

Fall 11-15-2018

Playing Sports in College: Understanding the Factors that Influence the College Choice Process for High School Student-Athletes

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By

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B.S., Kinesiology, Pennsylvania State University, 2009
M.A., Educational Administration and Policy Studies, University at Albany, 2012

EdD Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Education
Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of my committee, Dr. Marjori Krebs, Dr. Glenn Hushman, Dr. Cheryl Torrez, and Dr. Minhyun Kim, for their guidance and assistance. My deepest appreciation is extended to my EdD project chair, Dr. Marjori Krebs.

Thank you for your mentoring, encouragement, and guidance. Thank you, Dr. Glenn Hushman, for your continuous support, direction, and insightful advice. Thank you, Dr. Cheryl Torrez, for your inspiration, thoughtfulness, and invaluable input. Finally, I am thankful to Dr. Minhyun Kim for your supportive feedback, advice, and help.

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Abstract

The college athletic recruiting process at times can be overwhelming, confusing, and intimidating. It is my hope that *Playing Sports in College: Understanding the Factors that Influence the College Choice Process for High School Student-Athletes* will alleviate some of the questions associated with the recruiting process and allow prospective student-athletes to pursue their college student-athlete dreams by offering simple advice, some basic ground rules, and plenty of inspiration.

This book is a go-to guide for the numerous questions that arise during the recruiting process and can be used when a student-athlete begins the recruiting process and it can be referred to throughout the recruiting process. Every type of student-athlete, from the elite player who wants to go professional after college, to the recreational athlete who wants a spot on a college team can use my book.

This book will keenly enlighten prospective student-athletes on the importance of sport specialization instead of sport diversification and offer many helpful tips for high school success

in both academics and athletics. Throughout this book I provide the reader with objective comparisons between various college athletic programs as well as additional insights into finding the right school. I examine college scholarships, vital NCAA rules and regulations, time management skills, what college coaches are looking for, and player stories. Each chapter offers superb candid guidance for today's generation of students who want useful, straightforward information on the athletic recruiting process.

Key Words: College choice, student-athletes, recruiting, coaches, sports

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Chapter 1 Goals

Sports

Throughout elementary and middle school you probably had time to explore different sports and figure out which ones you liked and disliked. Maybe you joined a sports group outside your school such as the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), the United States Tennis Association (USTA), the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), or the United States Golf Association (USGA). Maybe you joined a youth hockey, football or lacrosse team to help you prepare for your high school team. If you have found a sport you enjoy and you are good at it, then congratulations! By the time you get to high school it's important to find a sport you really enjoy playing. Although you might be good at several sports, if you are serious about playing a particular sport in college, now is the time to really concentrate on that sport. If you haven't made your mind up, try to narrow your choices to two or three sports. If you are in the process of deciding which sport or sports you want to play in high school, here are some things to think about. Do you have good hand-eye coordination or is it just so-so? If it isn't that good, consider crew, soccer, or maybe gymnastics. Do you like to run long distances? If so, then you might consider the cross country or track team. Do you like contact sports? Then consider football or rugby. Maybe you prefer non-contact sports like tennis and golf. Don't decide on a sport because everyone is doing it. Just because your best friend plays soccer and the coach of the travel soccer team is your neighbor, you aren't obligated to play soccer. Soccer might be very popular but if you don't like it or you aren't that good at it, then it's not the sport for you. On the other hand, soccer might be your favorite sport so it *is* the sport for you. The important thing is to find something you like to play and become good at it. Now is the time to keep on trying and be the

best you can be. Whether you prefer a team sport or whether you like an individual sport played on a team, plan on being a team player.

Choosing a Sport

The following is a list of some team sports and some individual sports that are played on a team.

Some team sports include: baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, rugby volleyball, soccer, softball, water polo, and synchronized swimming.

Some individual sports include: archery, badminton, bowling, cross country, crew, diving, equestrian, fencing, golf, gymnastics, rifle, skiing, squash, swimming, tennis, track and field, and wrestling.

Note: If you are a girl, you might consider playing on a boys' team if there isn't a girls' team. Many girls play on boys teams in high school because there aren't enough girls for a girls' team. For example, a female golfer can play on an all-male high school golf team if there is no girls' high school golf team.

Why Play a Sport?

Physical fitness. "It keeps me in shape." "I sleep better." "I feel a sense of accomplishment when I am finished playing." "I feel energized after working out."

Recognition (family, peers, coaches, accolades, awards, and glory). "I love the attention I receive from friends and family when I play on my high school team." "I have a room full of trophies and ribbons." "I feel good when everyone is cheering for me."

"Kids I don't even know congratulate me in the hall."

Prestige. “I feel important when my name is announced over the loud speaker.” “I like seeing my name in the school and town newspaper.” “I have worked hard to make the high school team which goes to states almost every year. It’s an honor to be part of the team.”

Fun. “I have a blast at every game. It doesn’t matter if we win or lose.” “I like wearing my school colors.”

Sense of belonging. “I like being part of a team and bonding with team members.” “Team members are my friends.” “I like to cheer and root for my teammates.”

Leadership. “I like to lead and help others so being captain of my team is terrific.”

Continuity. “My father played a sport in high school and college and I feel a strong connection with him when I play the same sport.”

College. “I know my sport will help me get into college.”

Scholarship for college. “I expect to earn an athletic scholarship in my sport to help defray the cost of college.”

In College, Sports are Divided into Head Count Sports and Equivalency Sports

Head count sports. A full athletic scholarship is offered in head count sports. Basketball and football are head count sports for men. Tennis, gymnastics, volleyball, and basketball are head count sports for women.

Equivalency count sports. Equivalency sports are all the other sports that are not head count sports. In these sports the coach has a certain amount of money that can be distributed among the various team members. How the money is divided is up to the coach. Note: In equivalency sports, most players will be on partial athletic scholarships, so it is difficult to get a full athletic scholarship. (Refer to Chapter 4).

Goal Setting

Once you have chosen a sport (s), set a goal or goals for yourself. Goals are beneficial because they keep you focused and make you more productive. Achieving a goal can make you feel confident and enthusiastic. Here are some examples of athletic goals: Make the junior varsity team; make the varsity team; make the starting lineup; set a school, district, or state record; become captain of your team; win the conference, district, or state title; get a college scholarship.

Outline your goal process. By breaking the process into manageable steps, it will be easier for you to achieve your goal. Follow how Jane achieves her goal.

Jane's SMART Goal

Jane is a freshman in high school. This year she wants to make the high school varsity track team.

Jane does it the **SMART** way, she sets **SMART** goals:

Specific: What exactly does Jane want to accomplish?

Jane wants to run a 5K in under 25 minutes.

Measurable: Jane breaks up her specific goal into smaller goals. These goals will make it easier for her to track her progress.

Jane breaks down the 5K distance into smaller distances. She creates a new goal of running 1 mile in 8 minutes. Once that is achieved, she sets another goal of running 2 miles in 17 minutes.

Again, once Jane accomplishes these interim goals, she is better able to achieve her ultimate goal of running a 5k in under 25 minutes.

Attainable: How can her goal be achieved?

Jane goes to the high school track on a daily basis and practices 1-2 hours a day. If it's raining or snowing she practices indoors. After practicing every day for a month she has moved closer to attaining her final goal.

Realistic: Set goals within reach. Don't make goals that are too difficult.

Jane compares her times for the 5K to other girls her age. She realizes she has similar times and feels good about herself. She also discovers that she has similar training techniques and goals as others on the track team.

Timely: Set a specific time limit.

The track season begins in March. It is now September, so Jane knows she has about 6 months to achieve her goal of running a 5k in under 25 minutes.

SMART goals mean **SMART** planning!

Chapter 2

Navigating Your Way Through High School

High School Phases to Follow for the College-Bound Student-Athlete

Most high schools treat sports as an extracurricular activity. You, however, want to play a sport in college so you will have to take charge of your *sport career* in order to make this happen. We all know it's not a career yet, but you might as well start thinking about it as a career now. You are now a student-athlete, and in order to be successful you need to be well-organized.

6 tips toward achieving your high school success.

