

SOME COMMON COLLEGE RECRUITING MISCONCEPTIONS

Talented High School Athletes and Club Players will just get “discovered” by Colleges

The majority of high school athletes and parents believe that talented high school/prep athletes are actively recruited by college coaches. The reality is that only about 5% of all high school athletes are in well-known recruiting pipelines and are “actively recruited” by college coaches. The remaining 95% need to “recruit themselves” through their own personal efforts.

On a given tournament weekend in the US, a college coach may see over 300 players. Any time your team is going to a tournament, write the coach in advance with your schedule, jersey number, and team colors. It’s much easier for coaches to evaluate you (and likely they will) when they know you have a serious interest in their school and write them ahead of time. It is also very important to write coaches AFTER the tournament as well to ask them directly if they saw you and how they think you might fit into their program.

Most Division I Schools Give Players “Full Rides”

Division I men's soccer programs could have a maximum of 9.9 scholarships while women’s programs could have a maximum of 14 and not all schools provide their soccer programs with full funding. The scholarship budget is usually divided among 20 to 30 players. Many schools shy away from giving full scholarships if they can because it is a large investment in one player. Some schools also like to have the option of increasing individual player scholarships year by year, based on performance (and they can be decreased as well). Athletic scholarships are only awarded year to year so it’s important to know how your college coach will determine if you will keep your scholarship at the same amount for all four years. Ask them up front before accepting an offer (or promise of an increase in later years) and always get everything the coach offers you in writing. [Note: Some of the biggest D1 Conferences, sometimes called the Power 5, are moving to 4-year scholarships but not for every athlete in every sport.]

Scholarship Money is Only Available at NCAA Division I and II Schools

While NCAA Division I and II (and some NAIA and JUCO schools) offer athletic scholarships, all schools have financial aid available based on financial need, academic achievement, and often other specific academic or leadership criteria. In a typical year, over \$150 Billion in financial aid is awarded by Federal/State governments and colleges and universities to approximately 20 Million students all across the United States. Only about \$1 Billion is awarded annually in Athletic Scholarship dollars to around 130,000 NCAA student-athletes.

Players need Parents and Recruiting Services to Help Them

An overly active parent that handles the player’s correspondence is considered a red flag for many coaches, and often means the recruit may be immature or unmotivated and most certainly will be uninformed. To put it simply, college coaches are uncomfortable when parents or recruiting services are initiating contact in the recruiting process. Coaches want to hear from the player. They want to know if prospects are well spoken, mature, intelligent and enthusiastic about their university. In other words, while most coaches understand parents are very involved in the decision, they’d rather not recruit the parents. Clearly, parents need to work with their prospect to make sure all their questions are answered accurately, particular about the players roster and scholarship status and how those may change over time. Easiest thing is to set up a new email account that both the parent and player can access or use the auto-forward feature.

Some Schools Just Cost too Much to Consider

"Discounted tuition" is a term sometimes used to describe the amount of money you are paying after you receive all of your financial aid. Expensive private schools are very good at putting together a financial aid “package” or combination of academic and need-based aid to keep their final actual cost pretty competitive. Most college coaches will have enough experience to be able to predict for you what kind of total financial aid package you are likely to receive. Make sure you get a really good prediction on finances before you commit to their school and remember, if you are not getting an athletic scholarship from the coach, there’s really no reason to commit until you’re ready.

Division I Teams are Always the Best Teams

Many players don’t have a good understanding of what Division I really means. Many players think the label of “Division I” means all the players and coaches in DI are automatically better and that their playing experience will somehow be better than in another NCAA Division. Of course, the best soccer in the NCAA is played in Division I, but there are lots of very good DII and DIII soccer programs and at many of those schools, good players play earlier and play longer in college than many players in Division I. In reality, there are very good and also very average programs and coaches in every NCAA Division. Just be honest about your own abilities and have an open mind about the level of play at various colleges.

