Authors, Jeffrey Durso-Finley, M.A.T., M.Ed. and Lewis Stival, M.Litt have 40 years of experience in coaching, college admission, and college advising and have successfully worked with more than a thousand student-athletes to date!
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Authors’ Note:

This book seeks to shed light on one of the most confusing aspects of the college search process for many high school students: the recruitment of student-athletes. Given all of the different possibilities and paths prospective student-athletes follow as they move through the process, college athletic recruiting confounds by its very nature. On the surface one might think athletic recruiting is straightforward. College coaches want players, high school athletes want places to play, so it should work out nicely. Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. Complications arise because athletic recruiting and college sports rest firmly within the highs, lows and vagaries of human nature. Personal aspirations, the thrill of competition, the expectation of professional accomplishment, the reality of idiosyncratic college admission practices, the influence of parental pride and a myriad of other factors all come zeroing in on this one dynamic, thereby leaving wide room for miscommunication and uncertainty. There are far too many variations on a singular theme for athletic recruiting to be straightforward and easy.

In our professional lives we have dealt with more than a thousand student-athletes over the years. We’ve been a part of athletic recruiting from all perspectives _ the high school, the student, the family, the coach and the college. By virtue of these perspectives, we have come to expect a certain amount of confusion, frustration and, when things do not go smoothly, even some resentment from the parties involved. Stories abound. There’s the boy you know who received a full scholarship to a major state university despite being a terrible student. You know of a local girl, maybe even the high school valedictorian, who was denied admission at an Ivy League school even though she was “promised” a place in the first-year class by the coach. Even worse, you know of fantastic athletes who saw their athletic careers end the day they graduated high school, yet they had every interest and ability to keep playing in college. Why did their athletic career dissolve? Because they slipped through the athletic recruiting cracks, and they didn’t have the knowledge to fill those gaps themselves. We’re confident you have heard of such stories involving young men and women in your community. Or perhaps you’ve experienced some sort of disappointment personally, so you can sympathize with the many student-athletes, their families, and their school communities who have found the athletic recruiting process less rewarding than they had anticipated. Without question, athletic recruiting gone awry is an oft told tale in high school hallways and guidance offices.

Understanding Athletic Recruiting: A Comprehensive Guide for the High School Student Athlete was written to address the needs of thousands of high school student-athletes at every level, all the way from the scholarship-bound high school All-Americans to those who simply hope to compete in their sports in college. The good news is that by following our advice, guidelines and suggestions, student-athletes can maximize their options through the college recruiting process. We’ll give you the background counseling
to get you started in your high school program; we’ll show you a view inside the athletic recruiting process from the coach’s perspective; we’ll guide you in how you can market yourself to the world of post-secondary athletics; and we’ll let you hear about the entire process from accomplished coaches in their own words. Remember, however, that while this guide is about becoming a college athlete, a recruited student-athlete’s main goal and accomplishment when everything is all said and done is to earn a college degree and to do so at an institution that will serve him or her well. Our hope is that every student-athlete can locate a college or university where he or she feels comfortable academically and socially, where he or she can have the opportunity to compete athletically, and where he or she can receive a college degree—the real prize in this whole affair.

We’d like to offer the prospective student-athlete a word of caution before you begin. Ultimately, you and your family will be responsible for what happens throughout the college process, and you will control what options you might have, even though it may seem right now that all the power rests in others’ hands. As you will see, you can control a reasonable amount of what happens through the recruiting process, but it is important to remember that the word “student” comes first in the phrase, “student-athlete.” Pay attention to your role as a student from the outset, and you’ll find the many aspects of college admission and recruiting to be much more manageable as you present yourself to colleges and universities. As you read the book, look for bits and pieces of yourself and your circumstances. Chances are good that you should be able to find aspects that apply to you directly and that you can incorporate into your own college search, thereby making Understanding Athletic Recruiting: A Comprehensive Guide for the High School Student-Athlete serve as a mirror on your process. Use it to see yourself more clearly as you move through one of the most important phases in your life, but most important of all, know that if you wish to be a student and an athlete at the college level, you can do it.

Jeffrey Durso-Finley
Lewis Stival
Foreword:

Steven Thomas, Director of Admission,
Colby College, Waterville, ME

Exploring the relationship between athletics and academics has turned into a life-long career for me. I have experienced and observed the nuances of this relationship through the lenses of a New Jersey public high school student-athlete, a Division I scholarship athlete at North Carolina State University, an independent high school teacher and coach, graduate student assistant coach at Wesleyan University, as an athletic liaison at two (NESCAC) New England Small College Athletic Conference schools, as Director of Admission at two Maine colleges and, finally, as a founding member of the NESCAC Athletic Council. From each vantage point, I have learned a great deal about the fundamental symbiosis between athletics and academics. One always influences the other, and this is an important point worth considering wisely for all prospective college student-athletes. Athletics requires short-term motivation; choosing a college and a course of academic study require long term planning. Being mindful that this relationship and both of these requirements strike to the core of both the academic and athletic experience of every student-athlete provides important ballast for every student-athlete’s journey. This book, written by a former student (and now colleague) of mine and another longtime colleague, will help you navigate your way. I thank Jeff and Lew, both of whom spend their professional lives, along with me, trying to learn more every day about this symbiosis, for writing this timely and important book.

I trace my own beginnings in discovering athletics and academics all the way back to elementary school and my kickball days. I delighted in the opportunities I was afforded as a youngster to develop and to display my budding athletic energy and ability. Sitting in class, I often daydreamed about being out on the court or the field, and I read every book in the school library that had to do with sports. I read the entire sports page word for word and memorized all statistics. I couldn’t get enough sports from every corner of my life and world. Without ever knowing it, athletics was having an important influence on my intellectual development. The delight I found in sport did not merge with my intellectual curiosity until the fall of my senior year of high school when seemingly out of the blue, I became an accomplished soccer player on a highly successful team. I gained skill and confidence and began to see (at least dimly) cerebral connections between what I did on the field and what I learned in the classroom. By the end of my senior soccer season, I had become a heavily recruited soccer player at the Division I level, not bad for someone who had never seen himself as anything that special. Among a dozen offers, I chose a partial athletic grant-in-aid for soccer to North Carolina State University, mostly because it was in the Atlantic Coast Conference and warmer than New Jersey. I signed my ACC grant-in-aid and was admitted into the College of Liberal Arts at NC State...
the admissions “fast lane” for me! While my decision wasn’t exactly rocket science and I didn’t have a lot of wise counsel, I nevertheless completed a successful career at NC State, both on the field and off.

My ensuing professional career in education, athletics and college admissions had its beginnings way back before I realized it. I understand better than most that it’s hard for a 17 or 18 year old high school student, athlete or not, to have a clear vision of her or his future and to be able to steer a course directly for any chosen shore. One may, though, become more aware of what the future beyond college athletics holds for her or him. It is unlikely that a professional career in sports will be in the offing and more likely that other skill sets will be needed to provide satisfaction throughout life. The niche most student-athletes find in sports will have to be replaced in the years to come, as it did with me. Your education will someday make your athletic experiences all the more meaningful.

If this book provides anything to you, I hope that it will provide you with the desire to keep both your eyes on both of the prizes. Consider the academic implications of your athletic participation and consider the athletic implications of your academic responsibilities. Being aware of this relationship will make it much easier for you to choose the “right” school and to achieve the necessary balance to lead a healthy life in every way. Use the excellent information provided herein to help you make this important decision as your journey continues. Happy Trails!

Steve Thomas
Acknowledgements

The aphorism “Good musicians borrow, great musicians steal” and its origins have been attributed to artists all the way from Picasso to Leonard Bernstein to Jimmy Page. As neither of us is a great musician or a great artist, we’re safe on the stealing part, but over the years we’ve “borrowed” much from our colleagues in putting together this text, which has twisted and turned in the breeze for far too long. Our long overdue labor of love is delivered.

First off, thanks to our respective schools, The Lawrenceville School and Blair Academy, for providing fertile counseling for numerous student athletes at all levels, and to Headmasters Chan Hardwick and Liz Duffy, for allowing us the time and freedom to do what we do. Thanks also to all the coaches and teachers at Blair and Lawrenceville, our colleagues in our College Counseling Office, specifically Joe Mantegna and Holly Burks Becker, who continually remind us of the importance of our work, and to all our colleagues on both sides of the admission/college counseling fence, where we have learned the heart and soul of our craft. Thanks as well to those college coaches who have been so helpful in supporting our athletes over the years _ the repeated wrestling through the nuances of athletic recruiting is worth it knowing that we all try to do the right thing for students every day.

Finally, and most importantly, to Gianna and Lois, who have always pulled a strong and steady oar in the galley (or more accurately set the cadence and cracked the whip). Thanks for providing us the time and freedom for us to put this together. We love you and thank God for your patience!

Lew and Jeff

Blairstown and Lawrenceville, NJ
Chapter 1: So, You Want to Be a College Athlete?

Getting Started

So, you want to be a college athlete? Let’s first be more precise before we go any further. Let’s say that you want nothing more complicated than to play your favorite sport in college, whether it’s cross-country running, volleyball, swimming or crew. The problem? You know that despite your basketball prowess, it’s unlikely you’ll get the phone call from Rick Pitino in your junior summer. Or, you know in your heart that it’s not a realistic expectation that you’ll be a Tennessee Volunteer at this point next year and spend spring practice making local fans forget Peyton Manning. Not a problem. Once you’ve made the decision to pursue college athletics, you need to know from the outset that while getting a spot on North Carolina’s women’s soccer team is certainly a notable achievement, that spot represents a miniscule fraction of the opportunities out there for young women who simply would like to keep playing soccer at the college level. There are many more places to play college volleyball besides Stanford, and Wake Forest isn’t the only school where you can tee it up on the golf course for competition and camaraderie.

Even with that perspective, we know that if you are a current high school athlete, it’s difficult to avoid the draw and flash of big-time college sports. In fact, it may well be part of the reason you’ve thought of continuing on in athletics. Notre Dame football has its own television contract with NBC, March Madness crowds the screen with background pieces, colorful graphics and thumping techno music, and the College World Series has carved a resonant place in baseball mythology. Except, this face of college sports isn’t you. In fact, this face doesn’t represent the majority of college athletes today. Most current college athletes are just like you _ students who simply want to find a place to keep playing the sport they love. As a prospective student-athlete you might be looking to find ways to help pay for a college education or seeing if you can use your athletic ability to improve your college options, but above all else, you are trying to bring all these wonderful goals together to find the school where you can keep playing your sport at a college that suits you to a “T.” This person is you. You are the true model of the college athlete.

If the face of college athletics obscures the true model of the college athlete, how do you break through the surface to get the information you need to follow your dream? Your first step is to understand that the names and faces of big-time college athletes, for good or ill, represent a tiny fraction of the student-athletes who’ve made the decision and commitment to pursue their athletic passions at the collegiate level. Yes, at the highest level of athletic participation _ the full scholarship, Division I level _ student-athletes have an embarrassment of riches in terms of recruiting, information and resources. The coaches come to the players; they woo those students’ services in stunningly over-the-top and completely open ways; the players simply sign Letters of Intent, perhaps barely filling out the applications. What’s more, they are in the enviable position of choosing which school they’d like to attend.
But what if this isn’t you? As we’ve said, the vast majority of student-athletes are simply interested in their sport, looking to college as a means of pursuing their passions, but doing so with a sense of balance and perspective. The other tiny fraction has it easy when it comes to deciding where to attend college because the colleges come to them. The problem, then, is that while you’ve got the desire, the athletic ability, and the willingness to make the effort and sacrifice to play in college, you don’t have the information you need to make the best decisions. If you want options athletically and choices academically, you will have to work at finding your place and help your potential colleges come to you. In other words, you “self-recruit,” and this book can help you.

Let’s take this idea of the “true model of college athletics” one step further. If the names and faces of big-time college sports represent a fraction of college athletes, then it stands to reason that the big-time Division I programs represent a small fraction of the possible college options, yes? And, yes, this is absolutely true. Finding a school where you can get a good education, play the sport you love and have a fantastic overall experience doesn’t mean that you must only choose among Michigan, Penn State and Northwestern, so let’s clear up that misperception right from the start. There are over 3,000 post-secondary institutions in the United States across three different athletic Divisions in the NCAA, over 300 NAIA schools and still hundreds more junior college programs. If you are a high school athlete who’d love to continue running or playing lacrosse, or you want to join a soccer program where you can get some playing time, you can do it; all you need is the information and the willingness to dig beneath the distracting haze that college sports throws at you. Once you understand how you fit within the basic framework of the expectations of college athletics and the basic framework of the recruiting process, you can bring that knowledge together to leverage your options and realize your dreams. With the right information in your hands, athletics becomes part of your decision-making process for college, but one where you (the model of intercollegiate athletics, remember?) can work the system to your own advantage. Instead of merely hoping things work out, how do you find your niche? How do the coaches find out about you? Once they know about you, what can you do to help yourself become appealing to them? College admissions can be mysterious enough without the added element of athletics; so given all this mystery, how can you help colleges identify you as a potentially appealing student-athlete?