1. Know your class assignments including when your homework is due and when quizzes and exams are scheduled. It's up to you to talk to your teacher if you don't understand something. Take care of any problems right away because putting them off won't make them go away. If you find yourself still struggling in a class it's important to let your guidance counselor or teacher know. Don't wait!
2. Prepare and keep a daily and weekly sport schedule. If you know you have swim practice from 5-7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 6 a.m. Saturday or basketball practice from 4-6 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and 3:30-5:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday, write it down. Also keep track of matches, meets, and tournaments and whether they are at home or away. If they are away, include any travel time. The reason for doing this is so you can see how much time you have remaining to do your homework after you come home and eat dinner. Quite often you will be up past 9 p.m. or later completing course assignments.

3. Take detailed notes. Test questions most often come from what teachers talk about. The better your notes, the faster and easier it will be to study. Don't just listen to what the teacher is saying, write it down. Every day, preferably right after class, you should review your notes and rewrite them if necessary. This way the information is fresh in your mind and it gives you an opportunity to make sense of your handwriting and add any details you might have missed.
4. Get a sufficient amount of sleep, somewhere between 7 to 9 hours a night. When it's time to study, put down your cell phone, turn off the television, and move away from the internet. How often do you look at your phone? Honestly? Well at least you know you are not alone. Tweeting and updating your social media page are great ways to procrastinate. Time is valuable, so don't waste it.
5. Be inspired by watching your sport heroes. *Really* watch them. Concentrate on their athletic strengths and focus on what makes them great. Read internet, newspaper, or magazine articles about them. Always believe in aiming high. Why not? Make sure your inspiration doesn't turn you into a daydreamer. It's okay to daydream a little to keep your motivation up but don't let it become a distraction.
6. Make sure you start your day by eating a good breakfast. This way your body stays energized all day. As a student-athlete you want to keep your body in peak performance form.

Tips for Planning Your High School Student-Athlete Education

Freshman Year:

Athletics

- Set up and participate in a daily fitness and practice regimen.

- Try to make the freshman team, junior varsity team, or varsity team. If you are a good athlete, then you should be able to make the freshman team. If you are an above average player you should be able to make the junior varsity team. If you are an outstanding player, try out for the varsity team. Even though freshmen don't usually make the varsity team, you could be the exception. Note: Many underclassmen on a varsity team might see less playing time than upperclassmen on a varsity team.
- Continue with outside sports groups.
- Contact college coaches through, phone, e-mail, letter, text message, social media sites. (Refer to Chapter 3 for sample contact letters).
- Go on an unofficial visit to a college(s) of your choice. (Refer to Chapter 5).

Academics

- Make sure you are doing your homework and don't slack off. The grades you earn this year will count toward your GPA.
- Start thinking of the future. Think about college prep courses to take in high school such as regular courses, honors courses, or Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- Set a 4 year high school action plan for both academics and athletics.

Sophomore Year:

Athletics

- Try out for the junior varsity or varsity team. Don't be discouraged if you don't make the varsity team this year, you can try again next year.

- Improve in your sport or sports.
- Play athletics outside of school (summer/winter league soccer, softball, lacrosse etc.)
- Play as much as you can. You need the experience and exposure.
- Attend specialized sports camps (college summer camps or sports academies.)
- Contact college coaches through, phone calls, e-mails, letters, text messages, and social media.
- Go on an unofficial visit to a college(s) of your choice.

Academics

- Take challenging classes (honors or AP classes.) Remember to keep your grades up.
- Take the PSAT.
- Start studying for and preparing for the SAT and or ACT.

Junior Year:

Athletics

- If you are planning to take part in athletics at a Division I or III school, contact your high school guidance counselor to make sure you are taking the required core courses for the NCAA.
- Contact college coaches through, phone calls, e-mails, letters, text messages, and social media.
- Go on unofficial and official visits to a college(s) of your choice.

- Go to your guidance counselor to submit your NCAA Transcript Release Form. There is a fee but there is a fee waiver if you qualify. This form will permit your high school to release your transcripts, test scores, and other academic material to the NCAA Eligibility Center. It will also allow the release of your information to colleges and universities who want it.

Academics

- Take the PSAT if you didn't in your sophomore year.
- Take the SAT and or ACT, SAT subject exams. Choose the standardized exams that suit you best. If a college or university you are considering prefers one test over the other, then concentrate your efforts on that particular test. If you don't do well you will have time to take them again. (Seek out tutors for SAT and or ACT test preparation classes.)
- Take AP exams at the end of the year. (You need a 3 or better for college credit).
- Keep your grades up. (You don't have to take all honors and or AP classes if you can't get a good grade. It's okay to take 1 or 2 advanced classes to challenge yourself).
- Think about what colleges you are interested in attending and playing for.

Senior Year:

Athletics

- Contact college coaches through, phone calls, e-mails, letters, text messages, social media. Coaches can now contact you.
- Go on unofficial or official visits to a college(s) of your choice.

- Sign National Letter of Intent (NLI) (refer to Chapter 5) and athletic aid paperwork.
- Submit your NCAA Transcript Release Form if you haven't done so already.

Academics

- If needed, take or retake the SAT, ACT, or SAT Subject Tests.
- Go to your guidance counselor for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form or go online at fafsa.ed.gov. These forms will not be processed prior to January of your senior year.
- Take AP tests.
- Start applying to colleges.
- Keep your grades up, finish strong academically.

Graduation: Summer after Senior Year:

- Attend summer orientation at your college of choice, meet with coach or coaches, sign up for classes, get your dorm assignment.
- Get in the best shape you can for your sport.
- Be ready for classes and academics in college.
- Keep up with everything: sports, practice, reading, tuition deadlines, registration for classes.

What do you do if you are not ready for college?

- Take a year off from school
- Work
- Take a 5th year in high school

- Go professional
- Join the military

Planning for College

You've probably been told over and over by your parents and teachers to study hard and get good grades so you can go to a *first-class* or *top tier* university or college. Your coach has undoubtedly drilled you on practicing your sport so you can be the best you can be.

When you think of college do you think of a small group of students sitting in a circle discussing Voltaire, or 300 students packed into a large hall listening to a lecture on macroeconomics? Do you think college is a place where thousands of fans tailgate and party before every home football game ready to cheer their team on in a huge stadium, or do you think of a school that doesn't even have a football team much less a stadium? You've heard about college, but what exactly is it? The word *college* conjures up different images to different people. To some it means Gothic buildings with ivy climbing up the outside walls; to others it means a modern glass enclosed state-of-the-art recreation facility with the latest fitness equipment. Sometimes a college can be a name you've heard of in movies or read about in books. You might not know it, but chances are you have been thinking about college for a long time. Maybe your classmates will be talking about different colleges they want to attend, or you have siblings in college now. Once you start high school, however, your *real* college preparation begins.

Get to Know Your Guidance Counselor

Guidance counselors can be very helpful. They can advise you on choosing classes, planning for college, and assisting you in searching for the right school. It's important to establish a relationship with your guidance counselor so he or she knows you are interested in

playing athletics in college. Like any relationship, the more a person knows about you, the more he or she can assist you.

8 Reasons Why You Should Sit Down With Your Guidance Counselor As Soon As You Start High School

1. **Plan a high school course route:** Discuss what high school courses you should be taking for college. Talk about AP or honors classes if they apply to your college plans. Look at your high school transcript to make sure all your classes and grades are accounted for and correct.
2. **Entrance Exams, Exams, Exams:** Talk about particular tests for college admission. Discuss when you should take the PSAT, ACT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams. CLEP exams allow students who have existing knowledge of introductory college subjects the opportunity to take standardized subject tests and bypass introductory college classes. You might also have to retake an exam if necessary, so plan ahead.
3. **College Search:** Tell your guidance counselor what universities or colleges you are interested in. Discuss the different academic requirements for each of these schools. Some colleges require high grades, honors classes, and top scores on the SAT and or ACT.
4. **Important Dates and Deadlines:** Ask about college admission deadlines. Make sure you keep in close contact with your guidance counselor regarding any paperwork that needs to be submitted to colleges or universities. Note: Some colleges and universities offer Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA) and or rolling admissions. For ED, students apply early to their first-choice college or university. ED applicants

must attend the college or university that has accepted them. EA applicants, who receive an early response, do not need to commit early to attending a particular college or university. Colleges or universities with rolling admissions evaluate applications as they are received. Evaluations continue until all slots for their incoming class is filled.