If I Don't Commit to a School "Early", I'll Miss Out

Competition for recruits is as fierce as ever in almost every college sport. In soccer, most Division I programs are done spending scholarship money in the prospect's Junior year. If you expect to play in the top half of Division I, this is the timeline and you'll have to visit schools late in the Sophomore year of high school, the summer after, or early Fall of your Junior year at the latest. Much of Division I will typically be done recruiting sometime in the middle of your Junior year and the good Division IIs and IIIs will expect to finish their recruiting classes not much later in that Junior year into the summer before your Senior year. Schools have different needs and commitment schedules for any given year sometimes so ask directly, "What is the timeline to start and finish securing commitments in my year?"

Remember though, that the earlier you commit, the more likely it is you could change your priorities and the less accurate the coach's evaluation will be of you. Don't be pressured into making a decision until you're ready but don't be surprised to be given a deadline if you're offered a scholarship.

I'll easily be a star in College like I was in High School and Club

If you are actively recruited by a college, chances are you were one of the best players on your club team and your high school team. You've always been a regular starter, a difference maker, a leader. Some players assume that since they were the star of their club and high school teams that they will be a star in college too. Well it's been a nice ride, but it's over. You are now starting all over and even at good Division III programs, most of the players have been high school starters for several years and even the captains of their high school teams. College soccer will be much harder, more rigorous and time consuming, and the players will be better than you and your parents think!

In Division I for example, it's common to leave the campus for games on Thursday night and not return until Sunday night and have 7am lifting and condition sessions before classes for most of the school year. Many college coaches will restrict what their players can do outside of soccer even in the off-season so it's important to ask those questions of the college coaches you're communicating with. Even players who come from some of the top club teams in the US or your Region or State aren't really expecting what will be demanded of them in college.

I Need to do their Camp or ID/Prospect Clinic

The 1-day or short overnight ID/Prospect camp is an important way coaches will try to get their top young recruits to visit. They get to see the player play live and should ask for a meeting with you if they want to talk about a scholarship or commitment [In D1, only after June 15th after your Sophomore year]. You should ask for that meeting too. Bad News- about 90% of players that go to such camps aren't getting that meeting because they aren't really being recruited, or are not on the coaches "A" list. Spending \$100 to find out you're not being recruited seems pretty silly but these camps have become almost a 'necessary evil' in the process. The most complimentary thing you could hear from a coach is that "you don't need to do our ID clinic, let's just schedule a visit". If the coach keeps asking you repeatedly to come to prospect camps and ID clinics, you're just helping them pay for new uniforms.

I Can't Call or E-mail the Coach

The college rules regarding recruiting are more difficult to understand than ever before and they are different in each NCAA Division. There are rules regarding visits to a school, phone calls and emails, pickup games while you are on recruiting visits and contacts with the coach. Some student-athletes worry they will break the rules and somehow risk their college soccer career. However, most of the rules pertain to what the coach can do rather than the prospective player. Generally, you can call the coaches office, e-mail them, do their camps and clinics, and visit their campus anytime you want. June 15th is now an important date at the end of the Sophomore year of High School. In NCAA Division 1 and 2, this is the earliest you can really discuss scholarship dollars and commitments with coaches at those colleges. In D1, coaches cannot even answer your calls until that June 15th date or discuss a commitment with you or your club or HS coaches in any way, even on a visit or at a camp.

When you begin your conversations with coaches, you should be prepared to ask for the information you really want. An important early question, "have you seen me play yet and how do you predict I would do in your program?", and the follow up, "so am I being considered as a recruit for your Class (or for a scholarship)?" and the Biggy: "How much would you expect to offer and what is your timeline for that offer and my acceptance/commitment?." Some coaches won't want to answer these questions unless you're on the campus with them. How do you know (or they know) you'll accept the offer if you haven't visited? When you are physically on the campus, you can talk, watch events, tour, eat meals, meet players and NEED to make sure you talk to the coach and get all your questions answered.

Playing college soccer can become one of the most fun and rewarding experiences of your life. Unfortunately, that experience won't be handed to you, won't be easy, and it is absolutely up to you to do your research, ask lots of questions, and make sure you know what you're getting into when you choose a college. Good luck!!