First, you must define exactly what you mean when you say to yourself, “I want to be a college athlete.” Where do you want to play? Which level of competition? What are the risks you are comfortable with and the rewards that you are after? We’ll help you sift through all the intersecting variables so you can do a thorough self-assessment of your goals and get on the right track. Second, you need to understand how coaches recruit — the time line, the stages, and the meanings of the hurdles and signposts along the way. Once you know how the process works from the coach’s perspective and where the strengths and weaknesses are within that process, you can use that knowledge to
your advantage as you self-recruit. Sounds easy enough, to be sure, but it will take the same initiative, independence and responsibility that you are pouring into your academics right now for you to be successful.

**Determining Your Goals**

College athletics means more than just stepping in between the lines and strapping on your helmet. When you leave high school and move upward into post-secondary education, you are entering into a very different academic and social environment. That transition seems obvious when laid out so plainly, but the details of that transition may not be so obvious to you right now. In college, you are no longer playing sports as something to do after the last bell of the school day rings. Instead, you are adding your sport to the whole host of new personal experiences that college brings: intellectual, extra-curricular, social, developmental and academic. Your time is now your own to organize. You don’t have your parents over your shoulder seeing if your homework is getting done; you are fully expected to be your own motivator and decision maker. While it will certainly be exciting and fun, you need to answer three essential questions before you dive into the life of a collegiate athlete.

- **What are my goals?** – What do I want out of the experience of being a college athlete?

- **Which colleges meet my goals?** – How is the vast world of college sports organized; and how can I make sense of it to find the right kind of school?

- **How can I make it happen?** – Once I have a concrete goal and I know where I might be able to achieve it, how do I make the recruiting process come to me? How can I work within the system to have it support my aspirations?

Until you can answer those essential questions, any conversations you might have with college coaches will lack focus and direction. Lay the groundwork via self-reflection, do the hard thinking, find out how to make the athletic recruiting process work for you instead of around you, and then you will know how to target your self-recruiting.

**What Kind of Athletic Experience Are You After?**

Prospective college students evaluate their academic and personal goals for their education before they ever submit an application. They think about the kind of school they’d most like to attend, they investigate the possibilities that fit that model and then they
apply accordingly. Sounds simple enough, to be sure, but nevertheless there are over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States alone. Knowing that you will be applying to a small fraction of them, how do you end up deciding which ones? Word of mouth? College viewbooks and guidebooks? Influence of your parents? Working with your guidance counselor or college advisor? It’s usually a mix of all of these sources, of course, and others, but at the core of this decision-making process you will mix all the characteristics of potential colleges and universities together, bounce them off each other and then try to bring the mass of potential schools down to a manageable level. You’ll think thoroughly about the size of the institution, the area of the country where you’d most like to attend college, the kind of institution (college, university or technical institute), the school’s setting, the atmosphere on campus, the political or religious orientation of the school, the availability of certain academic programs, the availability of athletic scholarships, merit scholarships and other forms of financial aid, etc. The deeper you dig for specific characteristics, the more closely you can find a good match for your academic and social ideal. More importantly, though, your understanding of your own academic goals and extra-curricular preferences will determine where you apply and then eventually determine whether you will be happy. For example, if you’ve determined that you learn best in smaller environments with faculty attuned to teaching undergraduates closely, it’s a smart choice to stay away from large research universities, where the classes will likely be much bigger and faculty research much more important than you will find at a small liberal arts college. If a city environment is extremely important to you, then a school in rural Ohio, no matter how strong academically it might be, wouldn’t be a good match. In the end, you’ll think about the specific characteristics of each college; you’ll think about what those characteristics will mean for your own experience and overall happiness; and then you’ll choose accordingly.

Assessing the goals for your athletic experience works the same way. You will need to determine what would make you happy, what would make your experience a successful one and what you’d like your college athletic experience to be like. To do this, you need to put the same effort and energy into this process as you would into discovering what your academic ideal experience would be. What are your goals for playing your sport in college? How much impact do you want your sport to have on your college experience? Do you want it to be an all-encompassing, full-time, year round athletic experience? Or would you rather have your sport be more extra-curricular in nature?

Ask yourself these kinds of questions:

- Do I want to keep playing my sport in college, regardless of the level of play, or is it important to me to be part of a Division I program?

- If my goal is to be in a Division I program, is my emphasis on playing at the “highest level possible?” To receive an athletic grant-in-aid / scholarship? To have the status of being a scholarship athlete?
• If playing in Division I is important, but I’m not offered a scholarship, how do I feel about being a walk-on at a Division I school?

• If I’m willing to be a walk-on at a Division I school, am I also willing to risk being cut? Or in other words, is it Division I or nothing? (And, am I willing to take that chance?)

• Does my college have to be a “name” or well-known school, or am I willing to go off the beaten path to play Division I?

• How do I feel about Division II?

• Do I need to find an athletic grant-in-aid (a.k.a. scholarship), even if it means attending a Division II school?

• How do I feel about playing at the Division III level?

• Does playing at the Division III level mean you are interested in highly selective schools? Regional colleges? Community colleges?

• Am I willing to go outside my state or region to find a good Division III place to play?

• Am I willing to go out of the NCAA to find a good place to play? Are there NAIA schools/junior colleges that appeal to me?

• Is one of my main goals to find an athletic program that would give me the best chance of significant playing time?

• Is one of my main goals to find the best chance of winning a national or divisional championship regardless of playing time?

• Is one of my main goals to use my athletic abilities to help me enter the best educational environment possible, regardless of the success of that school’s athletic program?

• Do I want to try to play two sports?

• Do I plan on studying abroad while I’m in college?

• Do I have firm academic plans for college in terms of major or program?
Believe it or not, these questions are only a start. As you dig deeper and think harder about your own aspirations, you get a sense of the role you would like your sport to play in your overall college experience. Understand that the approach a self-recruiting student-athlete decides to take in his or her application strategy depends on the answers to these questions.

We’ll go into more details about strategies and examples, but for now, think about this simple test case. Let’s say you are a point guard from western Pennsylvania who’s decided that a Division I scholarship is your goal. However, the coaches’ assessment of your ability is that you’re a most likely a Division III player, maybe Division II if you have some time to develop. Beyond athletics, you also have a strong academic record from your high school, which means that if you apply to Penn State, you are likely to be admitted, even though Penn State is a Big Ten Conference, Division I basketball power. In this example, you would ask yourself a series of questions most likely along these lines:

“Well, do I want to play Division I versus Division III?”

“Division I, baby...”

“Ok, if I’m not recruited, am I willing to take the chance that I will be cut in an open tryout at a place like Penn State, thereby not having the chance to play at all?”

“Cut? I guess that could happen. No, I don’t want to take the chance that I can’t play. I’m definitely committed to playing in college.”

“Got it. Ok, then, am I willing to leave Pennsylvania to find a Division I school that will recruit me?”

“You bet, especially if it means I can play Division I and get a scholarship.”

“Ok. Now, do I need to get a scholarship or just a slot on the team?”

“Just a chance to play. I do not need to be signed or anything.”

“Signed? What do you mean when you throw around the word “signed?” An athletic scholarship? What about a preferred walk-on or a non-scholarship offer?”

“Hmm, I guess I would need some guarantee that I would be playing. I do not mind fighting for playing time, but I want to be on the team.”

“So, it looks like I feel as if I need to be recruited so as to definitely make a team at the Division I level. Well, what if that doesn’t happen? It’s not like I’m 6’10”
or anything. Am I willing to look at Division III schools if the big boys do not come through?"

“Well, the D-1 dogs will be coming, count on it, but just to play the game, I guess I would look at Division III schools if I had to, but only if they were close to home.”

…And on and on.

Rest assured, these questions can and should continue at length if you want a clear picture of your goals. In this running conversation with yourself, you can assess everything from level of play, type of institution, distance from home, the need for scholarships, your willingness to deal with tryouts, the strength of the academic program you desire, and a million other variables in order to find out exactly what your goals are for your athletic experience. Best of all, you will be better able to define them concisely after this type of internal conversation and incorporate them into your application strategy.

Does the above example mean that you should take Penn State off your eventual list of colleges? Certainly not. First, things can change, from your own goals for your experience to the coaches’ assessment of your athletic ability. Second, you’ll want to have as many options in front of you as possible when you make your final decision as to which college to attend. It does mean, however, that you will need to have other college options in place beyond Penn State in case the outside assessment of your athletic ability doesn’t match your preferred goals for participating in college.

At one end of the decision-making axis is the student who wants to play Division I, definitely at the highest level of competition possible, with the goal of getting a college scholarship. On the other end of the axis is a student-athlete who’d like sport to be a small but important part of his or her overall experience in college, and who is happy to have a place on any team. In between those extremes are thousands of schools and thousands of student-athletes who endeavor to make the right individual choice for themselves. Whether you recognize yourself in either of the poles described or you think you are somewhere along the axis, you need to make a decision that reflects what your goals are for your experience. Once that’s begun, the next step is to start to figure out where you can reach those goals.

The Divisions of the NCAA (and their Demands)

Most athletes’ first thoughts when considering collegiate competition center on Division I, as it’s the most familiar. Division I, the highest level of intercollegiate athletics in the NCAA, has over 300 schools which participate in some capacity, ranging from well over 100 in football to only a few dozen in crew. These are likely the schools you’ve heard
of because of their prominence in your state, region or sport of interest. Athletically, they
draw the most attention to themselves because of the level of competition, even though they
range in size from Minnesota, a major state university with 40,000 students, to Davidson, a
selective private institution of 1,700 students in North Carolina. The most powerful Divi-
sion I athletes are likely to have the recruiting process come to them, as the mechanisms
for scholarship athletes in major college programs are well entrenched. Even so, there are
plenty of Division I programs that welcome walk-on candidates and you’ll find Division I teams that often have spaces available at the end of the recruiting cycle. Here are some
examples of Division I colleges and their conferences:

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<th>Atlantic Coast</th>
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<td>Boston College</td>
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<td>Clemson</td>
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Note that even within Division I conferences there are variations, such as in the Big
Sky Conference listed above. The Big Sky Conference football programs participate in
Football Championship Sub-Division (FCS) - what was once called Division I-AA- though
the colleges are considered fully Division I in all other sports. Still other colleges may par-
ticipate in Division I in a single sport, but participate in Division III for all others. Johns
Hopkins University would be an example of this variation, as JHU lacrosse is Division I
but all other sports there are considered Division III.

Division III schools, the largest grouping in the NCAA, operate in a very different
sphere from Division I when it comes to academic eligibility and recruiting rules. Also, the
core course restrictions and NCAA eligibility descriptions we will detail later do not apply
to Division III schools. Instead, academic restrictions on admission and eligibility origi-
nate from each individual college and from each specific athletic conference, only adding
to the complexity of the admission process when a student-athlete tries to figure out where
he or she stands. The most important difference between Division III and Division I, how-
ever, is that no athletic grants-in-aid are available for students at the Division III level. The
following are some examples of Division III colleges and their conference affiliations:
Division II, the smallest grouping of the NCAA schools, operates in a middle ground in terms of prominence, academic standing and scholarships. Athletic grants-in-aid are available, though typically coaches, colleges, or programs will distribute partial scholarships so that the team can fund the largest number of students possible given the financial constraints. Most Division II colleges and universities participate and are recognized athletically on the local or regional level, so they tend to slide under the national radar screen for athletic competition and attention. Division II has national championships and a high level of athletic competition, certainly, but again, they tend to participate at the regional level.