5. Money for College: Find out the cost breakdown for the school(s) you want to attend. This will include tuition and fees, room and board, and books and supplies. Ask your guidance counselor if he knows of any scholarships or financial awards you might qualify for. These can include academic, athletic, or both.
6. So what's the game plan? Find out if other students from your high school are being or have been recruited to play a sport in college. Ask your guidance counselor if he needs an athletic résumé. An athletic résumé provides college coaches with useful information about a student-athlete's athletic and academic accomplishments. Note: some guidance counselors do not know about athletic résumés or the student-athlete recruiting process. If your guidance counselor does not know about the athletic process or athletic résumé, talk to your high school coach, high school athletic director, or youth coach. Some information to include in your athletic résumé is your: picture, name, address, phone#(cell and home), e-mail address, birthday, height, weight, sport(s), position(s), education (high school), GPA, SAT score, ACT score, rankings, tournaments (state, county, and national), upcoming games and matches, statistics (team & individual), any significant wins, honors and awards, varsity letters, news clippings, link to your YouTube video(s), future tournaments or events, and any scholarships you have been awarded.

7. Are you Eligible? Review NCAA admission and eligibility requirements. Inform your guidance counselor when you have registered with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse.
8. Game, Set, and Match: Inform your guidance counselor if you have verbally committed to a particular university or college. Give yourself a pat on the back for a job well done.

8 Things You Should Not Expect From Your Guidance Counselor

1. Don't look for extensive individual attention: Most guidance counselors have a lot of students and don't have the time to focus on your individual needs. If you want your guidance counselor to help you, tell him of your specific interests, such as "I want to be a pitcher for state university", or "I want an athletic scholarship in swimming", or "I want to play men's tennis in college, does the university I am looking at have a men's tennis team?"
2. Keep it simple: Your guidance counselor isn't going to know about a multitude of colleges and universities. If you are interested in a specific school(s) make sure you give your guidance counselor the names. Do your own research.
3. Be Organized: Keep on top of all necessary paperwork and pay attention to anything that needs to be submitted. Guidance counselors are busy, busy, busy, so keep track of your stuff.
4. Money for College: Don't expect your guidance counselor to know all the angles regarding financial aid. While most counselors are familiar with academic aid, many are not familiar with athletic scholarships. You will need to contact the

coach or coaches from the school(s) you are interested in attending for this information.

5. It's Academic: If you are a recruited athlete, your guidance counselor might not be fully aware of all the academic opportunities available to you.
6. Contacting College Coaches: Don't expect your guidance counselor to talk to college coaches regarding your admission to a particular college or university.
7. Know the Rules: Your guidance counselor probably doesn't know all the NCAA recruiting rules regarding prospective student-athletes. Here is the link to the complete NCAA rule book:
http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/usc/genrel/auto_pdf/2018-19/misc_non_event/ncaa-manual.pdf
8. You Make the Choice: Don't expect your guidance counselor to choose a school for you. He is there to advise you, but only you can make the final decision.

On Your Mark, Get Set, Choose

Prioritization is a major component to choosing a school. As a prospective college student-athlete, you have to be concerned with both academics and athletics. Which is more important or are they both equally important? Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself.

Athletics.

Can I play on the team?

Will I start?

What is the roster size?

What conference is the school in?

How does that conference compare to others?

How is the team ranked within the conference?

How many incoming freshmen is the coach recruiting?

What is the practice schedule?

What is the match or game schedule?

Does the team drive or fly to matches or games?

Does the team go to the NCAA tournament? If so, what is their track record?

Coaches.

Is the head coach casual or intense?

How is the head coach during practices?

How is the head coach during games?

Do the coaches have positive reputations?

Do the coaches have negative reputations?

Is the head coach approachable and helpful?

Academics.

How does this school compare with others?

What can I major in?

What can I minor in?

What are my career goals?

What is the school ranking?

What type of degree will I end up with?

Size.

What is the number of students who attend the college?

What size campus do I want?

Do I want a large campus?

Do I want a medium campus?

Do I want a small campus?

Are class sizes large?

Are class sizes medium?

Are class sizes small?

Location.

Is the college in an urban or rural area?

How far is the school from home?

Is it a commuter school?

Do I want to live at home?

Is the school across the country in a different time zone?

Can I adjust to a cold climate?

Can I adjust to a hot climate?

Can I afford to travel to and from the school?

Can my family and friends easily travel to watch me play?

Cost.

What is the cost of attendance?

Can I afford the school without a scholarship?

If I don't get a full athletic scholarship are there other types of scholarships available?

What will my financial aid package look like?

Diversity.

Do I want an ethnically diverse school?

Facilities.

Do I have to travel off-campus to practice and play my sport?

Is there a bubble or indoor facility that can be used during the winter or during inclement weather?

How close are the dorms to the sports facilities?

Is the athletic facility shared by different sports teams?

What does the weight room look like? Is the equipment up to date?

Are the sports and recreation facilities adequate?

Tutoring.

Am I entitled to tutoring?

Do I need it?

Do I have to pay for it?

What can I get tutored in?

Social.

Do I have any friends or family attending this school?

Do I want to join a fraternity or sorority?

Does the school have club or intramural teams?

After college.

Does the university have connections to jobs?

Will my degree from this school help me get a job?

Can I become a professional in my sport?

Chapter 3:

College Coaches and Teams

The Inside Scoop

Coaches send out hundreds of letters to prospective student-athletes. While it is exciting to receive a letter from a college coach, most letters are merely an introduction to their schools. Some coaches like to brag about their teams to impress you. Sometimes the letters ask you to fill out questionnaires. If you are interested in the college or university, fill out the questionnaires and attach your athletic résumé. This way, the coach will know you are definitely interested in his program. Here is an example of a letter that has been sent to a prospective student-athlete:

Dear Student-Athlete:

Congratulations on your accomplishments in your sport! I have coached at Prestigious University for the sport team for 15 years. Over the years we got to #9 in the nation and made it to the round of 16 once during the NCAA tournament. We won the Esteemed League Championship 8 times and I developed three All-Americans.

I am writing to tell you about Prestigious University and the Prestigious University's sport team. Prestigious University is one of the best undergraduate institutions in the country.

I'm interested in hearing from you and finding out what you think of our program. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and send me any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Head Coach

Below is a sample letter a coach received from a prospective student-athlete. You might consider this as a template for your letter. You can send a coach a handwritten or printed paper letter, or an email. An email letter is faster and easier but sometimes emails never get opened. A handwritten or printed paper letter might stand out as fewer people send physical letters in the mail. Note: If you are writing to multiple schools, remember to carefully edit your letter with specifics for each school.

Dear Coach [Last Name]:

I would like to introduce myself. My name is [First Name, Last Name] and I am currently a junior enrolled in [Name of High School]. I have played my sport for 7 years. I am [height] and [weight]. I am interested in obtaining a spot on your D 1 sport team for the Fall of 20XX.

For the past 4 years, I have played my sport competitively. My athletic résumé is attached, which provides details on all of my game results, stats, and school activities.

On [Date], I will be participating in My Sport College Recruiting Camp at [State University in City, State]. It would be great if you could attend the camp and see me play in person.

My GPA is 3.8 on a 4.0 scale and I finished my sophomore year with all A's. This year I am taking 2 honors courses and by the end of my senior year I will have completed 3 Advanced Placement courses. I am registered to take the SAT I test on Month, Date, 20XX. My October 20XX PSAT score was 2000.

I intend on pursuing a 4-year degree in business. I have heard many great things about the business program at [Name of University] and hope to one day to be a part of it.

