

## THE ROLE OF ATHLETICS IN THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

If you have the desire and the talent to compete in varsity athletics at the collegiate level, or if a college coach in any of the three NCAA Divisions (or NAIA) contacts you, your athletic ability may play an important role in your college admissions process.

Today, a large percentage of students in college participate in varsity sports, however, only a small percentage of the overall applicant pool are recruited student-athletes. In essence, having the support of the coach or being offered a scholarship to play a sport can be one of the biggest advantages to any applicant in gaining admission to even the most selective colleges.

In all cases, **the stronger your transcript, the easier it will be for coaches to support you** as an athletic admit.

### Preliminary Steps

It is important to do some background research on college recruiting for your sport; while recruiting for many sports is based upon your sophomore and junior year performance, some sports at the most competitive level begin the recruiting process earlier. Furthermore, some sports will recruit early enough that coaches will want to see SATs or ACTs as early as sophomore year.

Talk to your high school coaches about the kinds of colleges you are considering. Discuss with them what is required to play on a Division I, Division II or Division III team in your sport(s) and if they are willing to contact college coaches on your behalf.

**Division I:** often offer athletic scholarships (except the Ivy League and a few other colleges which offer only need-based financial aid); require the greatest time commitment; recruit earlier and coaches often receive very defined feedback on a prospect from Admissions. Coaches work within NCAA regulations and use their own discretion to apportion scholarship funds on a case by case basis.

**Division II:** can offer limited athletic scholarships; also require a very significant time commitment; recruit earlier and coaches often receive definitive feedback on a prospect from Admissions.

**Division III:** do not offer athletic scholarships; emphasize a balance between academics and athletics; time commitment is less consuming than at Divisions I or II; coaches often receive less definitive feedback from Admissions on prospects; students often need to be proactive and reach out to Division III coaches.

**Club Teams:** There are many terrific club programs on college campuses which provide great opportunities for athletes to continue with their sport at a competitive level and compete against other college club teams. For such athletes, their sport can be an asset on a college application even when one is not being recruited, but coaches for club teams generally do not get admissions slots in the way that varsity coaches do. That said, some club coaches do have slots and interested athletes should inquire.

If you participate in a sport where colleges may request videos or a film of your play, discuss with your coach what you might send. College coaches prefer game tapes to professionally produced promotional videos. They are looking for athleticism and demonstration of certain skills in a video.

In some sports such as track, crew and swimming, college coaches rely heavily on authentically documented times, while in tennis and squash they rely on rankings and in golf, tournament results. For team sports such as lacrosse, ice hockey, basketball, baseball or soccer, coaches tend to want to see video. But nothing matches seeing an athlete compete in person. Therefore coaches like to have your high school and/or camp or showcase schedule.

### **NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Eligibility Center**

For potential Division I and II athletes, the NCAA has established an Eligibility Center for recruiting and eligibility purposes. In the summer prior to your junior year, visit [www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/eligibility-center](http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/eligibility-center) to register online, submitting courses, grades and test scores so the NCAA can certify that you have or will have completed the required core courses during high school. You need to make sure that all of your core courses are approved by the NCAA so you should start this process in time to correct course selections as necessary.

**NCAA Regulations Regarding Coach Contact:** The NCAA has strict guidelines regarding when and how coaches can contact potential recruits. As these guidelines have been changing significantly in recent years, and vary by sport and by athletic division, it is important to be mindful of up-to-date regulations. This link to the NCAA website outlines recruiting restrictions and timetables by sport: [www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/CBSA16.pdf](http://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/CBSA16.pdf)

### **Correspondence to College Coaches**

You may initiate contact with coaches at the colleges you are considering at any time and you should also cc the assistant coaches. **Contact and interest MUST come from YOU, not your parents.** In addition to requesting more information about their program, let them know of your interest in applying to their college and/or of your desire to play for them.

Complete the college's online student-athlete questionnaire, which will add you to their database and follow up with an email expressing interest and including the following:

#### ► **Academic information**

- GPA (and class rank, if available), PSAT, SAT, ACT scores, academic honors, AP or honors courses, recent extracurricular activities and intended major/career goals

### ➤ **Athletic information**

- Position you play and the league in which your team plays.
- **Relevant** personal sports statistics (e.g., track or swim times, number of goals scored) awards or honors (e.g., captain, all-league). Do not overload coaches with stats. We suggest including only the information that will help coaches understand who you are **today!**
- Other sports you play
- Outside clubs you play for
- Summer camp plans

### ➤ **High School/Club coach name and contact information**

Reaching out to coaches is particularly important at the Division III level where coaches may not have a budget for scouting.