One issue to keep in mind about Division II schools, however, is that the confluence of participating on a mostly regional level athletically, drawing from a mostly regional population in terms of admission, and having wide variations in selectivity from college to college means that these schools, when looked at as a whole, are often easier to navigate in terms of admission requirements. Further, because they often have limited funding for athletics, Division II schools tend to have more spaces for walk-on candidates, making them prime ground for the self-recruiter. Division II operates exactly as its place in the hierarchy of the NCAA indicates—a middle ground. There are similar scholarship and recruiting restrictions as with Division I, but there are fewer schools and fewer sports offered at the Division II level. As a general rule, they are not as competitive athletically as Division I programs, obviously, but are usually stronger than Division III programs. If your particular goals for college sports include considering Division II programs, you’ll likely need to do even more applied research to discover suitable places to play. Once you do that research, you’ll just as likely find plenty of opportunities, especially as a self-recruited athlete. Examples of Division II conferences and colleges are:

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<tr>
<th>NESCAC</th>
<th>Old Dominion</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amherst</td>
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<td>Bates</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Carroll College</td>
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<td>Bowdoin</td>
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<td>Colby</td>
<td>Emory and Henry</td>
<td>Illinois College</td>
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<td>Connecticut College</td>
<td>Guilford</td>
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<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>Hampden-Sydney</td>
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<td>Middlebury</td>
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<td>Trinity (CT)</td>
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<td>Tufts</td>
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<td>Washington and Lee</td>
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<td>Mid-America</td>
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<td>Cen. Missouri State</td>
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<td>Fort Hays State</td>
<td>Concordia (NY)</td>
<td>Dixie State</td>
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<td>Missouri Southern</td>
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<td>Missouri Western</td>
<td>LIU-CW Post</td>
<td>Hawaii Pacific</td>
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<td>NW Missouri State</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>Hawaii - Hilo</td>
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<td>Pittsburg State</td>
<td>Molloy</td>
<td>Notre Dame de Namur</td>
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<td>Southwest Baptist</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
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<td>Truman State</td>
<td>New York Tech</td>
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<td>Washburn</td>
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<td>Queens (NY)</td>
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What do the differences in the Divisions mean to you as a potential student-athlete? Plenty, as your responsibilities in and out of class will be determined by the level of competition you decide to pursue, so here’s where the careful questioning, individual goal setting and self-analysis kick in. At the Division I level, you probably expect that the level of competition is higher than in the other Divisions and, if successful, the accolades are more national. But what you need to remember is that the commitment and comprehensive nature of the student-athlete experience rises concurrently. The time commitment will be substantial for training, both out of season and in season. Travel responsibilities may be substantial as well, potentially impacting your ability to participate in other extra-curricular activities at your college or preventing you from pursuing academic disciplines that require large amounts of classroom instructional time such as applied biological sciences, visual arts or engineering. The level of competition for playing time within your own team will likely be fierce, and you face the prospect of being cut from the team should the coach feel it’s unlikely you’ll play for him or her. While playing in Division I will certainly represent the pinnacle in terms of athletic competition, reaching that perch will mean that the amount of time given over to your sport in terms of training, meetings, pre-season, practice time and game preparation will quite likely far surpass any other activity you will undertake in college, including your academic work. The rewards are the highest possible in terms of athletics, but so is the commitment and the “risk” of missing your goal of playing sports in college.

At the Division III level, the experience is much more extra-curricular than at the Division I level, or, as it’s been said, it’s the difference between having sports be part of your life in college and having it be your life in college. Obviously the level of play in Division III is inferior to the Division I level. It’s unlikely you’ll have a front page photo spread in the Boston Globe should you win your conference, and the opportunity for you to play on a nationally televised Saturday afternoon slot is just as unlikely. The flip side, though, is that
the time commitment is mirrored accordingly, and you are better able to participate in other extra-curricular activities on campus. In fact, you are likely to be encouraged to do so by your coaches, as they will understand what makes for happy, successful student-athletes at the Division III level. In Division III you won’t get flak for having to miss a practice for a biology lab; and while you may find your coach disappointed not to have you on the team one spring, your plans to study for spring semester in Barcelona will likely be supported by the program.

Division II, again, operates in the middle ground. A successful Division II program will have many of the same expectations for time, travel and commitments as a Division I program, but as a high percentage of athletes will not be full scholarship players, the expectations are somewhat different and the specific coaches will act with more individual latitude. If anything, your individual research from program to program becomes much more important at this level, as both the expectations for your commitment and the quality of your experience could vary tremendously.

The NAIA

While most of the national attention regarding intercollegiate athletics centers on the NCAA, students who are committed to playing sports in college should actively consider adding NAIA institutions to their search. Almost 300 member institutions divided into fourteen regions across the country make up the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Though the preponderance of the membership in the NAIA can be found in the Midwest, the conferences and colleges stretch from Maine to California and from Florida to British Columbia.

How can NAIA schools serve an important role in a prospective student-athlete’s search? Two ways. First, the limitations and restrictions on institutions that rely heavily on athletic scholarships do not exist at NAIA schools. Individual institutions within the NAIA determine financial aid calculations according to their own policies, so participation is not solely defined by the head coach and/or the available scholarships, as happens within some NCAA Division I schools. Second, most NAIA schools are distinctly regional in nature. Having a regional demographic to their applicant pool means that they often do not feel the same pressures of hyper-selectivity that some of the NCAA Division III colleges feel. Therefore, your prospects for gaining admission and playing your sport at such places as Mackendree College in Illinois or the University of Great Falls in Montana, for example, are much greater than at such highly selective schools as Emory University in Georgia or Pomona College in California. In brief, NAIA schools offer plenty of opportunity for prospective student-athletes to find places to play. Here are some examples of NAIA colleges and their conferences:
California Pacific Athletic Conference:  
Bethany College  
California Maritime Academy  
Cal State _ East Bay  
Dominican University  
Holy Names University  
Menlo College  
Mills College  
Pacific Union College  
Simpson University  
William Jessup University

Florida Sun Conference:  
Embry-Riddle  
Florida Memorial College  
Northwood University  
St. Thomas University  
Savannah Coll. of Art/Design  
Warner Southern  
Webber International

Where Should You Play for the “Best” Competition?

You should play at the college which fits you best academically, socially and athletically. Don’t be misled into chasing one particular conference or school. Competition and camaraderie do not vary across the NCAA divisions, athletic conferences or between different intercollegiate associations, even though the level of play might. Football players and fans in attendance will be just as enthusiastic for the Williams vs. Amherst annual battle as they will be for Michigan vs. Michigan State. There’s no doubt that the University of Sioux Falls is just as excited for their 2006 NAIA Football Championship as Grand Valley State is for theirs in NCAA Division II. Some intercollegiate rivalries might get more press and attention than others, but for the players, the stakes, the enjoyment and the success will be just as important and rewarding no matter where they are playing. Find your niche and the competition will be there waiting for you.

Assessing Your Ability

Once you start to get a sense of what you want out of college athletics _ the level of competition, the commitment, the type of experience _ you need to determine whether your aspirations fit with your abilities. Your educational goals have given you the framework for the kinds of colleges you’d like to attend, but now you’ve added more layers of complexity by trying to incorporate sports into your model. There’s no sense shooting for a level of competition you’ll never reach, as it will do nothing but frustrate you. Nor is it smart to sell yourself short if you have the interest and ability to play at the higher level. Remember one fact, however, before you get started:
When it comes to athletic recruiting and college coaches, it does not matter how good an athlete you are.

After reading this, you are probably thinking, “Huh? Isn’t that the defining attribute that determines where I can play? How good I am?” Not exactly. What actually matters is how good a coach thinks you are. Even right now, before you’ve gone through the process, you likely know of cases where a great high school athlete somehow slipped through the cracks of athletic recruiting and didn’t end up playing in college. Similarly, you probably know circumstances where an athlete was recruited by a college when he or she wasn’t even the best player on his or her own team. In both of these examples, athletic talent was part of the equation, but it wasn’t the defining attribute. Instead, a coach’s opinion was the final determination of that student’s athletic future. If the evaluation is glowing, that player gets support in the admissions office from that coach. If that evaluation is negative (or, just as bad, if it’s non-existent), then that player gets no support in the admissions office.

Without question, you must know the coach’s evaluation of your ability before you proceed, because you must have the support of the coach if you are going to be recruited by that college. Or, conversely, you must know if a coach doesn’t plan on supporting you so you can decide whether to apply at all. Neither of those two possibilities is a reflection of your objective ability as an athlete nor of your potential as a future player; instead, it reflects what an individual coach has subjectively determined is your ability. That’s the information you are after. All in all, you need to have a clear sense of both your athletic ability and the perception of your athletic ability so you can know how to target yourself in the self-recruiting process.

Naturally, unless you are playing a spring sport, your senior season could go a long way toward determining a coach’s assessment of you. A Division III soccer player who appears on a Division I coach’s “C” list after his or her junior year could become an “A” list player by December if that player develops and succeeds in the fall of his or her senior year. A Division I basketball program which has lost all of the centers from their recruiting list may suddenly drop down in an emergency and look for a possible Division II or junior college player with size and potential, hoping she or he develops over time once in the program. Your ability and your “recruitability” will change over time, obviously increasing the need for a comprehensive application and self-recruitment strategy, but you still need to have a general understanding of how the college coaching community will evaluate you when you approach them. Otherwise, you may be firing those proverbial shots in the dark. So, how do you get this kind of information? By stuffing any ego you might have under the couch and listening to what others have to say.

- **Talk to Your High School Coach** If your coach has enough experience, she or he can likely give you a start as to where you might play. Don’t settle for general information. Why this level or this school? Why not at this position? What
would I need to do to change my possibilities? Get specifics. If your coach doesn’t have the experience to give you a full assessment, ask him or her to ask other more senior coaches in the league for their assessment of your play. As you will quickly discover, the coaching community is a small one, and you can likely get good information from the colleagues of your current coach.

- **Talk to the Coach of Your All-Star/Traveling/AAU team** As athletics across the country become more specialized on the youth level, the prominence of the travel, regional or developmental team has skyrocketed in recruiting circles. As these teams often contain more accomplished players than on the local high school level, the coaches are more likely to have experience with athletes heading on to college programs. Again, don’t settle for generalities when you have these discussions, but ask what skills, physical characteristics and abilities affect their assessment of you.

- **Athletic Camps** If you are serious about playing on the college level, you must continue to develop your skills through off-season development. Summer athletic camps are a perfect way of doing this development. Your current coaches, again, are the best source of camp information as they receive flyers and promotional materials from camps simply by virtue of their position. Once you weed out the programs that are glorified summer camps and are instead developmental or showcase at their base, you can use your time there to help you figure out how your abilities fit on a national scale. Don’t settle for the standard “Written Evaluation” you receive at the end of the session. Talk to the coaches face-to-face and ask them about your ability and how it might fit in college. Most of these coaches have seen miles of videotape and hundreds of participants in their sport, so they can usually give you a quick, accurate assessment.

- **College Coaches** Over the course of your junior spring and your senior fall, you’ll contact many different coaches as you follow the section on “How to Self-Recruit.” As that process evolves, you’ll discuss your abilities at length with those coaches while they determine whether they will recruit you or support you throughout the process. By both their deeds and words, you’ll be able to determine the level of their interest in you and their perception of you as an athlete. Once you have submitted your videotapes and your Letters of Introduction, you can then ask those coaches whether your ability fits in their program, in their league or in their division. Respectable coaches are honest and forthright. If they think you have a chance to play for them, the last thing they want to do is have you move on, so they’ll continue the recruitment process. But, if they think you can’t play for them, the last thing they want to do is have to deal with your phone calls and letters over the next six months, so politely push them for a specific, honest assessment.
Carefully Follow the Sections on “Recruiting: The Coach’s Perspective” and
the “TimeLine” _ You can find legions of guidance counselors and aggrieved parents who have firsthand knowledge of athletic recruiting which has turned frustrating, embarrassing or suddenly, unexpectedly absent. The vast majority of these problems stem from a lack of communication of where recruitment stood at the last conversation between the family and the coach or with a lack of understanding of how the recruitment process operates. Don’t let yourself get lost in confusion or uncertainty. Follow the guidelines we’ve laid out, the signposts of the process and keep in communication with college coaches. Without fail, move through the process with eyes and ears wide open and listen, listen, listen for the details of what people say to you. Most importantly, avoid hearing only the things that you want to hear and discarding the rest!

Your goal is to accumulate as many informed opinions as possible, determine how the college coaching community has assessed your athletic ability, keep a close eye on the signposts, and then act accordingly. If a college coach tells you the only way you’ll play center at the Division I level in basketball is to grow a foot and a half, it’s unlikely that you’ll be able to do much about that. However, athletic recruiting in many sports can be remarkably well-defined given certain objective data. If you find out, for example, that you need a 2K ergometer score that’s 8 seconds lower than it is currently to be recruited for crew at the Division I level, that’s a physical goal you can try to reach. A college swim coach knows how a certain time in the 100 freestyle in high school approximately translates to the performance of a college athlete _ given standard effort and coaching, of course _ and that coach will recruit accordingly. Track coaches make a guess as to how much time they can shave off a 1500 meter runner and begin to recruit when a high school athlete hits a particular mark. Again, get specifics, and then use the information you get to self-recruit and apply it intelligently.