I have seen numerous videos of your team's matches on YouTube and have been keeping up with news and stats on the official [Name of University] website. I would be a great fit for the team because I am passionate about sport, I am a team player, I am a hard worker, and I fight until the end of every match. Below is the YouTube link of my highlight video and I hope you take the time to watch it. Please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email me at prospectivestudentathlete@internet.com

Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Type and Sign First Name, Last Name]

Dos and Don'ts for Contacting College Coaches

<p>Do remember that coaches send out hundreds of recruiting letters. You might think you are special (which you are) but a coach needs to hear from you. Be proactive and send out a letter of interest to the college coach of your choice. Get your name out to different college coaches.</p>	<p>Don't think that coaches are going to find you. Even if you receive a letter, you must respond to it. Otherwise a coach doesn't think you are interested.</p>
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Do write an original letter and be specific.	Don't send out a form letter. Coaches can see through it.
Do write the letter yourself.	Don't have your parents write the letter for you. Coaches know when parents are writing letters.
Do write a concise letter. Many are busy, so it's good for them to have your personal information at their fingertips. If you have a video, provide the link.	Don't send out group e-mails. Even though you might be sending out dozens of letters to different coaches at different schools, the last thing a coach wants to see is a list of 20 other coaches at the top of an e-mail.
Do address the coach properly. Whether you are sending an e-mail to the head coach or one of the assistant coaches, the letter should be addressed in a professional manner such as "Dear Coach Smith." Wouldn't you rather receive a letter addressed to you personally such as "Dear Joe", or "Dear Melissa" and not a letter addressed "Dear Student-Athlete" or "Dear Recruit"?	Don't write "Dear Coach", or "Hi Bob", or "Sup Coach".
Do proofread. Have someone else read your letter for edits.	Don't use "txt msg slang". Don't misspell words.

What Are College Coaches *Really* Looking For?

Passion. Most coaches want a gifted athlete who can make a real contribution to their team. “I am looking for players to give 100% effort every time they play.” “I want a passionate player who is extremely enthusiastic about playing his sport.” “I want a player who consistently gives maximum energy and effort.” Coaches are not looking for someone who just wants a scholarship or an opportunity to go a prestigious school.

Academics. The NCAA has instituted an Academic Progress Report or APR. The APR calculates the academic progress of scholarship student-athletes during the school year. Each team member is evaluated, then the combined team receives an APR score. Teams failing to achieve an APR of 925 may be subject to penalties such as a reduction in scholarships, loss of practice time, or other sanctions. These are some reasons why coaches are very interested in a team’s APR rating and why coaches are careful to monitor the academic performance of their student-athletes. “I am proud to see my team achieve a high APR.” “I tell recruits how well my team has done academically.” Note: If you are a superb student, a coach will be very interested in you.

Ranking. “I look primarily for blue-chip players.” Sometimes coaches overlook a player’s potential or how a player performs under pressure because they are busy looking at statistics.

Note: When recruiting, coaches also look for honesty, loyalty, compassion, leadership, and someone who wants to be coached.

What a Student-Athlete Should Look For?

Who’s who. Look up the background of players on the roster and the caliber of matches or tournaments they play.

- Look up the teammates' playing time, experience, where they came from, if they have started all games, and statistics.
- Do student-athletes from other countries make up the majority of the team? If so, then they are probably taking most of the scholarships.
- Check out your competition. See if you can find out who the incoming freshmen are and how you compare. Be objective. Are you better or worse?

Fitting in. Whether you go on an official visit or an unofficial visit, you should have an opportunity to meet the team. See if members of the team are outgoing and friendly. If you make the team, you will be “hanging out” with them, so try to make an educated guess about their personalities. Some teams are large, and chances are there are enough players on the team to be with in case you don't like some. On a small team of 6 or 8, you will have to get along with everyone. Obviously no one is going to get to know you over a weekend, nor will you know everything about the team. By observing, talking, and listening, however, you should be able to formulate an opinion. Just be aware, the coach is going to ask the players their opinion of you, so regardless of how you feel, try to put on a good show.

Witness a practice. When you go on an official or unofficial visit, a coach might have you observe a practice. Although you might be observing a “normal” practice, some coaches will try to impress recruits by refraining from yelling or swearing, but you will never know for sure. Talk to team members when the coach is not around to get a better understanding of what a real practice is like.

Scholarships. Find out the number of scholarships the coach will be offering for your recruiting classes. Look on the roster to see how many seniors will be leaving the team.

This is important because there might be 1 senior or 10 seniors who are graduating.

Know where you would fit on the team. If the team is losing a lot of seniors, then you might have a better chance of playing on the team as a freshman.

Team. How do you fit in on the team? Objectively, what will your contribution to the team be? Does being on a losing team versus being on a winning team matter as long as the school is the right choice? What is the strength of schedule the team plays? How does the team do?

Plan b. Make sure you like the school. Four years at a school you hate could be torture. Playing and being on a team just for the money might not be the best incentive. The most important question to ask yourself is if something happened to your scholarship or if you are no longer on the team, could you stay at the school? If the answer is “no”, you might have to transfer to another school. If you lose your money or your place on the team, what would your follow up plan be?

Note: Coaches frequently recruit from the same tournaments or events. Coaches often like to know which other schools are recruiting you.

Player Stories

The vignettes you are about to read are true. Only the names have been altered.

Juanita’s Story

Juanita played softball, basketball, and soccer in high school. She considered herself an all-around athlete and made the varsity team during her junior year of high school in all three sports. Juanita was captain of the soccer and basketball teams. She wanted to play a sport in college but couldn’t make up her mind on what sport to play. Finally, after much deliberation, she decided to pursue soccer as her college sport. During the fall of her senior year of high

school she contacted the head soccer coaches at colleges and universities in which she was interested. She then visited some of the schools. Several Division III colleges were very interested in Juanita and offered her an opportunity to start as a freshman. One of Juanita's visits was to the local state university, a Division I school. The state university coach was very interested in Juanita but he did not offer her a starting position or any athletic scholarship money. Juanita narrowed her search to two schools, a Division III and the local state Division I school. She ultimately decided to go to the local state university because she could live at home. During Juanita's freshman year of college she did not play in any games nor did she receive any money. During her sophomore year Juanita substituted in several games. Her parents came to all her home games and they were very happy to watch her play. During her junior year the coach gave Juanita a partial scholarship and a starting position in non-conference games. As a senior, Juanita started in all games, was voted captain of her team, and won the All-Sportsmanship Award for soccer.

Julie's Story

Julie was a standout high school volleyball player. She was recruited by several powerhouse Division I schools and was happy to be chosen by her first choice to play on a full scholarship. During her freshman year, Julie started for the team and was selected as an All-American. During her sophomore year, she started for the team and later in the season the team won the NCAA title. Julie again was selected as an All-American. When she began her junior year, the coach had recruited a blue chip high school player for Julie's position. Julie no longer started for the team, but played in games when she was needed. The team again won the NCAA tournament, but Julie never participated in any of the tournament games. The person who replaced Julie won All-America honors and Julie did not win any individual awards. At the start

of Julie's senior year, the coach sat down with her and told her she would not be starting nor would she be needed as a substitute player since a new freshman player would be taking her spot. The coach gave Julie two options. She could go to another school and possibly play on another team or she could stay at this school for another year on scholarship, but she would not be a member of the team. Julie chose to stay on scholarship at the school of her choice, not compete, and complete her degree.

Isaiah's Story

Isaiah was a top high school student and a star basketball player. He was recruited by several highly prestigious (Ivy League Conference) schools and considered going to one them. He qualified for a partial academic scholarship at one of these highly prestigious colleges, but since these schools did not offer athletic scholarships he knew his attendance there would still be expensive. At the same time, a neighboring top state university wanted him to play basketball and offered him a full athletic scholarship. Isaiah could attend the top state university for free or he could attend the highly prestigious college and take out a big loan. After much consideration, Isaiah decided to attend the top state university for free. At the top state university, Isaiah started all four years on the basketball team, was named Conference Player of the Year and won an impressive academic scholarship to graduate school.

Chapter 4

Tips and Tools

Division III Schools

Division III is the largest division in the NCAA regarding the number of schools and student-athletes. Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships to students. Although Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships these schools can offer very generous financial aid packages to academically qualified student athletes. Below are some reasons why student-athletes chose to play sports at a D III schools.