Before using your current or former high school coaches as references, be sure to tell them what colleges you are contacting and that they might expect to hear from at least one of them. Always keep your high school coach informed of what is happening.

Try to attend camps or showcases where coaches from the colleges you are interested in may be attending. There is no better way to demonstrate your talents.

Once a relationship with a college coach has been established, set up a visit to meet. If a visit is impractical, start a dialogue by phone or email. You should communicate regularly with the coach to reassure him or her of your interest. Be proactive.

Remember that while coaches are trying to figure out if you are a fit for their program, this is also a time for you to figure out if the program (and college) is a fit for you. Have some questions to ask the coach about their program (e.g., what is your coaching philosophy? Would I red-shirt or start as a freshman?, etc.). If possible, go to a game to watch how the players interact with each other and with the coach. See if you can visualize yourself as a part of this team.

Be sure to return any calls or emails from coaches. Keep in mind that the NCAA regulations may limit their ability to contact you, or even return a call from you; you may need to follow up on contacts you initiate rather than leaving messages.

It is not unusual for a coach to ask you if their college is your first choice as he or she is more likely to support the athlete who will commit to him or her. There are ways to handle questions like this so please consult with us. If you are having a difficult time responding to his or her questions or if a college coach makes unfounded promises and asks for a commitment before you are ready, ask for some time to evaluate your feelings and thoughts. Some coaches may urge you to apply Early Decision. Stay in close contact with us throughout this process.

### **Possible questions to ask a college coach who wants you to apply ED:**

Has the admissions office reviewed my profile? What kind of feedback have you received? Can you tell me where I stand on your list?

You can ask if there is a deadline to allow yourself more time before making a commitment. It is OK to ask for more time if you feel you need it, but be prepared to explain why more time is important to you. You can let the coach know that he or she can contact your high school coach or counselor to verify your sincerity.

Empathize with a college coach's situation. Typically, a coach is allowed to present to the admissions committee a list of his or her most desired candidates from the applicant pool. It may be difficult for you to determine where you stand on a coach's list and what chance exists for him or her to get you in. A coach may have originally put you high on the list, but then demoted or even bumped you from the list if he or she finds a better athlete, someone who shows more interest, or even someone less talented but with stronger academic credentials. Therefore, keep your communication with coaches current.

### **Remember—it is the admissions committee who accepts students, not the coach.**

Admissions committees may not admit all the candidates on a coach's list or follow the coach's order of preference; academic and personal factors are taken into consideration. Coaches who guarantee you admission may or may not be overstepping their bounds. Therefore, ask coaches to share with you, if they can, how the admissions committees are viewing your application (the "pre-read"). It is best to get a reaction from Admissions, if possible, before committing yourself.

Division I universities may provide a recruited athlete with a firm letter of admission far earlier than the notification date for all other accepted students. Those who are offering an athlete an athletic scholarship will sign a National Letter of Intent with that athlete. The letter outlines the student's commitment to attend and play for that university, and outlines the university's financial commitment to the student. NLI Signing Dates generally occur no earlier than the fall of senior year; dates vary by sport. For more details on NLIs, see the NCAA website: [www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/nli/nli](http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/nli/nli)

Ivy League universities are forbidden by conference rules to "accept" any students—including athletes—prior to their published notification dates. And they do not offer athletic scholarships; the only financial aid they provide is based on need. Therefore they have no need for a letter of intent, which actually serves as a financial contract. In order to compete for athletes with other Division I non-Ivies, they will send out Likely Letters to recruited athletes. These letters, which are formally issued by admissions offices, indicate that if the applicant maintains the academic and personal standing reflected in their application, they will be admitted. Formal acceptance letters will go out on the published notification timetable for all applicants.

Do **not** choose your college solely on the basis of the coach or its athletic program. Your college must also be a good fit academically and socially. If you get injured or do not make a varsity team, you want to find yourself in the best college community for you as an individual.