By the way, you’ll notice that we don’t advocate talking to your parents about your athletic ability, although you should certainly talk to them about your goals for playing sports in college throughout this process. The reason we do not advocate using your parents as a resource for determining your ability is that starting from the moment that they sit on the sidelines, many parents, just by nature of their care and support of you, are notoriously biased judges of athletic talent in their own children. Given this reality, we encourage you to resist using your parents as guides in order to avoid this bias. In the opening paragraph of this section, we counseled you to put aside whatever ego you have and listen to what others have to say. You might be saying, “Well, my father is a coach and played my sport in college.” and that very well could be true. However, the number of parents who can give an unbiased assessment of their child’s athletic ability is small to begin with, so the number of people who have that ability and are current in the coaching, admission, and college bound world will be miniscule. Let your parents be your biggest fans rather than your agent. Everyone - coaches, players and parents - will be much happier as a result.
Chapter 2: Laying the Foundation
Balancing the Student-Athlete Equation

Before you begin planning for your college athletic career, remember that your academic record at every juncture of your high school career is every bit as important as your athletic accomplishments. Don’t think otherwise. Every year across the country, there are young men and women who find out too late in their senior year that their academic records are the reason they can’t attend the school of their choice or that their grades are the reason they’re not being recruited. Comments like “I should have done more schoolwork and gotten better marks as a freshman and sophomore” or “I wish I had taken more math or more years of a foreign language” are uttered far too often by high school seniors when they learn that their college options have been limited by a lack of academic focus and commitment. The lesson to learn from these mistakes? It’s never too early to begin charting your academic voyage through high school.

Make your academic progress a priority from Day One. Learning as much about your high school’s academic programs and taking an appropriately demanding course of study will open up options for you down the road and will undoubtedly assist you in finding a college where you can continue playing your sport. Too often the student side of the student-athlete equation gets less attention than it deserves. While student-athletes make sacrifices, financial and otherwise, to maximize their athletic profile, they blithely assume the academics will never be an issue. Not true. If you remember to keep the academic and athletic ledger balanced, then you will give yourself the best chance at becoming a well-prepared student-athlete.

Know this: more and more colleges are reluctant to bring weak student-athletes onto campus for fear that they will struggle academically. At the most basic level, colleges know that if students cannot meet their class obligations, they might not be eligible to play -- a situation that benefits no one. As Jay Martin, Head Men’s Soccer Coach at Ohio Wesleyan puts it, “It does no good for the young man or the team if he comes here and lasts only for a semester. It just does a disservice to the young man.” Similarly, more and more big-time athletic conferences are excluding NCAA Clearinghouse Non-Qualifiers and Partial Qualifiers from competition at any juncture in their college careers, which places a premium on even blue chip recruits to “get their academic house in order” while in high school. The tightening of academic restrictions has hit the Division III level as well, in part as a reaction to the 2001 publication of The Game of Life, a much talked about exploration of the negative effects of athletics and admission at non-scholarship schools. Right now the academic scrutiny of potential student-athletes across the country has never been higher.
Think about it from the coach’s perspective. Why would a college coach attempt to bring a marginal student-athlete into his or her program, when the chances are very good he or she can find a similar athlete just around the corner who happens to be a non-risk student? When a coach looks for and recruits a student-athlete with strengths on both the “student” and “athlete” sides of the equation, that coach mitigates the risk of losing the player to academic ineligibility and simultaneously gains the respect of the administration for bringing in quality student-athletes. Today’s reality is that coaches expect much from the athletes in their programs, both in terms of time commitment and seriousness of purpose. And, the vast majority of colleges and universities consider the academic success of their student-athletes to be as important as their athletic success. It reflects on the coach, either good or bad, just how well his or her student-athletes are doing academically. Indicators such as four-year graduation rates or the number of Dean’s List student-athletes are great selling points for potential recruits and their families, while they are simultaneously prized by school administrators as markers of a successful athletic program. Having a team full of competent and hard-working students means one less issue a coach needs to be concerned with in his or her professional role. Instead of using valuable time and resources keeping the players eligible and/or successful in their academic endeavors, the coach can put all emotional energy toward worrying about winning and the general health of the program.

Don’t think otherwise: The better a student you are in high school, the more athletic options you will give yourself in college. Balance the student-athlete equation from the beginning, and you’ll find yourself in a much better position when it comes time for your college search.

Start Planning Early

For many promising athletes, the identification process for recruiting can occur quite early. Parents, coaches, and interested parties within the community are often aware of these rising athletic stars, sometimes even knowing who they are before they enter high school. The attention can be excessive and misleading. As a result, these rising stars are often less concerned with their academic development than they are with their athletic progress, even at the risk of jeopardizing their eligibility to play in college. Strange as it might sound, we think that the best time for you to begin planning for college is before you enter high school. (Note that we emphasize planning for college in general, not planning for which specific college you might aspire to right now. The goal of advanced academic planning is to give you the most options down the line, not to work toward a singular option from the outset).

Encourage your parents to schedule a meeting with a guidance counselor at your high school before you begin in order to select a freshman course of study. Don’t leave anything to chance. Just because you are taking English and math and science and history
doesn’t mean that those courses are considered “core units” as determined by your school and the certifying branch of the NCAA — The NCAA Clearinghouse.

The NCAA Clearinghouse is where all students hoping to play at the Division I or II levels must send their final high school transcripts and standardized testing results, criteria which are then evaluated by Clearinghouse officials for eligibility purposes. Every student-athlete who hopes to play a sport at the Division I or II level must be “cleared” by the Clearinghouse in order to participate. Sound confusing? Well, the guidelines for “approved courses” and the mechanisms for the Clearinghouse can be confusing, so you absolutely must ask your guidance counselor for more specifics about the Clearinghouse, especially as it applies to the classes you elect during your high school career. Check out the Clearinghouse website (www.ncaaclearinghouse.net) if you have questions, and pick up (or download) a copy of the “Guide for the College Bound Student-Athlete” for additional clarification.

The Bottom Line: Keep pursuing the dual issue of college preparatory coursework and NCAA Clearinghouse certified classes as you schedule your courses during high school. Doing so will keep you from falling victim to poor academic preparation and planning.

Preparation and Personal Responsibility for Success

High school should be a time for fun and friendship in an environment that is relatively free from the challenges and issues that come with adulthood. Still, there’s work to be done. You must prepare yourself academically for your further education; moreover, you must learn individual responsibility in order to achieve your long-term personal goals. Being prepared to face what comes next in your education, and specifically the academic demands of college life, is every bit as important as the number of victories your athletic team earns or the wonderful memories you may have of your high school experience. All in all, if you do not achieve the necessary academic foundation in your high school education and do not take the personal responsibility for planning your educational future, you jeopardize the success of your entire college experience.

Be forewarned: The academic preparation you receive in high school will be more valuable to you down the road than you might think. The student-athletes — indeed all high school students — who build solid academic foundations are most often those who experience academic success as undergraduates.

Let’s face it. Very few, if any, readers of this book will be fortunate enough to earn a living as professional athletes. The great majority of you will need to rely on your academic training after your playing days are over to have fulfilling careers after college
(see Dean Steve Thomas’ Foreword for the perfect example!). Investing in your schoolwork during your high school years undoubtedly pays off, as a strong academic grounding will serve as the springboard for a successful college academic career, which then in turn serves as the cornerstone upon which you will build your future after college. To that end, we’ve provided some useful guidelines for you and your family to follow as you navigate your high school years. Remember, taking responsibility for your high school years is our central message! You must make sure to take the right classes and to take the appropriate standardized testing at the appropriate times—don’t leave these things in the hands of others! Maybe you are in a high school where the guidance counselors are inundated with caseloads of hundreds of students. Maybe you are in a high school where you are assigned a particular college counselor whose role is simply to facilitate your college search. Whatever the case, the responsibility for your academic performance, your athletic eligibility and your eventual success is yours alone. In the end, when it comes time for you to self-recruit to reach your athletic goals, you’ll need a healthy dose of initiative and independence in order to achieve your desired results. Why not start down the road of responsibility by controlling your academic destiny?

A Basic Year-by-Year Academic Primer

Eighth Grade:

• Meet with a high school guidance counselor to select an appropriate freshman academic program. It should be demanding, manageable and college preparatory in its focus.

• Note: the NCAA mandates that a prospective student-athlete must have taken four years of English; so in addition to your normal assessment of NCAA-approved courses, make doubly sure that your scheduled ninth grade English program is considered a full core unit by the Clearinghouse. Check this by going to www.ncaaclearinghouse.net and entering your school’s six digit CEEB number to check your school’s List of Approved Courses (formerly the 48 H Form).

Ninth Grade:

• Succeed in ALL your courses, but at the minimum you must average a 2.0 GPA (a C average) across your sixteen core courses during high school for them to count towards your NCAA requirements. However, that is a minimum requirement. The better your overall academic program and performance, the more options you will have. The foundation for the future starts now!
• Meet with your guidance counselor to select an appropriate academic program for your sophomore year.

• Develop good outside reading habits. Nothing will have a greater impact on your future academic success in high school or your upcoming standardized testing than reading as widely and deeply as you can outside of your assigned coursework.

Tenth Grade:

• Make satisfactory progress in all of your courses. Remember, you need at least a C average across your 16 core courses for NCAA standards. Don’t fall victim to settling for the minimum, however. You should strive for the best academic success you can possibly achieve in the classroom.

• If possible, register for and take the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) or the PLAN (a preliminary American College Test) in order to begin college preparations. While a tenth grade PSAT does not count toward the National Merit Scholarship Program or count toward your Clearinghouse eligibility, taking the test will nevertheless give you an early baseline for areas where you might improve your standardized testing.

• Meet with your guidance counselor to select an appropriate academic program for your junior year.

• Read and familiarize yourself with the NCAA Guide for the College Bound Student-Athlete, which is available online at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net or in your guidance office.

• Continue to develop yourself personally through extra-curricular opportunities. Find ways to develop leadership qualities through your activities — athletic and otherwise. Continue to build good reading habits.

• Begin to prepare for the SAT Reasoning Test or ACT, plus the SAT Subject Tests, if appropriate.

Eleventh Grade:

• Succeed to the best of your ability in all your classes. Remember, while you need a 2.0 overall GPA in your core classes for minimum NCAA qualifications, the better a student you are, the more options you will have for college. Endeavor to make satisfactory progress in all your courses.
• Take the PSAT/PLAN in October in preparation for the SAT/ACT later in the year.

• Register for and take the SAT Reasoning Test or ACT twice during the winter/spring.

• Register for and take the appropriate SAT Subject Tests in June.

• Meet with your guidance counselor as soon as possible to begin the college search. Start to develop a list of qualities you are looking for in colleges—majors, activities, location, size, etc.

• Start the recruiting process on your own. Begin to follow the process as laid out in the upcoming chapters on how to self-recruit. Letters of Introduction start going out in the spring!

• Meet with your coach to discuss your plans to play college athletics, and focus on those schools that match your academic interests and athletic talents.

• Fill out and submit the NCAA Clearinghouse Eligibility Form after July 1 of your junior year.

• Plan on visiting as many colleges as you can, whether for pure research or as part of your self-recruiting process.

**Twelfth Grade:**

• Have the best academic performance you’ve ever had during the fall semester/term.

• Take the SAT Reasoning Test and/or SAT Subject Test(s) as needed before January.

• Fill out and submit the NCAA Clearinghouse Eligibility Form if you haven’t already done so.

• Submit all applications well before the deadlines, and submit all necessary transcript request forms and other supporting documentation to your guidance counselor. Make sure all documentation is sent to your colleges no later than two weeks before the application deadlines.

• Secure the necessary teacher recommendations as early as possible.
• Register as an amateur with the NCAA. Confirm amateur status in the spring.

• Begin the financial aid process by filling out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and, if necessary, the CSS Profile (an additional financial aid report that many private colleges require). Investigate and submit any other required documentation for financial aid applications at each potential college.

• Have your SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Test(s) and/or ACT scores formally sent to your colleges.

• Continue college visits, on-campus interviews, and conversations with coaches, parents and guidance counselors as appropriate.

Over the years we have learned that the student-athletes who approach the college process responsibly are the real winners. Taking ownership of your high school education and being proactive about taking an appropriately demanding and NCAA Clearinghouse-approved academic course of study will be your best insurance against becoming an example of the academic casualties we described earlier.