- They were able to play on a varsity college team as a freshman.
- They played their sport at D III federal academy where their tuition was paid by the government
- They were recognized by the athletic department as player of the week. Pictures were posted on the school website.
- They were able to play both two sports; one sport in the fall season and one sport in the spring season.
- They were able to tell their friends back home that they were on a college varsity team.
- They had fun playing their sport as there was not too much pressure to win all the time.
- When they came to college they didn't have anything to do on the weekends, so they enjoyed playing their sport with friends and teammates.
- Their high school coach wrote them a good recommendation.
- Four years of playing a sport, with one year as captain looked really good on a resume.
- There is less pressure on sport performance.
- The practices were not that time consuming; academics came first.

- There was practice every day during the season, however, there was plenty of time to concentrate on school work.
- There was plenty of time to pursue other activities such as internships and study abroad.
- They did not get into the D I program they wanted.
- Travel time for games/matches was minimal.
- The coach had other athletic department responsibilities, and as team captain it was great to lead team practices.
- The coach was very accommodating regarding work and academic schedules.
- Team practices were short.

Division I Schools

Division I athletic programs are comprised of the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS). FBS schools are formerly known as Division I-A schools. They have the highest caliber of collegiate sports. FCS schools, formerly known as Division I-AA, have the next highest level of collegiate sports. Head count sports offer full athletic scholarships. Equivalency sports offer partial scholarships. It is important that you and your coach have open communication about your scholarship agreement and the longevity of your scholarship.

Head count sports. Below are the numbers of sport scholarships for men.

Basketball (13)	Football (FBS-85) (FCS-63)
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Equivalency sports. Below are the numbers of sport scholarships for men.

Baseball (11.7)	Cross country/track and field (12.6)	Fencing (4.5)
Golf (4.5)	Gymnastics (6.3)	Ice hockey (18)
Lacrosse (12.6)	Rifle (3.6)	Skiing (6.3)

Soccer (9.9)	Swimming and diving (9.9)	Tennis (4.5)
Volleyball (4.5)	Water polo (4.5)	Wrestling (9.9)

Head count sports. Below are the numbers of sport scholarships for women.

Basketball (15)	Gymnastics (12)
Tennis (8)	Volleyball (12)

Equivalency sports. Below are the numbers of sport scholarships for women

Beach volleyball (3)	Bowling (5)	Cross country/track and field (18)
Equestrian (15)	Fencing (5)	Field hockey (12)
Golf (6)	Ice hockey (18)	Lacrosse (12)
Rifle (3.6)	Rowing (20)	Rugby (12)
Skiing (7)	Soccer (14)	Softball (12)
Swimming and diving (14)	Triathlon (4.5)	Water polo (8)

Below are the D I FBS and FCS Conferences.

FBS conferences.

American Athletic Conference	Atlantic Coast Conference	Big Ten Conference
Big 12 Conference	Conference USA	Division I Independent Conference
Mid-American Conference	Mountain West Conference	Pac 12 Conference
Southeastern Conference	Sun Belt Conference	

FCS conferences.

Big Sky Conference	Big South Conference	Colonial Athletic Association Conference
Division I FCS Independents	Ivy League Conference	Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference
Missouri Valley Football Conference	Northeast Conference	Ohio Valley Conference
Patriot League Conference	Pioneer Football League Conference	Southern Conference
Southland Conference	Southwestern Athletic Conference	

(Number of Available College Athletic Scholarships, 2018)

A Comparison of D III & D I Schools

Having been both a D III and D I college coach, the following chart represents my perspective of some similarities and differences between the two conferences.

D III	D I
No athletic scholarship money is available.	Athletic scholarship money is available.
Athletes play for enjoyment, love and fun.	Athletes play for enjoyment, love, fun, and scholarship money.
There is team camaraderie and competition for playing time.	There is team camaraderie, competition for playing time, and competition for scholarship money.

<p>Players have limited practice hours and competition events. Players can practice as many hours as they want on their own.</p>	<p>Players have limited practice hours and competition events. Players can practice as many hours as they want on their own.</p>
<p>Coaches have a planned practice schedules, hour by hour, day by day, week by week.</p> <p>Games/Matches are scheduled for the entire season.</p>	<p>Coaches have a planned practice schedules, hour by hour, day by day, week by week.</p> <p>Games/Matches are scheduled for the entire season.</p>
<p>Players can miss practice for academics.</p>	<p>Academics are typically second to the sport.</p>
<p>Weight training and conditioning are usually optional.</p>	<p>Weight training and conditioning are a requirement. There are weight and athletic trainers at practices and conditioning sessions.</p>
<p>Student-athletes have a balanced college life.</p>	<p>Athletics is a full-time commitment.</p>
<p>Most classes are small and students can have plenty of one-on-one attention with professors.</p>	<p>Classes can be large and can be taught by teaching assistants.</p>
<p>I'm a varsity athlete.</p>	<p>I'm a D I varsity athlete.</p>

There is no mandatory commitment for student-athletes to show up for all practices. Coaches seldom have a full squad at practice.	Student-athletes must show up to all practices including optional practices.
Fewer games are played during the season. There is minimal travel.	Very strenuous schedule on-season and off-season. There is a lot of traveling.
There is more emphasis on the academic experience.	There is more emphasis on the athletic experience.
Teams might have academic counselors but they might not be sport-specific.	Teams have sport-specific academic counselors.
Study hall is optional.	Study hall is required.

Below are examples of D I and D III student-athlete schedules.

D I Tennis Player Schedule

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
5 AM	Day Off	Wake-Up to Eat Breakfast	Sleep	Wake-Up to Eat Breakfast	Sleep	Wake-Up to Eat Breakfast	Sleep

6 AM	Day Off	Lifting watch film	Wake- Up Eat Breakfast	Lifting	Wake- Up Eat Breakfast	Lifting	Sleep
7 AM	Day Off	Stretching in training room	Conditioning	Stretching in training room	Conditioning	Stretching in training room	Sleep
8 AM	Day Off	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Breakfast
9 AM	Day Off	Snack Get ready for class	Individual lesson	Class Snack Get ready for class	Study Hall	Class	Training room for taping and stretching
10 AM	Day Off	Class	Study Hall	Class	Coach meeting	Snack	Pre- Game meeting/ Snack
11 AM	Day Off Eat Brunch	Study Hall	Lunch	Class	Lunch	Class	On field warm- up
12 PM	Day Off	Lunch	Class	Lunch	Class	Class	On Field Warm-up

1 PM	Day Off	Warm-up for Practice	Warm-up for Practice	Meet with academic counselor	Warm-up for Practice	Warm-up for Practice	Game Time
2 PM	Study Hall	Practice	Practice	Warm-up for Practice	Practice	Practice	Game Time
3 PM	Study Hall	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Game Time
4 PM	Study Hall	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Game Time
5P M	Study Hall	Stretching	Stretching	Practice	Stretching	Watch Film	Game Time
6P M	Tutor Session	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Stretch	Stretching Whirlpool
7P M	Day Off	Class	Class	Tutor Session	Tutor Session	Study Hall	Team Dinner
8P M	Day Off Eat Dinner	Class	Class	Study Hall	Study Hall	Dinner	Go to teammates house to hang out
9P M	Day Off	Class	Class	Study Hall	HW	TV Time	

10P M	Day Off	Night Snack	Snack Time	Look at Film	Look at Film	Go to Bed for Big Game tomorrow	
11P M	Day Off	Do HW(Homework)	Do HW	Relax-unwind	Relax-Unwind	Sleep	Sleep

D III Track Player Schedule

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8 AM	Day Off	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
9 AM	Day Off	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
10 AM	Day Off Eat Breakfast	Class Eat Breakfast	Sleep	Class Eat Breakfast	Sleep	Class Eat Breakfast	Breakfast
11 AM	Day Off	Class	Class Eat Breakfast	Class	Class Eat Breakfast	Class	Team Meeting
12 PM	Day Off	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Warm- Up
1 PM	Day Off Eat Lunch	Lunch	Do HW	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Meet Time

