lists--with four or five schools per list--to focus your college search.

No.4: Create a Video

The recruiting video is one of the most important ways an athlete can attract the attention of coaches at the university level.

So how do you make the video? Well, like anything in life, quality does count. This doesn't mean you have to hire Steven Spielberg to shoot your footage, but many people find hiring a videographer a worthwhile expense.

Also, skip the heavy metal soundtrack and colorful graphics. Coaches hate them! Quick Tip: Keep your video short, simple and as professional-looking as possible

No. 5: Research the Schools

This task used to be a lot more difficult 10 years ago. But with the rise of the internet there is a multitude of recruiting information, both official and unofficial, about virtually any college or university you're interested in.

For starters, check out the school's website to find out the best coach or school official to contact. For smaller schools, individual e-mail addresses for coaches can be found quite easily, as they often view the website as a promotional tool for their institution. Bigger schools may require a little detective work to find contact information for specific coaches, but it is not impossible.

Simply find the e-mail address path (Eg: first name.last name@university.com, first name.last initial@university.com), usually found in the athletic department directory of websites. Then plug in the name of the coach you want to contact and let them know you're interested in attending the university.

In addition, Ronald Baum of Homerun Softball camps believes a university's website can also save you time by pinpointing which schools are recruiting your position.

"If you're a pitcher, you can see that they've got four pitchers coming back next year. Chances are they're not recruiting a pitcher for the following year and you should probably look somewhere else."

Another great resource is to talk to current and former players who've already been through the recruiting process at that particular university. You can get player referrals directly from the school, or perhaps do a search for athletes who've played at the university on social networking sites such as myspace and facebook. Just let them know you're interested in attending their alma mater and ask if they have any tips or information about the program. Though the information you receive may not be entirely reliable, it can be an invaluable way to peek inside a program, warts and all.

Quick Tip: Check out a school's website. Find out who's on their roster and collect contact information for relevant coaches.

No.6: First Contact

Now it's time to place yourself on a college's radar in an aggressive--but friendly-- way. It used to be this could wait until your junior year, but with the pace of youth sports increasing all the time, it's probably a good idea to begin contacting coaches in the summer before your freshman year. It's Never too early to get your name out there.

So what do you include in your e-mail or letter to the coach? Well, some sort of introduction explaining who you are and why you're contacting them. (Keep it short-- coaches are busy.) A few paragraphs should do.

A copy of your **recruiting video or a link** where they can view your video--the latter quickly becoming a popular choice with coaches--as well as a recruiting resume with details such as stats, honors, academic data and contact information for your high school coaches should also be included.

Some people prefer to make contact with a coach by phone. This is fine as long it is the athlete who's making contact, and not the athlete's mom or dad claiming their kid is the next Reggie Bush. (Not only does it come off as a unprofessional, but it also robs the coach of a chance to get to know the athlete on a personal basis.)

Quick Tip: Check out a school's website. Find out who's on their roster and let the coaches know you're interested.

No.7: Increase Your Game-and Your Exposure-at a University Camp

Sports camps generally serve two different functions: to help an athlete get better and to help an athlete get noticed. Some sports camps, especially those at universities you've targeted, can often do both at the same time. (Many coaches find camps a great way to fill out their rosters.)

Unfortunately those hoping a few days at a university camp will magically get an athlete recruited, without having established rapport with that institution beforehand, are often disappointed.

At the big camps, less than five percent of the kids who attend are actually on the radar of that specific university. But that doesn't mean the experience is wasted.

This is because the coaching fraternity, despite the large number of colleges in the United States, is actually quite small. Though you may not get an offer from Penn State simply by attending one of their camps, this doesn't mean the coach running the camp can't point you toward an opening at a different university.

Like any job, it's all about networking and creating relationships. So be on your best behavior and be ready to learn as much as possible. **Character counts!!** You might just get recruited, without even realizing it.

Quick Tip: Attend a camp and be flexible; you never know where that first impression might lead.

No.8: The Final Choice

Ok. It's your senior year and, hopefully, you have a few offers on the table. So what do you do? How do you narrow it down to the one school that is right for you?

For most athletes, it will depend on the financial package being offered by the school. Are they offering a full-ride? A partial scholarship? If one school offers a significantly greater financial award, it shouldn't be considered lightly. (Not just to avoid going into major debt, but because it demonstrates their interest in you as an athlete and a student.)

For others, it will be a question of possible playing time on the next level. Do you have a good chance of getting in the starting lineup by your sophomore and junior year? If you're a third baseman, and they've already got two underclass third basemen in front of you, there might be better places for you to pursue your higher education while playing the hot corner.

Ultimately, though, most people suggest basing your final decision on the university itself. Not just the athletic department, but the overall collegiate experience a school has to offer.

"My suggestion to athletes is to narrow it down to their three top choices," says Husted. "And then think, 'if something happens to my athletic career which school would I be happy at.' There are no givens when it comes to athletics. All you know for sure is whether you'll feel comfortable at a certain university."

Quick Tip: Choose a university that offers you the best environment for athletic, academic and personal development.