Remember also that college coaches often look at the way in which a student-athlete and his or her family approach their academic responsibilities and the college process as a marker of whether to recruit that student. Character counts! You can leave a great impression on the coach and the admissions office if you do all that is requested of you in a timely fashion. The professional life of a coach or an admissions officer is high-speed and hectic, even as they are called upon to make precise, insightful judgments about you as a potential student and athlete. As you might imagine, they have little interest in chasing down late application materials, financial aid paperwork or the DVD of your greatest athletic performance that you are “pretty sure” you already sent. Be prompt, responsible, and timely in approaching your academic work and the recruiting/application process. You will surely find that both coaches and admissions offices will appreciate it.

At this point you’ve thought deeply about your goals and aspirations for athletics in college, you’ve started to gain an understanding of what the requirements and commitments might be for attaining those goals in the college world, and you’ve received a host of assessments and opinions of your athletic ability from knowledgeable people so you can focus your aim with more authority. The next step? Understanding the recruiting process from the coach’s perspective.
Chapter 3: Recruiting - The Coach’s Perspective

What are the signs that you are a recruited athlete? A letter from a college coach? An invitation to a summer sports camp? A conversation with a coach on his or her campus over the summer? In truth, you can easily get yourself on the mailing lists of multiple athletic programs by filling out online questionnaires, so that’s not a clear sign. Simply mailing in an application can get you on the roster of an “elite” athletic camp, so that’s not an accurate indication. And, given some persistence and advanced planning, you can have a sit-down meeting with a coach by arriving at his or her door on campus during the summer, whether or not that coach is currently interested in you as a player. In fact, all three of the possibilities listed above can mean you are a priority recruit for a college program or it can mean absolutely nothing to your status as a recruit. Jay Martin, Ohio Wesleyan’s highly successful men’s soccer coach, highlights this confusion with a discussion he has in the fall with his team. After the team has been set, cuts have been made and the roster solidified, he asks his players how many of them think they were recruited to play soccer. There are always “quite a few hands, but in fact very few of them were bona fide recruits.”

Coach Martin’s exercise wonderfully highlights two crucial points for you in your path to become a student-athlete in college. One, you can see how the recruiting process is clearly confusing, as even students who have made it all the way onto a college athletic team have misperceptions as to their status. Two, it dramatically emphasizes how college coaches rely on student-athletes who find their way into a program, as the Ohio Wesleyan men’s soccer team is bolstered every year by self-recruited players who’ve included OWU as part of their application strategy. Those athletes had playing sports in college as a goal, they developed themselves academically and athletically, and they were eventually admitted to a great school “because they were solid student-athletes and fine citizens,” as Coach Martin would describe them. In fact, a surprising number of athletic programs rely on these types of student-athletes to fill out their rosters.

A student-athlete who succeeds in the standard athletic recruitment process moves from prospect to recruit to matriculated player over the course of a single recruiting season. While there are prospects that college coaches have identified well in advance of their junior year, of course, the self-recruiting for these kinds of athletic prospects is essentially unnecessary. All the others _ the self-recruiters, in essence _ need to look at it from this perspective. An official recruiting season for the majority of sports begins on July 1 in the summer after the junior year (a rising senior) and it ends when the admission letter arrives from the college. Note, however, that the restrictions and regulations are constantly evolving. Direct contact dates are different across the range of sports, for example, and it seems that what college coaches are permitted to do and say (and when they are allowed to say it!) changes each year. Be sure to take a close look at the latest
rules before you proceed by picking up the most recent copy of NCAA’s Guide for the 
College-Bound Student-Athlete, and always remember that the responsibility for adhe-
ring to recruiting guidelines is yours.

The pace of the recruiting process varies, of course, and this stems from a myriad 
of factors. A very successful college program can move quickly to reciprocal commit-
m ents between a coach and a player because that program has a strong draw for the player 
in terms of expected success. There are differences among the divisions in the NCAA, as 
you’ve seen, so a Division I program might be able to offer a scholarship spot in the fall 
of the senior year (or even get a verbal commitment well before that), while a Division III 
program might have to wait until the bulk of the admission letters arrive in April. Coaches 
differ as well. Some might move extremely quickly to the “signing” or commitment stage 
in order to get their recruiting class sewn up as fast as possible. Others might move ex-
tremely slowly because of institutional budget restrictions, a lack of athletic scholarships, 
or a strategy of waiting until well into the process to scoop up players who might have 
fallen through the cracks of a higher division.

As your eventual goal is to take control of the athletic recruiting process, you need 
to understand the coach’s perspective on athletic recruiting as well as his or her methods for 
progressing through the recruiting stages. While there’s no strict formula that’s followed 
with timing and pace, there is nonetheless a general pattern to the process. Knowing this 
timeline for recruitment will give you the clues you need to figure out where you stand as 
you self-recruit.

*In the simplest terms, a coach’s goal for athletic recruiting is to identify, evaluate, 
and recruit potential players for their program. Once they’ve secured a personal 
commitment from a player, they then reciprocate that commitment by giving of-
ficial “support” to their institution via the admissions office.*

When we reach the section on self-recruiting, you’ll learn how to get noticed in the 
process at each stage, but for now let’s further define what happens in the different stages 
and look at them from the coach’s perspective.

**Identifying and Evaluating Prospects**

A college coach who wants to be successful needs to identify the talented athletes 
who can help his or her program. There’s nothing complicated about it. Whether the 
player is a blue-chip basketball player who lives three miles from campus or a sixteen year-
old “project” from Slovenia, a successful coach will scour the country (and, increasingly, 
the world) to find players. Duke men’s basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski, has been said
to have his coaching staff follow up on every single lead that comes his way, whether it is a random videotape that arrives unsolicited or a letter from a high school coach in New Mexico that touts his star player. Given the number of McDonald’s All-Americans that Duke signs every year, is it likely that there would be a “sleeper” in their recruiting mix? Not likely. However, as they say, you never know, and good programs never turn down the chance to identify prospects.

Coaches identify and evaluate prospects through multiple, but ultimately very straightforward, channels in hopes of finding their players. The identification of their potential recruiting class happens through:

- Poring over miles upon miles of videotape
- Visiting countless high school tournaments and games
- Tracking successful athletic programs
- Conducting and participating as coaches in summer camps
- Subscribing to national and international recruiting services
- Responding to identification from students, coaches, alumni, etc.
- Networking with other college coaches for prospects
- Following media reports on potential players, e.g. newspapers, sport-specific publications, etc.
- Receiving letters of introduction, questionnaires, etc., directly from student athletes

The point of the identification stage, without question, is to generate a recruiting list as deep and as broad as possible. Coaches cannot begin to address such crucial goals as program needs, individual positions, financial aid restrictions, scholarship distribution, academic applicability/eligibility, etc., until they have a pool of potential players, and for many programs the identification process never ends. A college football program might have wrapped up its recruiting class by early springtime, but you can bet that the coaching staff is already identifying the juniors in the next year’s class to contact, and in some cases, outstanding sophomores and freshman.

Already working on the next class? Yes, you read that correctly. The most recent recruiting class has yet to step a foot on campus, but the coaching staff is already working on the next year’s class. Recruiting is an endless cycle. It’s also important to remember that in this stage coaching staffs and recruiting coordinators attempt to identify prospects both in terms of quality and quantity. A coach can’t be caught short of impact players should the tide of recruiting swing against him or her, so the list needs to be extensive. Some prospects will choose to go elsewhere, some will be ineligible for some reason, some will drop out of the recruitment game, and, quite simply, some will turn out not to be good enough athletically. As a general model to facilitate the understanding of identifying and evaluating prospects, let’s use the notion of a three-tiered system of recruits: the A-List,
the B-List and the C-List. Of course, there are coaches who never need to divide up their prospects so deliberately or who set up different parameters, but a three-tiered system is used in some permutation by many college coaches. It’s easiest to understand, so we’ll use it as our model.

A-List players are just as they sound: they are the cream of the crop. Call them blue-chippers, call them five-tool players, call them what you will, but no matter the particular sport, the level of athletic competition, or the NCAA division, these are the players who impact a recruiting class and an athletic program. If a coach has five slots to fill, the goal is to identify, recruit and matriculate five of the A-List prospects as fast and efficiently as possible. Given the three-tier model, the number of prospects on this list usually is the fewest. Overall, the A-List is the one that gets the most attention from the coaching staff and the one that has the most volatility.

B-List players are prospects that are appealing to a college coach, but there’s still something that holds that coach back from putting on a full court recruiting press. It could be anything. Perhaps the athlete is a bit too small for the position he or she plays; perhaps the athlete hasn’t been measured against significant enough competition for the college coach to be confident in his or her ability to succeed at the next level; perhaps the athlete is relatively new to the sport, thus the coach isn’t sure how to assess that player’s talent. A strong player can end up on the B-List for a variety of reasons. Even so, that student-athlete is certainly in the mix of that college’s recruiting class since, given the volatility of the A-List, it’s likely that the coach will have to bolster his or her incoming players with B-List recruits.

C-List players are those that in the coach’s estimation are unlikely to make a significant impact on their program, if at all. This list is usually the largest of the three in a college’s recruiting database, as it’s the result of collecting prospects from all the recruiting sources. Even so, coaches try as best they can to keep as many of the C-List players on the recruiting “bench” in the event that they need to approach them at a later date. Woe to the coach who needs to fill his incoming class with C-List players. He or she probably will not be the coach at that college for long. The C-List could be filled with Division II or Division III players hoping to make the jump to Division I, students who’ve been identified as long term projects (e.g. have the size but not the speed for their sport, or vice-versa), students who’ve been identified by other sources as potential players whom the coach may go back to in the end, and, in some cases, it could be anyone who has sent in a questionnaire or athletic resume.

Do not think, however, that being on the C-List means you have no chance of making it onto that final list of incoming recruits. A college track coach who has no A-List or B-List pole vaulters might just take a chance on one of his C-List recruits rather than fail
to bring one on campus in that recruiting class. Or, a Division III cross country coach just may discover one of his C-List runners has been admitted to the college based on other factors in the application, as the admissions office liked the applicant’s non-athletic strengths and admitted him or her. In this case, even though the student wasn’t a priority athlete for the coach, the coach is certainly glad to have the student on the team. The college admissions office was interested in the student for academic reasons, knew he or she could play for that coach, and decided to admit that student. Everybody wins. Even these basic examples raise the point that simply being “known” to both the admission and athletic offices as a potentially valuable student and athlete can make a difference.

Identifying prospects begins the recruitment process for college coaches, and successful collegiate programs will be looking to build their list of potential players at all times. It’s a part of the process that never ends, so it’s the entry point for the student-athlete to get his or her own self-recruitment going. Once those prospects have been identified and evaluated as viable recruits, however, it’s time for coaches to move on to building an incoming class: the next stage is active recruiting.

The Recruiting Process & the Timeline

The NCAA defines specific recruiting periods, signing periods, and non-contact or “blackout” periods for the major sports in Division I. Otherwise, the rhythms of the recruiting cycle have some flexibility to it. Understanding the general Timeline gives you some sense of when you might be contacted by coaches as each stage develops, and knowing both “when” and “how” the contact arrives can help you figure out whether or not you are an active recruit. Further, the Timeline can also show you how you can help yourself in the self-recruiting process, as you will discover ways to insert yourself into the recruiting cycles of the schools on your list.

Keep in mind that the Recruiting Timeline does have some variation to it. While many coaches prefer to adhere to the certainty the Timeline provides, there are many who would prefer to accelerate it, mostly to their advantage. If you are a Division I recruit, might you be contacted for an official visit in late February or March of your senior year? Possibly, but based on the usual or ideal timeline, it most likely means that the coaches have moved through their A-List and maybe even their B-List. If you haven’t received a Division I offer by January, could you hear from a Division III coach for the first time then? Absolutely, but that most likely means that the coach is trying to find out whether you are committed to Division I or whether you’d consider Division III. Coaches want this process over as early as possible, with their top recruits targeted, committed, applied, accepted and in the fold by the end of the fall. From the coaches’ point of view, the faster it gets done the better, and the better the recruit, the faster it’s to be done.
Recruiting stages fall within a simple set of general categories.
  o Identification: (questionnaires, letters of introduction, etc.)
  o Follow-up contact: (print or email communication)
  o The Phone List I: (first contact)
  o The Phone List II: (repeated contact)
  o Invitation to official/unofficial recruiting visits
  o Home visits
  o Letter of Intent / scholarship offer
  o Official support from the coach

Most of those categories make sense on the surface, but what do all these stages mean in real-life athletic recruiting? If you get a questionnaire, are you being actively recruited? How do you know where you stand with college programs as this process evolves? Remember, coaches would love to have their class in the fold as soon as possible. If the cards fall their way and they get the student-athletes they’d like to commit, they’ll offer those students scholarships or indicate their eventual support in the application process as soon as they can possibly make it happen. In real life, however, this “pedal-to-the-metal” approach doesn’t work for most colleges or coaches. Whether it’s a Division I scholarship school or a highly selective Division III school, the process gives coaches, parents, students and counselors headaches with all the ebbs and flows. Nevertheless, if you are someone who’s going to self-recruit and go through this process start to finish, here’s how and when it will likely take place.