2 PM	Day Off	Do HW	Lunch	Do HW	Do HW	Do HW	Meet Time
3 PM	Day Off	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Meet Time
4 PM	Day Off	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Practice	Meet Time
5PM	Day Off	Conditioning	Team Meeting	Lifting	Practice	Conditioning	Meet Time
6PM	Day Off	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Team Meeting	Team Dinner
7PM	Day Off	Class	HW	HW	Class	Dinner	HW
8PM	Day Off Eat Dinner	Class	HW	HW	Class	Hang out at teammates house	HW
9PM	Day Off	Class	Tutor Session	Tutor Session	Class	Watch TV	TV Time
10PM	Day Off	Snack then TV	Snack	HW	HW	Watch TV	TV Time
11PM	Day Off	TV time	TV Time	HW	HW	Sleep	Sleep

Player Stories

Hideki's Story

Hideki grew up in the Midwest playing baseball and soccer. When he entered high school he continued to play both sports and was a star player. Hideki won numerous athletic awards including All-Conference and All-State in both baseball and soccer. In addition to his athletic prowess, he was also an honor student and a National Merit Semifinalist. He received numerous recruiting letters from college coaches for both sports. After much deliberation during the final days of his sophomore year of high school, Hideki decided to focus on baseball since he thought playing two sports in college might affect his academics. After his junior year in high school, Hideki was recruited by many colleges and universities, but chose four Division I state universities and one Division I highly prestigious (Ivy League Conference) school for his five official visits.

After visiting all of the schools in the fall of his senior year of high school, and talking to the respective baseball coaches, Hideki was offered a partial scholarship to each state university and an opportunity to play baseball at each school beginning in his freshman year. Hideki did not have an offer from the highly prestigious college but the coach came to visit Hideki and his family a few weeks after Hideki's official visit. This coach kept in contact with Hideki on a weekly basis where he and Hideki developed a good relationship. In the spring of Hideki's senior year, several coaches were pressing Hideki to make a decision. The only school Hideki was waiting to hear from was the highly prestigious college. The coach there really wanted Hideki on his team and worked very hard on Hideki's behalf to get him accepted to the university. Finally, Hideki was accepted to the highly prestigious college and he was told he would start on the team as a freshman.

When Hideki started college in the fall, he never showed up for baseball practice. Hideki's parents convinced him that he was never going to play baseball professionally so there

was no need for him to pursue the sport anymore. His parents told him he should concentrate only on his school work. Since the school did not offer him any athletic scholarship there was no obligation for him to play on the team. Hideki would never have been accepted to the highly prestigious college if the coach had not lobbied for his admittance. The coach was blind-sided by Hideki's actions but there was nothing the coach could do except wait for the next season and recruit another player.

Bill's Story

Bill was a four-year letter winner for his high school tennis team. He played #1 singles and was captain of the team for his junior and senior year. By age 17, Bill was the top 18-and-under player in his region and was nationally ranked in the top 100. Bill's primary goal was to get a tennis scholarship to an FBS conference school. When Bill was a freshman in high school his parents divorced and extra money for private tennis lessons was scarce. Bill would teach tennis clinics to young players in his spare time in exchange for court time and discounted lessons. Although Bill was a very talented athlete, he was a mediocre student. He had trouble applying himself to his schoolwork and earned mostly B's and C's in high school. At a local tennis showcase in August prior to his senior year, Bill caught the attention of a D III coach from the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC). This coach called Bill at home one evening and invited him to come and visit his school. Bill did not have the money or grades to attend the school and therefore told the coach he was not interested in visiting his school. The NESCAC college coach continued to call Bill once a week just to chat and see what he was up to. Bill was in contact with several FBS conference coaches and several FCS coaches and went on four official visits. The best scholarship offer he received was a 35% scholarship, which could increase as he progressed through school. Bill discussed the price of tuition with his

mom, but it still would have been a stretch. There was no free ride available to him in the big conferences. When the NESCAC coach called, as he did weekly, Bill told him about his dilemma. Bill said he didn't think he could get into his D III college because his grades were too low and his mom could not afford the tuition. After listening to Bill, the D III coach was able to persuade admissions to admit Bill and secure financial aid for him. Bill realized this was an opportunity he could not pass up, and decided to attend the D III college. In college, Bill played #1 on the team in both singles and doubles all four years and became the singles NCAA champion during his junior year. Upon graduation, Bill decided to play professional tennis and toured for several years.

Amy's Story

A child of immigrant parents, Amy grew up in the southwest. Amy loved gymnastics and starting competing in meets when she was in fifth grade. Both of her parents worked long hours, but they supported her passion by providing her with private gymnastic lessons. Amy helped out every day in the family business, was an honor student, and captain of her high school gymnastics team. When she was a sophomore she won the team state championship and the all-around individual championship. Amy was academically ranked in the top 2% of her senior class. With help from her guidance counselor Amy applied to three Division I highly prestigious (Ivy League Conference) schools and one state university. Amy was accepted to all of the schools. The state university offered Amy a full athletic scholarship while the highly prestigious schools could only offer her partial financial academic aid and no athletic scholarships. Amy and her parents weighed the offers while comparing the academics and athletics of all the schools. Although the highly prestigious colleges offered very impressive financial aid packages, her parents would still have to pay a portion of her tuition. Amy ultimately decided to

attend the state university on a full athletic scholarship. While in college Amy competed and led her team to two conference championships. She was also nominated and selected to be a Rhodes Scholar.

Pedro's Story

Pedro was a top high school student and a star golfer. He was recruited by a Division I highly prestigious (Ivy League Conference) college, which he knew was expensive, but he had his heart set on going there. At the same time, a state university wanted him to play golf for them. The state university offered Pedro a partial athletic scholarship and a partial academic scholarship due to his outstanding grades and standardized test scores. Both scholarships would cover all of his tuition. Pedro had to choose. Should he go to the state university for free or should he go to the highly prestigious college and pay for a good portion of the tuition? In the end, Pedro decided to go to the highly prestigious college and play on the golf team. Pedro played all four years, never won any golf awards, but he formed many strong personal connections and created long-lasting relationships which helped him in his business career after he graduated.

Chapter 5

Visiting the College or University

Campus Tour

You can take a virtual tour of a college or university, but you if you are serious about attending it, you will probably want to visit the school. As a prospective student-athlete there are two ways to visit a college or university. You can take an official visit or an unofficial visit. An official visit is when the college or university pays for any portion of your visit. This usually includes travel, lodging, meals, or a combination of them. You can start taking your official visits after the first day of class of your senior year, with the exception of men's basketball where a prospective student-athlete can begin visiting a college or university after January 1 of his junior year. The maximum amount of time for this visit is 48 hours. Prior to your visit you need to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center and submit your high school transcripts and standardized test scores. Division I schools allow five official visits with one visit per university or college. An unofficial visit is when you and your family pay to visit a college or university. You can take an unlimited amount of visits any time during high school to any Division I or III college or university.

Colleges vary when it comes to hosting prospective athletes. Some coaches may have you stay at a hotel and others will have you stay with students on the team. Whether you are making an official or unofficial visit, plan on taking a campus tour that includes the athletic and practice facilities. You will probably meet various academic advisors, athletic trainers, strength and conditioning coaches, assistant coaches, and players. Also try to speak with someone in admissions and financial aid.

