

College Athletics Recruiting 101

By Tom Kovic

The college experience is, in many cases, the most important four years in our children's lives, as it will shape their future personal and professional direction. That being said, securing admission to a college or university that best match students' desires, strengths, and aspirations is essential. Today more than ever, high school athletes are strategically marketing themselves to college coaches not just for scholarships, but in hopes of gaining entry into their top college choices in a highly competitive arena. And it's working. By realizing the potential leverage families of prospective student-athletes have in the college admissions process, especially as it pertains to non-scholarship schools and for student-athletes who may not qualify for athletics aid, should develop increased confidence and hope as families begin the college quest. Then, knowing how to close on this opportunity is, without question, essential.

Student-athletes bring a unique quality to the table when it comes to college admissions. They offer a special talent that can improve the institution's visibility and raise the level of popularity among future attendees. College officials understand this and in many cases, offer strong support to student-athletes both in admissions and financial aid.

The college recruiting process can be a daunting effort if it is not well planned and executed with organization and enthusiasm from start to finish. As a coach of a Division I team for 19 years, I would say that roughly 75% of my athletes gained entry to the university because, in part, they took the appropriate recruiting process. I've learned, first hand, what works and what does not. What follows are insights on how to maximize the student athlete's best chances in gaining admission to their top college choice.

Gather Information

Gathering information is critical to the successful organization of any worthy project. Building an information base can begin as early as the ninth grade as a family hobby and increasingly grow into a highly organized, disciplined project by the end of the junior year.

Begin by gathering information on the student-athletes colleges of choice including team and coach profiles, statistics, ranking, and academic offerings. Continue to update and maintain individual e-files on these favorite college programs.

Build your Team

Parents, prospect, high school/club coach, college advisor, guidance counselor and a personal mentor should all be part of your team in the college recruiting process. Each team player will have a specific role to play in order to ensure the prospect's best chances. Advance goals should be set with clarity and purpose that compliment the organizational structure of the recruiting process.

Team members will need to oversee the following:

- Financial aid/scholarships

- Admissions
- Development of target calendar
- Research (schools, majors, athletic programs, rankings)
- Video and profile development
- Planned communication and contact log
- Campus visits
- Scheduling standardized testing
- Organizing communication “role play”
- Researching college profiles and determining potential compatibility

By selecting the team approach, the responsibilities are equally distributed to the area experts. All assignments should be clearly spelled out and communication between the team members should be frequent and consistent. This will help streamline the college quest and assist in avoiding any confusion that could contribute to unclear thinking, misdirection and potentially poor choices.

Develop and Execute your Plan

A knowledgeable consumer will have a clear edge in the pursuit of the attainment of any worthy product. I believe that the same holds true in the college search and I encourage families to make every effort and commitment to organize pertinent information regarding this process and to execute well-designed plans.

Develop timelines that will target general events in the beginning of the college search (making unofficial visits, maintaining your data base, and attending competitions) and continue through more specific events (compiling a video and player profile, communicating with coaches, and making official visits, etc.) as time progresses. This will increase the chances of “hitting targets” throughout the process.

Communication

Effective communication between the family and the collegiate coach can be critical to the decision made by the coach. It can make or break a coach’s decision to offer an athletic scholarship or to provide that extra “push” in the admission process.

If your mission is clear, communication becomes the vehicle to move with definite purpose in your chosen direction. On the other hand, ill-prepared communication can cause confusion and misdirection. Your ship moves, but with a weak rudder.

Communication should be initiated early on by the family and by the prospect. Although college coaches have clear restrictions as to when and where they may contact prospects, a prospect may call or e-mail a coach early, with few exceptions.

An initial letter of introduction accompanied by a profile is a great way to begin, but it is very important to follow this up by e-mail and by phone. The prospect that practices persistence with respect, will grab the college coach’s attention.

Provide the college coach with everything he or she requests (profile, DVD, transcripts

etc.) in a timely manner. This will make the evaluation of athletic talent and academic credentials an easy task for the coach, and they will develop a level of appreciation that could be the “tie breaker” when it comes down to support for the prospect. Remember: cultivating a strong and genuine relationship with coaches, based on honesty and sincerity, is critical to building trusting relationships.

As one can imagine, college coaches receive hundreds of personal profiles annually from prospects, and they will begin to prioritize their recruiting file based on the initial cover letter and profile. These documents will usually be placed in one of three files of importance:

“A” file: blue chip, top-tier recruits

“B” file: second-tier recruits; still have excellent opportunity

“C” file: little chance of impact; admissions risks

It is important to streamline your portfolio into a comprehensive and efficient format that stands above the rest. Keep your profile simple, neat and professionally formatted. Make the job of initial evaluation easy for the college coach by highlighting pertinent information including:

Personal and school contact information

Academic standing, awards, and test results

Physical characteristics

Athletic clubs and level, showcase tournaments, and elite camps

Athletic Statistics, Records, and Awards

Mission Statement

Coach’s Comments

Maintain a copy of your generic player profile to send to the majority of schools and then personalize 5-10 profiles to be sent to your top schools with additional information that will help you gain admission and/or scholarship attention, such as family legacy or a connection to the coach indirectly through your club coach, for example. Commit to making a strong impression with a professional approach in all written correspondence. Remember, your goal is to move your profile to the “A” contact folder.

A video is another means of developing a first impression and trust me when I say that first impressions are remembered. Typically, a coach will roughly evaluate a recruit within the first 2 minutes of the video. They need to! Along with the hundreds of profiles, they are being bombarded with hundreds of videos.

Make your video succinct, professional, and yet attention grabbing. Follow these guidelines:

- Introduction: Tell coaches who you are, where you are from and what your specific goals are. Show confidence and project a mature image (20 seconds).
- Video footage: The coach will have a good indication of your talent within the first 2 minutes of your video. Highlight outstanding moments and technical

- mastery of your talent, which will grab the coach's attention.
- Show 5-7 minutes of your finest competitions along with training highlights.
- Finish your video with 15 seconds of direct contact information for you, your club and/or high school coach.

Keep in mind that as individual collegiate sports differ, it is important to communicate with the college coaches about their requirements for DVD footage.

The profile and video will initially define you in the eyes of the college coach. These tools should be crisp, clean and to the point. Give the coach every reason to filter your information into the active recruit file.

Be sure to continue with timely communications to the coaches. Inform them of new awards, accolades, records, or landmark achievements. Don't call after every big competition; keep your communications succinct and focused. Remember: cultivating a strong and genuine relationship with coaches, based on honesty and sincerity is critical to building trusting relationships.

The college recruiting process is both exciting and potentially overwhelming. It requires a disciplined and yet flexible approach, especially when timelines get tight and situations become challenging. Developing and executing plans are crucial to the success, no different from preparation for a championship competition! Communication (both offering and receiving) is vital, and the working participants should build a mutually strong and respectful relationship in order to maximize results.

The bottom line is that through a systematic college recruiting process, you and your child can identify, work toward, and hopefully secure admission to the college of his or her choice – one that is an ideal academic and athletic "fit". It will be well worth your efforts knowing that you were part of a team that guided your child as he or she embarks an important and meaningful process that will have great effect on their future careers and personal growth.

Tom Kovic is a former Division I college coach and the current director of Victory Collegiate Consulting, where he provides individual advisement for families on college recruiting. Tom is the author of "Reaching for Excellence, an educational guide for college athletics recruiting. For further information visit: www.victoryrecruiting.com.