The Questionnaire Stage

“We have a three step process in place here that we find works well. Once we have identified a kid, however that might have occurred (either we’ve received a letter of inquiry, been notified of her, or we’ve seen her play), we respond by sending out an introductory letter and questionnaire. Step One is complete when we get the questionnaire back.”

(Penny Siqueiros, Women’s Softball Coach, Emory University)

The questionnaire stage is the equivalent of walking in the door of a bank and filling out a loan application. You aren’t close to getting the money yet, so don’t get too excited, but at least you’ve begun the process. When you self-recruit, you’ll fill out on-line inquiries, write Letters of Introduction to athletic coaches and have your coach contact programs where he or she thinks you can play. The natural result is you’ll be sent a questionnaire in order to obtain basic personal, academic and athletic information from you. Once you return the questionnaire, you are in a database and you are a known entity to that program as a prospective student-athlete. You’ll likely remain active on that database for a good while, but you remain as a prospect (and only a prospect) until they start to sift through the hundreds of contacts they’ve received.
It’s worth pointing out that if you are in a college program’s prospect database, it’s likely that you’ll get an invitation to the summer camp on their campus, or perhaps to one the coach runs on another campus. These opportunities are a nice two-way street for communication, skills evaluation and relationship building, but they are still quite preliminary in the recruiting process. Use these opportunities as they arise to their fullest. At this point, you can’t tell what will happen to you as a recruit by attending one, but you certainly can dramatically expand the number of coaching contacts you have, you can find out more about how you might be evaluated and you might get some invitations to apply to colleges by the coaches you meet. All in all, it’s a great way to push the process a little further along.

On a related topic, the last ten years or so have seen unofficial recruiting days (such as “Tiger Football Day for Juniors”) become more and more common. These are a “get to know the program” style event and they are used to build up contacts in the database, maintain prospect contact, and determine interest level with the prospects already identified. As per NCAA regulations, students and families pay their own way to these events, but the invitations come right from the official mailing list or are sent to coaches and high school athletic directors. Be flattered, attend if you are invited and/or interested in the school, but know that for these programs there’s still a mile of both academic and athletic evaluation to come. You may feel pressured to attend these “get to know the program” days, but they mean virtually nothing when it comes to the final recruiting stages. If the head coach of that program deems you cannot play for him or her, your presence there is irrelevant. If the head coach of that program is excited about the prospect of your playing for him or her, your presence doesn’t drastically affect your recruitment.

**How Do Questionnaires Fit Into the Recruiting Timeline?**

It’s the first step, but it’s also the most ineffective step for understanding where you stand. The submission of questionnaires could start from before you are a junior and continue well into your senior year, yet result in nothing more than the use of postage in your recruiting process. Programs will not stop collecting information on prospects until their recruiting class is closed, but as you know, they are likely working on the next class simultaneously. In terms of where you are in the recruiting timeline, there’s little for you to discern where you stand while in the questionnaire stage.

**The Follow-Up Stage _ Written, Printed and/or Email Communication**

As contacts are identified and reviewed, coaches will sift and sort through their prospects and weed out the students that simply do not fit. For example, a 145-pound offensive lineman at a Class D high school in Rhode Island would probably be dropped from the mailing list at USC. Similarly, non-scholarship or highly selective schools might cull out prospects that they know they won’t be able to support because of aca-
ademic reasons. Cornell’s baseball program would be unable to recruit a student with a 2.2 GPA and 450/410/500 SATs because of Ivy League restrictions. Given this academic data, they are unlikely to follow-up with that student. Know that coaches are usually quite responsible about maintaining contact with potential recruits, but at some point they need to prioritize to be fair to everyone involved. As Bill Tierney, head men’s lacrosse coach at Princeton puts it,

“While we don’t recruit everybody, we feel that responding to all inquiries is the right and proper thing to do. An exception might be when a young man inquires in November of his senior year, he’s got C’s and D’s on his transcript, and has 1500 on the new SAT. That kid we probably wouldn’t get back to because of the lateness of the inquiry, and because he simply would not be competitive in the Princeton applicant pool.”

Once the prospect list is streamlined, the coach begins mailing letters, flyers, updates, and other promotional materials in successive waves in order to keep the contact going and to facilitate the ongoing evaluation of prospects. Right now in the NCAA there’s no restriction as to the amount of written contact a coach may have with a prospective player, and it makes complete sense from the coach’s perspective to stay in repeated contact with all potential players. As you might expect, A-List prospects will get the signed letter from the coach while the C-List prospects will be getting a copy of the mass mailing. However, the variations within athletic programs are such that you simply do not know how serious the recruiting is at this stage from the written and email contact. While these and other forms of printed contact continue over the course of the recruiting process, coaches and recruiting coordinators are working behind the scenes to decide whether you’ll become an actual recruit by talking to coaches, requesting transcripts, reviewing videotapes, etc. Remember, the evaluation of you academically and athletically takes place at every turn.

Expanding technology has streamlined this process for follow-up contact considerably, so if you have email access you’re likely to get a battery of information via that route. This is especially effective at the Division III level, as coaches with limited recruiting budgets might mail basic flyers and brochures to prospects to start the recruiting, but then all they need for continuous contact is to send a mass email talking about how the season is going or giving an update on admission deadlines. At the Division I level, the lack of restrictions on text messaging has brought a new form of repeated contact into the process, as coaches face virtually no restriction on sending their top recruits text messages to their cell phones on a regular basis. By
the time you read this, the rules may have changed yet again, as there’s no doubt as to the presence of the “build a better mousetrap” game in athletic recruiting.

In the largest context, this point in the Timeline is when coaches accelerate the gathering of evaluations on their potential recruits. Whether it’s through observing you at tournaments, examining the game tape you’ve sent, or talking with people who have seen you play, college coaches are behind the scenes trying to get the true scoop on your ability. If we were to continue with the bank loan analogy we started with in the last stage, they’ve received your application, and they are reviewing your credentials to see if you qualify. In the meantime, the bank is sending you information on other products and services you might be interested in. The contact is nice, though it’s not necessarily helpful to you. The critical point is that behind closed doors they are assessing your qualifications.

**How Does This Communication Fit Within the Recruiting Timeline?**

The follow-up communication you receive at this stage via emails, flyers and brochures tells you little more than you received during the questionnaire stage, unfortunately. Think about how easy it would be to have a work-study student include you in a mass mailing or for an assistant coach to add your name to an email distribution list. The follow-up contact will likely continue right up until the point where the recruiting class is finalized, so even if you have made it to the point where you are receiving repeated follow-up communication, it’s not clear where you stand in the process. From the coach’s perspective you are a known identity right now, though not necessarily a known quantity. While you can be happy that you are still in the recruiting game, there’s still a long way to go.

**The Phone List Stage: Part I - First Contact**

“For Step Two, we send out another letter requesting a video, and to complete Step Two the prospective student athlete needs to send back a video for us to evaluate. If we like what we see—both on the video and on the questionnaire (academics, testing, etc.), then we contact the kid by telephone or email and wait to see if the kid is receptive to us” (Penny Siqueiros, Women’s Softball Coach, Emory University)

You’ve made it to the coaches’ phone lists? Aha, now we’re cooking! Officially, coaches in most sports cannot call potential recruits until July 1 of that student’s junior summer (a rising senior). While there are all kinds of exceptions for “incidental contact,” athletic camps, and other contingencies, that date still serves as the jumping off point for the majority of athletic recruiting. Up to this point coaches have been doing their homework by reviewing videotapes, talking to coaches, checking transcripts, and trying, at a furious pace, to target who their A-List recruits will be. Over the course of the summer
the coaches will call (and continue to call) their A-List recruits to get a sense of where each recruit’s interest might stand. As the summer and fall wear on, coaches will begin to cement relationships with their A-List kids, they will start asking for commitments from prospects to nail down part of their recruiting class, they will ask the priority recruits to file early action/early decision applications, and/or they will be moving down the recruiting list for certain events or positions, depending on how things progress. Usually they are doing all these things at once. The great sorting has begun.

**How Does Making the Phone List Fit in the Recruiting Timeline?**

If there is a point in the process when you can say to yourself that you have moved from mere prospect to active recruit, it’s when you get that first phone call from a coach. A coach’s goal is to lock down his or her solid core of A-List recruits as fast as possible in the summer (if not before) and to continue finalizing commitments from players as fall progresses. Depending on how the conversations go, they may make first contacts with B-List candidates and “In Case of Emergency” recruits in the summer as well. Those phone calls are more likely to occur later in the process. It’s certainly possible that a first phone call to a prospect might come all the way into the winter if more important recruits happen to have fallen away. A good rule of thumb is that the higher the division or the stronger the program, the quicker things move. Either way, once you get the phone call, know that you are on the radar screen as a real recruit, no matter when it arrives.

**The Phone List Stage - Part II: Weekly Contact**

Over the course of the late summer and early fall, the “great sorting” has produced a cadre of recruits for each coach that are top priority for the program. These recruits represent the players who’ve shown the most interest in the school, the ones that the coaches feel have most athletic promise and then whoever else the program feels would help to build up the recruiting list to the greatest possible strength. The official NCAA rule is that coaches can call recruits only once a week, and the vast majority will adhere to that rule closely given the regulations (and the ease with which these contacts can be verified). Interestingly, however, there’s currently no limit on how many times a prospect can call a coach. Some coaches will hang back a bit from a weekly phone call so as to not appear too eager. Some others, as you might imagine, will use this rule to its fullest extent and tweak the definition of what makes a new week so they can make another phone call.

At this point in the timeline coaches are looking to move toward firm commitments. At the Division I level these weekly phone calls could involve making arrangements for official visits, or perhaps the intent is simply for the coaches to stay in touch, hoping that a commitment will arise in a future conversation. Once that coach feels that a firm commitment has been made, he or she will likely stay in touch only in stages. A smart recruiter will keep the line of communication clear and obvious, however, perhaps checking in to
see how a recruit’s season has progressed, finding out about the status of the application, or asking if they’ve received the materials inviting them for the official visit. Making the “Continuous Call” List will be self-evident, of course, and the tone of the conversations will leave no doubt as to where you stand. A recruit on the “Continuous Call” List will likely have all of the subsequent stages of recruitment brought to him or her, including some sort of an offer of official support from the program.

How Does the Weekly Call List Fit Within the Recruiting Timeline?

The signals are getting clearer and clearer. Getting on to the weekly/repeated phone list can happen any time after July 1; and whenever it happens, you can be assured that you have become a fully active prospect, if not a priority recruit.

Invitation to Official/Unofficial Recruiting Weekend

When any potential student-athlete announces he or she is being recruited by a Division I school, the first question that should be asked of that person is “Have you been invited on an Official Visit?” The answer to that question determines exactly how serious the coach is about that prospect. Athletic programs are given a limit to the number of official visits they can offer, and so they’ll only invite the student-athletes that they are serious about recruiting. Of course, these student-athletes are the prospects most likely to get an offer of official support from that program with the admissions office. If you are offered an official visit, you’ve made the short list and the hard questions will come quickly. It’s likely that a few days after your visit, you’ll get a phone call asking how the visit went, and the conversation will then move toward your future in the program. Another common pattern on official visits is for a sit down meeting to take place with the head coach or recruiting coordinator to talk about your interest in them and their interest in you. A request for a commitment will quite likely be part of this conversation. Remember, the NCAA allows for a total of five official visits, even if you are being recruited for more than one sport.

Unofficial weekends at the Division III or non-scholarship level have a similar impact, so if a Division III coach specifically asks you to come to campus, you are on his or her recruiting list. The main difference between Division III invitations to visit and a Division I Official Visit is that the student has to pay his or her own way in Division III. You can still be set up with a host for the time you are on campus; you can be given materials or benefits that any potential student who is not an athlete might receive; but you cannot be reimbursed for transportation, or receive any meals, game tickets or other benefits not available to the general crop of prospective students.
How Do Official/Unofficial Visits Fit Within the Recruiting Timeline?

As previously discussed, coaches would like to finalize their recruiting class as soon as possible, so official visits might happen as early as the first few weeks of school in the fall and continue until the recruiting class is closed. If you suddenly become an important recruit to a coach at any level, you may get a phone call in the spring asking you if you’d like to come to campus. If coaches have visits remaining and spaces in their recruiting class left to fill, they could potentially continue bringing students to campus all through the end of the academic year, but this is a coach’s nightmare.