Drew's Story

It was a Friday in October of Drew's senior year of high school. He went to school like any other day. It was a little different because that afternoon he was leaving for the airport to go on an official college athletic recruiting visit for football. He told his friends he was flying to Wisconsin. After school Drew stopped at home to change his clothes, pick up his itinerary, and grab an overnight bag. When he got to the airport he noticed his flight was delayed due to the weather. This wasn't the first time this happened to him, but Drew was anxious to get going on his trip since he knew his visit could only be for 48 hours. Luckily his flight was only delayed two hours. When Drew arrived at the airport that evening, one of the assistant coaches picked him up and brought him to the hotel. Drew ordered room service and relaxed a bit before turning in. On Saturday he had breakfast with the team, met with the head coach in his office, watched a team practice, met with the team's academic advisor, visited the student-athlete study hall, had lunch with another assistant coach, walked around the campus and went to the campus book store and bought some t-shirts. That evening Drew attended a night home football game. On Sunday Drew toured the campus athletic facilities, visited the freshman athletic dorms, and had lunch with the team captain. In the afternoon the assistant coach who picked him up on Friday brought him back to the airport for his trip home. This weekend was very similar to his three previous official recruiting weekends. On Monday at school, Drew saw his friends at lunch. Later that afternoon when Drew got home, he received two voice messages from colleges he had visited unofficially. He listened to the messages but he was not really interested in those schools. He checked the machine to see if any other calls came in, but no such luck. That evening, while Drew was doing his homework, he received a phone call from the head football coach of the university he just visited. The coach offered Drew a full athletic scholarship. Drew told the

coach he really enjoyed his visit and liked the school, but he also liked another university he visited two weeks earlier in Pennsylvania where the coach there also offered him a full scholarship. He told the Wisconsin coach he would get back to him that evening with his decision. Drew couldn't make up his mind so he asked his parents for help. Together they chose the university in Pennsylvania because it was closer to home.

Things To Think About After Your Official or Unofficial Visit(s)

Do I want to be on the team?

Will I start or play sporadically?

Do I like the coach (es), players?

Will I get a full/partial scholarship or am I going to be a walk-on athlete?

Do I like the school?

National Letter of Intent (NLI)

The National Letter of Intent (NLI) is a contract where a student-athlete commits for the first time to a four-year university. The NLI and athletic/aid scholarship documents are sent to the student-athlete by fax or email during appropriate signing periods. After you sign your NLI all other coaches and universities are banned from recruiting you.

Gina's Story

Gina was an honor student who also swam for her high school. She began her high school swimming career on the junior varsity swim team. When she became a high school junior she swam on the varsity swim team. Every year Gina improved, and at the end of her senior year in high school she was a two year letter winner, an All-Conference selectee, and the MVP of her team. Gina had her heart set on swimming in college. She was not recruited by any FBS schools but an FCS school in her state was interested in her. The coach at the FCS school offered her a

very small partial athletic scholarship with the possible opportunity to swim on the team as a freshman. Gina didn't really like the school but this was the only scholarship offer she had. A coach from a nearby D III college had seen Gina swim during the conference finals and was very impressed by her times. She thought Gina would be a great fit for the team and could start as a freshman. When the coach called her to ask her to visit the school Gina told the coach she was not interested. Gina knew she could not afford the tuition and she knew the school did not offer athletic scholarships. At the end of the month, Gina was ready to sign her NLI with the FCS school that recruited her. With her college decision made, Gina had time to help her teammates with their college searches. Although her friends' swim times were not as good as hers, they still wanted to swim in college. One warm spring day, three of her teammates decided to visit a local D III college and asked Gina if she wanted to join them. Gina said agreed and the girls went on their visit. This was the same D III college that wanted to recruit Gina earlier that year. At the pool, all the girls met the coach. The coach started to talk about the swimming program, the facilities and academic programs. At the end of the meeting, the coach told the girls to stop by the financial aid office. Gina decided to talk to a financial aid advisor and found out the school could pay almost 80% of her tuition. When Gina learned about the amount of financial aid she could get, she brought the information back to her parents and decided to apply to the school. Gina told the coach she was applying to the school. The coach was thrilled that Gina was applying and personally discussed her application with the admissions department. The coach told the department that Gina was a superb student and athlete. Gina was accepted to the college and decided to attend. One of her teammates from high school was also admitted and they both started on the team as freshmen.

Walk-ons

A walk-on is a college player who is on the team but does not receive any form of athletic scholarship. If you are going to be a walk-on player without a scholarship you do not need to sign an NLI. There are three types of walk-ons: preferred, recruited, and unrecruited. A preferred walk-on is guaranteed a spot on the college team and receives all the support of regular scholarship athletes. A recruited walk-on does not have a position on the team. He may be required to try-out for the team once he is on campus. An unrecruited walk-on athlete comes to the school on his own and makes the team through an open try-out.

If You Try Out For The Team and Still Don't Make It, Don't Give Up

- Work and train hard so the following year you can try out again.
- Choose another sport to play that is not an official NCAA sport such as rugby or handball.
- Play a club or intramural sport.

Chapter 6

On Campus

College Campus

This might be the first time in your life that you are on your own, so it's your responsibility to meet people and make new friends. When you get to campus and find your dorm room you will probably meet your roommate. You might know the person very well, you might know a little bit about him, or this person might be a complete stranger. So long as you are welcoming, cheerful, and have a positive attitude, you will start off on the right foot.

Things to do when you get to campus.

- Set up your dorm room.
- Try to meet any incoming freshmen who were recruited in your sport.
- Pick up your books. (If you are on athletic or academic aid your books might be paid for.)
- Meet with your academic advisor:
 - Know how many credits you need per semester to be eligible to play your sport.
 - Know what GPA you need to be eligible to play your sport.
 - Know the required annual percentage of coursework needed towards your degree.
 - Inquire about summer or winter session courses.
- Get to know the campus. Look around the school, take a trip on the campus bus or shuttle.
- Find all the locations of all your classes by the first day of class.
- Familiarize yourself with the athletic facilities.
- Review your daily schedule for classes and practices.

Do's and Don'ts for College Team Practices

Do be on time. Be the first one there and the last one to leave.	Don't be late.
Do wear your school colors or issued practice gear.	Don't wear colors or clothes from other schools. The last thing a coach wants to see are clothes from a rival university.
Do help teammates. Be inclusive.	Don't leave players out. Make sure everyone knows what is going on.
Do get plenty of water, sleep, and proper nutrition.	Don't do drugs or anything that will harm your body.
Do review game plans and video or films with the coach.	Don't post inappropriate pictures on social media.
Do use positive language.	Don't use swear words.
Do follow team and NCAA rules.	Don't drink. Don't take illegal drugs. You might be drug tested and a positive drug test may result in the loss of your scholarship
Do give 100% effort during practice and in competition.	Don't be lazy.
Do listen to the coach and follow instructions.	Don't talk back to coaches or trainers.

Some Reasons You Might Like or Not Like Your College Teammates

I like my teammates because....	I don't like my teammates when they.....
they are my friends.	blame me for their mistakes.
we carpool to practice and games.	lie.
we exercise together.	talk behind my back.
we hang out with each other and study together.	violate team and NCAA rules.
we live together.	cheat.

If you are having a team problem tell your parents or a person you can confide in. If the problem is with your coach, try to see the assistant athletic director or compliance director.

Rachel's Story

Rachel was ecstatic about going to a D I state university to play lacrosse. She was a one-star recruit from her local high school. She started playing lacrosse as a sophomore and played on her high school varsity team during her junior and senior years. State university was the only school to offer Rachel a partial athletic scholarship. Rachel chose to go the state university. Being outgoing and personable, Rachel quickly made friends on the state university lacrosse

team. When the season started, Rachel practiced with the team but the coach did not play her during the games. Rachel didn't care about playing in the games, all she wanted was to have friends and be on the team. As the season progressed, several starting players got injured. Half way through the season, the coach started to put Rachel in the games. More and more players got injured and by the end of the season Rachel became a starting player for the conference tournament. Rachel knew she was just an average player who was lucky to get a partial scholarship and play a D I sport and playing for the conference tournament was a wonderful experience.

Chapter 7

Stuff Happens

Transferring

If you are fortunate and talented enough to earn an athletic scholarship, remember you might not have a four year scholarship. While schools can offer a student-athlete a four year scholarship, they can also offer scholarships that are renewable every year an athlete is eligible to play. Your coach has the authority to renew or not renew your scholarship.

While your coach could renew your athletic scholarship at the end of a season, things can happen. A situation could arise when you return to school and find you have a new coach and he doesn't want you on the team. Now the new coach might hope you will quit the team or leave the school, forfeiting your scholarship. (Considering the price of tuition today, few student-athletes want to walk away from a scholarship, especially if it's a full scholarship.) What can you do? You can stay at the school on scholarship and not play on the team or you can transfer to another school. A college transfer student is a student-athlete who transfers from one collegiate institution to another collegiate institution.