Home Visits

In the context of the entire NCAA, home visits are infrequent and are reserved for the top-end athlete, so we will not cover them at length here. Suffice it to say that if should you receive a home visit from a coach, you have made the very short list. A home visit is usually reserved for the top echelon of recruits, most often at the highly competitive, Division I level, and will be used for the final “selling” of the program to the student and the family. If your athletic recruiting experience has ended with a home visit, it’s quite likely that you didn’t need the section of this book on “How to Self-Recruit.”

How Do Home Visits Fit Within the Recruiting Timeline?

They are the beginning of the end game. In fact, some college coaches are known for being at the doorstep of a five-star recruit at midnight on the first day when home visits are permissible in their sport so as to prove their commitment to that recruit. Midnight Madness, indeed.

Official Offer of Support: Letter of Intent / Scholarship Offer

If you sign a National Letter of Intent, a document that certifies that a student athlete has agreed to attend a specific college or university the following year (for more information, see www.national-letter.org), or you actually receive a scholarship offer, it’s the end of the process for you. The admissions office has cleared you; the athletic department has supported you; you sign the NLI _ game over. The NCAA regulates signing periods for the major sports and sets restrictions for signing dates on all of them.

While there are 55 athletic leagues in the country that currently adhere to the National Letter of Intent, there are no Letters of Intent at some Division I and II schools, and at all Division III level schools. However, if you’ve progressed to the level of continuous phone contact, you can reasonably expect a coach to ask you for an oral commitment in exchange for his or her official support with the admissions office.
Remember that at all levels of athletic competition, the admissions office makes the final decision on your candidacy, not the coach. No matter how positive or supportive a coach might be, both you and the coach will need to wait for the admission process to take its course.

That being said, it is true that at these schools coaches are often in a position to offer plenty of assurance, usually based on the feedback they have already received from admissions and/or his or her general understanding of the admission process at his or her school. Still, all of your academic and personal qualities will be scrutinized in the admissions office with the same attention to detail that the coach has evaluated your athletic qualities. This uncertainty between “support” and “signing” underscores the difficulty of recruiting at the non-scholarship level. Nothing is final until you get the letter of admission in your hands.

**How Does a Coach’s Official Support Fit Within the Recruiting Timeline?**

It’s the end. If you’ve made it this far, then you’ve successfully navigated the waters of athletic recruiting, whether the process came to you or you self-recruited. You still need the admission letter in your hands to be sure, but you’ve made it.

The vast majority of student-athletes will never get to the final stages of the Division I Timeline as described here, but the sequence of stages is nonetheless important at every level of competition to determine how and if you are being recruited. **The most important point to take away from this section is that the degree and frequency of contact will tell you a great deal about the program’s interest in you.** For example, mass emails mean merely that you are known to that coach, but the invitation to spend 48 hours on campus at the college’s cost means you are important to that coach. As you follow the Recruiting Timeline and see yourself in all the stages ranging between a quick email and a request for a commitment, you need to 1) strive to understand where you fit within the recruiting process based on the signals sent by that program and 2) realize that as the stages progress, the size of the active list is dropping dramatically. A top Division I football program might start out with 2,000 contacts, coordinate only 50 official visits and offer only 22 scholarships. The drop is precipitous.

Even at a strong Division III soccer program, for example, where you are dealing with no athletic scholarships, no official visits, and limited recruiting, the numbers boil down dramatically from start to finish. Below is a rough model of a Division III soccer team, though know that stronger teams at more established programs might start out with a bigger prospect list. A weaker, less established team might start out with a smaller list, but the distillation and trajectory are worth examining.
If you
Receive a questionnaire
Receive other follow-up brochures/emails
Receive a phone call from the coach over the summer
Are on the repeat call list
Are asked to visit campus
Receive official support in the admission process
Are admitted to the school

You Could Be
One of 700
One of 250
One of 75
One of 35
One of 20
One of 8
One of 5

The above odds are hardly reassuring. If only a fraction of student-athletes, the truly gifted, ever sign Letters of Intent or are offered athletic grants-in-aid at the Division I level, then only the most talented athletes succeed in the athletic recruiting process overall, even at the Division III level, right?

Absolutely Not!!!

In the athletic recruiting process there are factors you can control and factors you can’t control. Your athletic ability will only carry you so far in the athletic recruitment game, just as your academic ability will only carry you so far in the college admission game. However, you can control one key step in becoming a student-athlete. You can self-recruit.
Chapter 4: The Art of Self-Recruiting

If you’ve followed the guidelines we’ve laid out so far, you have gathered three crucial pieces of information regarding athletic recruiting:

1) You have clear goals for your athletic experience, i.e., you know what you’d like to get out of college sports.

2) You have a clear sense of your athletic ability, or, more importantly, how colleges are likely to evaluate your athletic ability.

3) You understand the general recruiting process and timeline for college coaches.

Now that you have this information in hand, you can begin the process of getting colleges to come to you. Self-recruiting is all about getting yourself known to coaches, entering into the application process at those colleges, and bringing your athletic and academic gifts together to achieve your goals. Before you start sending out piles of letters and videotapes, you should keep some broad issues in mind first.

• Cover all your bases _ If you have determined that you are shooting for Division I baseball, but you’d like to play somewhere no matter what, you can’t throw your lines in only at Texas, Texas A & M, SMU, Houston, Rice, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State. Remember that the assessment of your athletic ability is something out of your hands; so if those schools don’t see you as a viable Division I athlete, or they are out of spots at your position, you’re stuck. Instead, plan on sending information to your preferred Division I schools, sure, but also to other Division I programs, II, III or NAIA, if appropriate. When a college coach recruits, that coach does not focus on only one player and at only one position. Neither should you. Self-recruit comprehensively, which means looking across Divisions, conferences and geographical areas.

• Expand Your Field of Vision _ One of the goals of a college admissions office is to have geographical diversity in its undergraduate class. They want kids from all over the country. If you are a volleyball player from California, think about schools on the East Coast. If you are a Minnesotan with dreams of playing Division III field hockey, what about the Deep South? Look at it this way. Your athletic ability will take you a certain distance. Your academic ability will take you a certain distance. But, if the strengths in your application get you into an “all-other-things-being-equal” spot during admission review, whom do you think is more appealing to Connecticut College? A basketball player from Or-
agon or another applicant from New Jersey? Use geography to your advantage. There are hundreds of great schools out there that would love to have you on their campus.

• Look for Connections _ Keep an eye out for connections between conferences and schedules. If you are determined to find a walk-on Division I spot playing lacrosse and Johns Hopkins looks unlikely to happen, take a look at whom they play against. Or, if the Franklin and Marshall coach told you that she doesn’t have a spot open at your position, and you certainly have the talent to play at that level, all of a sudden the rest of the Centennial League teams become targets for you.

• Attitude Counts _ Coaches look for talent, certainly, but they also look for character, team harmony and “coachability.” If you come across as arrogant or act as though the coach would be lucky to have you, or she might just pass on you rather than take the chance on adding a negative attitude to the team. Your interactions via written correspondence, phone contact, and during campus visits should be mature, respectful and polite.

• Be Organized - Whatever it takes to keep track of your efforts completely and accurately, do it. Keep a chart of contacts. Keep a record of conversations with coaches. Note dates and deadlines. Have a place where email addresses, mailing addresses and phone numbers can be kept. Keep a box of applications and viewbooks handy, etc. You are self-recruiting, so you need to be as organized and responsible as you possibly can.

• Self-recruiting Means Double Duty - Yes, you are self-recruiting for athletics, but you are also self-recruiting through the admissions office. Keep the two processes separate until the process brings them together naturally. If you contact a coach for information on his or her swimming program, contact that admissions office for an application, view-book, and a brochure on athletics. If you do an unofficial visit and meet a coach, make arrangements in advance to interview in the admissions office and tour the campus.

When you self-recruit, you’ll be trying to enter into the recruitment process on your own. You’ll be trying to hit as many targets on the college side as possible, get on as many mailing lists as possible, have as many coaches evaluate you as possible, and talk with as many coaches as possible about playing for them. You need to be firmly committed to the process and the idea of self-recruiting, because if you drop the ball, there’s no one there to pick it up for you. The first step? Get yourself known.
Self-Recruiting: The Identification Stage

If you are identified early as a “recruitable” athlete no matter the level of competition some of the college programs will come to you. Whether through newspaper clippings, recruiting services, contacts from high school coaches or from noticing you at a camp or tournament, a coach will evaluate your talents, deem you as a possible prospect and send you an introductory letter. This letter will detail the strengths of his or her program, the merits of the school and how you can benefit academically and athletically from attending that college. While that’s a simplified version of how coaches usually start recruiting, it is the framework nonetheless. This framework, however, misses two key issues for the self-recruiter.

First, you would think that if you are recruited by one college, then it stands to reason that you should be recruited by another college in the same conference or with the same relative program strength. While this can be true, it rarely works out that neatly. Differences in program strength, differences in coaches’ opinions and individual program needs tend to muddy the waters, and so some recruits slip by unseen. Don’t let it happen to you. If you get a letter from Bowling Green’s softball program and you’d really prefer to go to Miami of Ohio to play, you can (and should) take matters into your own hands and self-recruit at Miami of Ohio. Know that as the process unfolds, it will be tempting to run headlong with whoever first contacts you. Don’t stop there. There are hundreds of institutions in the U.S. that have intercollegiate athletics, and there will certainly be schools of interest that haven’t become interested in you quite yet for whatever reason. Why this happens is irrelevant. Instead, remember that you need to be the active agent in this process. You should continue the pursuit of your goals, whether or not they line up neatly across conference and/or divisional lines.

Second, plenty of talented high school student-athletes will slide under the radar screen of recruitment every year. Whether it’s because of the size of the school, the lack of recognition of the conference, a paucity of newspaper clippings detailing successes, or the abysmal performance of an individual team, thousands of potential college athletes will never be recruited because they remain unknown to the colleges or are unaware that they can self-recruit. Coaches need to find out about these students. They love to find out about these students for no other reason than they can’t be everywhere at once. This is especially true at the Division III level, where recruiting budgets are small and coaches rely on long established contacts or traditionally strong high school athletic programs to find their players. They can’t recruit you if they don’t know about you. In the beginning stages it’s not a lack of interest; it’s a lack of knowledge. So, inform them.
Letters of Introduction

Your first step will be to initiate contact with a wide range of colleges, and the most efficient time to begin writing colleges is in the winter or spring of your junior year. As discussed in Chapter 3: “Recruiting _ The Coach’s Perspective,” their jumping off point is the development of their recruiting database. You need to get on that list, and Letters of Introduction are great ways to do it. Go through your self-reflection, establish your goals, do your research, come up with a list of colleges that spans divisions, areas of the country, and selectivity, and then drop yourself directly into that college coach’s office via a Letter of Introduction.

Letters of Introduction to prospective schools should be concise and to the point. At first, all you are trying to do is get yourself into the database. Once you get your name known to that coach and you’ve provided the necessary information for them to follow up with you, you have successfully entered their “identification stage.” This is not the time for long paragraphs on your commitment to improving your free throw shooting. Avoid writing about the state championship game and how well you played. Stay away from being patronizing of the athletic program and/or the coach. Letters of Introduction should be pure information. Tell them you are interested in applying to the school, you are interested in playing, and ask them to send you any information they can on their athletic program. In most cases you’ll get a questionnaire back from that coach or get invited to fill out an online questionnaire. If you submit a résumé as part of your Letter of Introduction and it includes complete information, perhaps you’ll receive a letter of acknowledgment from that coach instead.

Remember the recruiting timeline and where you are in the process right now. Once you’ve entered the coach’s field of vision, it’s possible you are one of hundreds, if not thousands, of students in that database. You aren’t trying to sell yourself _ not yet anyway. Instead, you are trying to give that coach the tools to help you get to the next stage. While you can’t convince coaches to give you a slot based on your Letter of Introduction, remember that coaches have the best interest of their own program on their mind at all times as they proceed through the recruiting stages. If you can help their program, it doesn’t matter how short your letter is _ they’ll be interested in you as a student-athlete. If you can’t help their program, it doesn’t matter how much you write _ you will not be supported.

The most important aspects of the Letter of Introduction are the simplest ones:

• Contact Information: Your name, address, phone number, email address, school’s address, etc.

• Academic Information: Your school’s name, athletic conference and level, your guidance counselor’s name (with contact information), basic academic data such as GPA, rank and any standardized testing scores.
• Athletic Information: Current team, conference or league description, all-star/traveling/AAU team information, Coach(s) name w/contact information, quick statistics, etc.