Below are student-athlete transfer stories and corresponding charts. The charts represent the student-athlete's general overview of every collegiate year. The charts contain five categories: school, position, coach, teammates, and team program. School refers to the student-athlete's opinion of academics. Position is a student-athlete's opinion of his place on the team. Coach is a student-athlete's opinion of his coach. Teammates involves a student-athlete's feelings about players on team. Team program quality is a student-athlete's overall judgment of athletic department; athletic director, facilities, trainers, sports information program, and tutoring.

Sergei's Story

Sergei was an honor student and an average high school ice hockey player. He was recruited to play at a large state university on a partial athletic scholarship. As a freshman, Sergei was not in the starting lineup. The school had good academics but Sergei didn't like the coach, the practices, or his teammates. Sergei transferred to a smaller state university in a different conference after his freshman year. Sergei did not have to sit out a year because the coach gave his permission transfer and play. The new university had a good coach and better practices, but the facilities were so-so and the ice hockey budget was smaller. Despite the shortcomings of the school, Sergei was in the starting lineup his entire sophomore year and he received a partial athletic scholarship. Sergei's junior year was the same as his sophomore year. In the fall of his senior year Sergei had a season-ending injury. Since Sergei played less than 30% of the games, he was able to receive a medical redshirt. He graduated from college and was eligible to play one more year of hockey. Since he had good grades he decided to go to graduate school. He stayed at the same school for graduate school. As a graduate student he continued to play on the team one more year.

Note: A student-athlete who is injured can extend his eligibility by taking a medical redshirt if he qualifies.

Freshman Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position				X
Coach				X
Teammates			X	
Team Program Quality	X			

Sophomore Year After Transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality			X	

Junior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality			X	

Senior Year Red Shirt

5th Year Graduate Student

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality			X	

Samantha's Story

Samantha was an international student who came to the United States on a full scholarship to play basketball at a medium size private D I university. She loved the beautiful school, teammates, coach, conference, and her starting position as a freshman on the team. After her first year, she felt the classes were too demanding and she could not handle being a student-athlete at the school. She wanted to be at a school with easier academics. Samantha was able to transfer to a large state D I university in another conference. As a sophomore she was a starter on the team and was granted a full scholarship. She liked the school and her teammates. She did not, however, like her coach. After the season, the coach did not renew her scholarship. Samantha returned to her home country for a year and searched for another school. She contacted coaches and found a small private D I school in another conference that would give her a full athletic scholarship. With a year off, Samantha took five years to receive her undergraduate degree.

Note: A student-athletic who transfers has to sit out a year.

Freshman Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School			X	
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Sophomore Year After transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			

Coach				X
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Samantha sat out one year while she went back to her home.

Junior Year After Second Transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Senior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Sally's Story

Sally was a talented tennis player. She was recruited by Coach A during her senior year of high school to play tennis at a D I university. Although this school was not her first choice, it was an Ivy League Conference school and that was her top priority. When she arrived at the university, Coach A, who recruited her, resigned and the university hired Coach B. Coach B was a former NCAA champion and professional top 100 player, but never coached at a college

before. Now Sally was at a school with tough academics and a coach who did not recruit her. She was happy to play high up in the starting lineup but didn't like coach B. Her classes were very difficult and she spent all her free time at the library and study hall. In addition, the university was in a remote area far away from her home and friends. As the year progressed and the air grew colder, the practices seemed to go on forever. Sally was lonely and stressed and felt she couldn't stay at the school any longer. She made the decision to transfer. Sally transferred within the conference to another D I university. She entered new D I university as a sophomore and was considered a rising star player by Coach C. Sally played #1 in the lineup in singles and #1 in doubles. She was glad she transferred and very happy she didn't lose a year of eligibility because of her transfer. Sally started playing when the school year began and adjusted quickly to her new environment. She liked her teammates, her classes, Coach C, and enjoyed her position on the team. The next year, as a junior, she again started for the team but Coach C decided to put her lower down in the lineup. Although she was not happy with her new lower position, she still liked the school and the team. That year the team won the Ivy League Conference and made it to the NCAA tournament. The following year, now a senior, Sally played in the non-conference season (fall) in the same low position she had as a junior. Although she was not happy with her low position in the lineup, she justified it because her teammates voted her captain. In the spring of her senior year, Coach C took her out of the starting lineup in singles and doubles and Sally did not play in any conference matches during her senior year. Sally graduated from the new D I university in the spring. Sally's transfer was successful, but her position on the team and playing time deteriorated.

Note: One time transfer exception, the player does not have to sit out a year.

Freshman Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
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School	X			
Position	X			
Coach				X
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Sophomore Year After Transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Junior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position			X	
Coach			X	
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Senior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position				X
Coach				X

Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Dan's Story

Dan was recruited in the beginning of his senior year of high school by Coach A to compete in wrestling at a large D I state university. While he was being recruited, the coach was really nice to him, visiting his home and meeting his family. When Dan visited the school he loved the campus and knew this was the school for him. When he arrived on campus in the fall, the coach was aloof and unapproachable. During Dan's freshman year the coach yelled at him, picked on him, swore at him, lied to him, ignored him, and never had anything nice to say. Although Dan was performing for the team, he never got the approval or the proper coaching he needed to improve. Although the coach had a terrific résumé, his coaching skills were horrible and inadequate. As Dan's freshman year progressed, he hated the coach and the practices, but he performed well at meets. Dan wanted to talk to other schools so he asked his coach for a permission-to-contact letter in the fall of his freshman year. The coach denied him the letter. Dan asked again for the letter in the winter of his freshman year and again the coach said "no". Dan then asked for the letter after spring break and the coach again told him no. Exasperated, Dan finally asked for the letter a day before the conference tournament and this time the coach agreed. Dan spent the entire summer talking to other coaches and looking at other schools. Dan transferred out of conference to a new state university and played his sophomore year. He completed the remainder of his collegiate athletic career and ultimately graduated from the new state university.

Note: A student-athlete needs a permission-to-contact letter prior to contacting any new coaches. (This rule has been revised). As of October, 2018, student-athletes who compete for D I

universities will be able to transfer without a permission-to-contact letter and be eligible to receive an athletic-scholarship.

Freshman Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position		X		
Coach				X
Teammates				X
Team Program Quality	X			

Sophomore Year After Transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Junior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Senior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Mark's Story

Mark was an above average high school track athlete. He started all four years for his high school team. Outside of school he competed in regional and national track meets. He was recruited by a D I university, although the school recruiting him was not his first choice. It was, however, the only school to offer him a partial athletic scholarship. When Mark arrived in the fall of his freshman year he was very happy with the coach and his decision to go to the school. He started for the team in every meet. He also did well in his classes and felt this school was right for him.

Prior to Mark's sophomore year, the university changed to a more competitive conference and fired the existing coach. When Mark started his sophomore year, the university had hired a new coach. From the outset, Mark did not get along with the new coach but he started for the team and placed well. Mark realized the competition in the new conference was difficult but he continued to work hard during practices and meets. At the end of the year the coach talked to Mark and told him he did not want him on the team for the coming year and he would be taking away his scholarship. Mark's choices were to stay at the school, which he liked and not have a scholarship, or transfer to another school. After careful consideration, Mark chose to compete at another school in a less competitive conference on a partial scholarship.

Freshman Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality	X			

Sophomore Year After Team Changed Conferences

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School	X			
Position	X			
Coach				X
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality		X		

Junior Year After Transfer

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		
Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality			X	

Senior Year

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Bad
School		X		

Position	X			
Coach	X			
Teammates	X			
Team Program Quality			X	

Conclusion

Playing Sports in College: Understanding the Factors that Influence the College Choice Process for High School Student-Athletes contains useful and practical information for any prospective student-athlete who is hard working, dedicated, and passionate about playing a sport in college. This book offers advice, tips, methods, and strategies that will help student-athletes achieve their full athletic potential in college.

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