There’s an excellent chance that the first thing that will happen to your Letter of Introduction is that it will be opened at the desk of an assistant coach, and your general information will be typed into a computer. Make that process as smooth as possible for them.

Further, prepare an athletic résumé to be sent with your Letter of Introduction as well. The athletic résumé is where you will begin to get into the nitty-gritty details of your abilities. Each résumé will have variations depending on the sport, of course, but the general idea remains the same. The following is an example of both a Letter of Introduction and an athletic résumé.
Tyler Joshua Garrett
12 Stapleton St
Buffalo, NY 11309
TriplPlay@hitnet.com

Birth Date 8/30/90  Bats / Throws: R/R
Height: 6'0”  40 Yd Dash: 4.91
Weight: 175

**Academic Profile:**
Cumulative GPA: 3.1
SAT Scores: CR 550 / M 590 / WR 630
# of Advanced Placement / Honors Courses: 5 APs, 6 Honors
Graduation Date: 6/2007  Honors/Awards: Team Captain, Latin Scholar Award
Intended College Major: Business

A full transcript and school profile can be provided upon request as well as academic references. BCHS plays in the WNYCL (Western New York Parochial League) and plays Class A for statewide tournaments, the highest division of competition.

**Athletic Profile:**
**BCHS:**
2005 Stats
Batting Average: .360  Runs Scored: 24  Stolen Bases: 12  RBI: 29  Positions Played: CF/P

2006 Stats
Batting Average: .355  Runs Scored: 29  Stolen Bases: 6  RBI: 36  Positions Played: 3B/CF

**Post 66:**
2005 Stats
Batting Average: .325  Runs Scored: 33  Stolen Bases: 8  RBI: 18  Positions Played: CF

2006 Stats
Batting Average: .370  Runs Scored: 41  Stolen Bases: 17  RBI: 21  Positions Played: CF/P

**Contact Information / References:**
D. Power  Phil Thebesis  Father Len Rojas
Head Coach, BCHS  Coach, Post 66  Counseling Office
Main Street  3 Ebbets Fld Rd.  Buffalo Catholic HS
Buffalo, NY 14242  Buffalo, NY 14242  Buffalo, NY 14242
716-555-4231  716-555-2874  716-555-4231
d.power@bchs.k12.edu  bagsfull@hitnet.com  l.rojas@bchs.k12.edu
March 1, 2006

H. Radbourne  
Head Baseball Coach  
Brobdingnagian University  
Brobdingnagian, NY 98775

Dear Coach Radbourne,

My name is Tyler J. Garrett, I am a junior at Buffalo Catholic High School, and I’m interested in Brobdingnagian University and its baseball program. Please send me any information or materials you could provide me describing your program, as I’m interested in B.U. and plan on playing baseball in college.

I’ve played for a Parochial State Championship team at BCHS, and I have played for two years for Niagara Legion Post 66. I have a 3.1 cumulative GPA in a coursework that includes three AP courses and my SAT’s currently stand at 1750.

Please find below the names and addresses of my coaches and my counselor. They have all offered to speak with you concerning both my athletic and academic abilities. Thank You.

Sincerely,

Tyler J. Garrett  
12 Stapleton St.  
Buffalo, NY 11309  
TJG@whoohoo.com

D. Power  
Head Coach, BCHS  
Main Street  
Buffalo, NY 14242  
609-555-4231  
d.power@bchs.k12.edu

Phil Thebesis  
Coach, Post 66  
3 Ebbets Fld Rd  
Buffalo, NY 14242  
609-555-2874  
bagsfull@hitnet.com

Father Len Rojas  
Counseling Office  
Buffalo Catholic High School  
Buffalo, NY 14242  
609-555-2042  
l.rohas@bchs.k12.edu
The variations in your Letter of Introduction and your athletic résumé will undoubtedly be determined by the specific requirements of the sport, but these examples should give you a start as to the kind of information to pass on. Be concise. Be informative. Be honest. But, no matter what, get yourself known. It’s the first step down a long, yet ultimately navigable, road.

### Identification & Evaluation: Athletic Camps

If athletic recruiting is about exposure to college coaches, then there’s no better way to showcase your skills to a wider and more diverse group of college coaches than to attend a summer athletic camp. Hundreds of summer camps take place each year across the country in dozens of sports. If you want to have six consecutive weeks filled with detailed, national-level instruction in fencing (saber, foil or epee), you can do it. If you want to attend a day camp and simply play basketball for five hours a day for a week with local high school coaches, you can do it. You’ll find no shortage of opportunities in which to participate in your chosen sport; but if your goal is eventual college participation, you need to choose wisely. While there will clearly be overlaps between categories, you can break down the types of summer camps into roughly three groups – summer programs, developmental programs and showcase programs. The self-recruiter needs to understand the differences between these programs and use them accordingly.

Summer programs, much like the ones run by the local college or the municipal recreational department, are primarily for fun. You’ll get a camp T-shirt and water bottle at the beginning, you may meet local coaches who are running the camp or some prominent high school/college players from the area, but the goal of these camps is to have fun, learn a little bit of basic skills, and keep you pleasantly occupied during the summer. You may get some solid basic instruction depending on the aims of the camp director, but the chances are the camper-to-instructor ratio will be high. The level of instruction will mirror (or fall short of) the instruction you receive in your high school program. You’ll likely learn little that’s new. These kinds of programs, while quite fun and low stress, will gain you little in the eyes of college coaches and don’t advance you along in self-recruitment.

Developmental programs are much more well-defined, much more rigorous and much more helpful. These are usually more expensive than summer programs as well, but as the overall goal for these camps is either to contribute to your athletic experience in college or to expand your options for colleges, it’s a miniscule amount in contrast to the cost of four years of college. Further, these programs are exactly the kind your high school or traveling team coach would love for you to attend, so don’t be surprised if you are encouraged to gather a handful of kids from your soccer or field hockey team and attend one together. Developmental camps are more often run by colleges, staffed by college coaching
assistants and provide more detailed instructional opportunities for improving overall skills
than the summer camp programs. You may find out about defensive strategies that are cur-
currently in vogue in your sport or learn subtle techniques or tricks to take back to your high
school team. The competition will be more rigorous and the learning curve will likely be
steeper. Most importantly, prominent college programs will bring in speakers, guest head
coaches and will often have an instructional component regarding college recruitment.
Instead of self-recruiting over the internet and through the faceless communication of the
telephone, you might be able to walk into a room with college coaches from across the
divisions and ask them questions about athletic recruiting and their individual programs.
It’s important to note that here’s where a significant loophole in the athletic recruiting rules
comes in. Normally you wouldn’t be able to have repeated face-to-face contact with a
college coach as a junior, for instance, because of NCAA regulations. But, if you attend a
developmental camp that happens to have the assistant coach from the Randolph-Macon
men’s soccer team on its instructional staff, you can discuss soccer strategies with him to
your heart’s content as he coaches your progress in camp.

(Note: this is quite different from the showcase camps. At showcase camps you
are being “evaluated,” which means that the college coaches cannot speak to you.
By rule they can only watch you from a distance. At developmental style camps,
the coaches can speak to you if they are part of the instructional staff, obviously,
and they will certainly discuss techniques and strategies which are in vogue in your
sport.)

If you distinguish yourself enough during these camps, it’s likely you’ll get phone
calls requesting your transcript or you’ll receive a questionnaire in the mail from one of
the colleges that was represented there. The process is underway. However, even if you
haven’t made the lacrosse world forget Gary Gait by your performance at the Top 150 La-
crosse Camp, at the very least you’ll have made some contacts in the coaching community
from which to jumpstart your self-recruitment. When it comes time to assess your athletic
abilities accurately in the fall, you’ll have the invaluable feedback of coaches who evaluate
athletic talent year after year.

The third style of summer camp, the showcase camps, have a Division I element to
them. They represent the highest level of competition, the highest level of exposure to col-
lege coaches, and also the highest level of “risk.” It’s possible that the showcase element
dominates to the point where there’s little active teaching and instruction. You play in the
morning, play again in the afternoon, and you have prominent speakers at night. These are
likely the highest priced camps of the three, and they likely have the highest profile guests
and attendees. For student-athletes who aren’t blue-chippers and who will not be fighting
off the scholarship offers, they may end up being the equivalent of the camp “scout team,”
paying top-dollar for the opportunity to be shown up by the topflight players. Even so,
given the level of exposure at these showcase camps, you can put yourself on the map ath-
etically if you shine while you are there. Many college coaches have stories of someone they spotted at a showcase camp who was sliding under the recruiting radar screen when they “discovered” him or her. It happens, certainly, but carefully weigh your participation in these programs with your own ability and where you might invest your resources to achieve your overall goals.

How do you find out about these camps? The place to start is with your coach or athletic director. All through the academic year they receive brochure after brochure encouraging them to send their athletes to specific summer camps. Their own professional experience will likely give you a head start on finding good, solid instruction and exposure to excellent teaching and to the coaching community. Also, you should call the local college or university and talk to a coach in the sport you wish to pursue. Just by placing this call, you’ll likely get on the mailing list for that school’s athletic camp, but you’ll also gain some insight on which national camps have the best instruction, the best exposure and the best experience. Remember, assistant coaches at the collegiate level have multiple jobs over the course of the year. Obviously, their primary job is coaching and recruiting for their current program; but, in the meantime, they need to increase their contacts with potential recruits (and potential future employers), so they hit the road for a slew of summer camps every year. If there’s a wellspring of knowledge about which camps work well and which camps do not, it’s with the assistant coaches of your local college team.

Some Hints Concerning Camps:

• **Have a Goal** – If you are a sophomore (rising junior), is it skills acquisition? Then listen and practice. You are setting the stage for future development. If you are a junior (rising senior), is it college contacts? Then make sure to introduce yourself to the coaches in attendance, ask questions about their program, learn nuances of how recruiting affects your sport, etc. Talk to the camp director about your ability and where it might fit in with college. Figure out what you want out of your camp experience and don’t waste the opportunity to gather good information and contacts.

• **Show Up in Shape** – It sounds obvious, but if one of your goals is to be noticed by a college coach, spending three days chasing other players around the field because they are in better shape than you are is a wasted opportunity.

• **Be a Good Learner** – Don’t be afraid to ask lots of questions and try out the answers. Coaches look for athletic ability, obviously, but they also look for “coachability.” The coach will be thinking, “Will this athlete listen when I try to give instruction? Is there an attitude problem? Can this player handle being corrected?”

• **Skills Instruction is as Important as Game Time Exposure** – Think Big Picture. If the aim of an afternoon skills session at a soccer camp is to develop your
off-foot, don’t be afraid to fail, and certainly don’t be afraid to push the limits of your ability. One, it’s just smart for the overall development of your game. Two, smart coaches and smart athletes know that it’s far too easy to practice the skills you’re good at performing, but the truly successful players practice the skills they’re not especially adept at performing. So, if after the off-foot session you are spotted sticking around to practice the techniques you just learned, you’ll be noticed for your mental game, which leads us to…

- **Know That You Are Being Watched** – While your pure athletic ability will carry you far, your secondary skills and overall attitude will carry you farther in college coaches’ eyes. How do you interact with other players? Do you hustle at all times? How do you deal with referees? Politeness counts here as anywhere. Coaches want to build teams with camaraderie, spirit and ability, so any hint that you could be divisive by your attitude will be noticed by those coaches more vividly than your 40-yard time.

Given the continuum of instruction, exposure, experience and fun that the summer camps can produce, there’s little doubt that you should include these camps as part of your self-recruitment strategy. Whether your goal is skills acquisition, connections with college coaches for recruitment or the opportunity for an accurate, unbiased assessment of your athletic abilities, summer camps give you the opportunity to facilitate your self-recruitment more than almost any other factor.

**Identification & Evaluation: Videotapes**

Walk into an athletic department at virtually any time of year and you’ll find an assistant coach sequestered in a darkened audio-visual room poring over miles upon miles of video. Video has long been used by team sports to evaluate game performances, but the use of videotapes or DVDs in more individual sports such as golf, gymnastics or tennis has increased in the last decade for two main reasons. First, as the technology has become more and more widespread, coaches and individuals at every level of competition, including high schools, have access to recording and editing equipment that was available to only top level programs and professionals twenty years ago. Second, as athletes have become bigger, stronger and tend to focus in on their sport year round with more ferocity, coaches and players are looking for any new keys to success they can find. You’ll often find professional baseball coaches describing how one of the major differences in hitters today versus thirty years ago is the continuous video analysis that takes place. A successful hitter who is video driven will often have clips of every single at-bat over the course of his season or he’ll watch video of the upcoming starting pitcher to chart tendencies. When he dips into a slump, he can look back on past at-bats to help diagnose where he’s somehow changed his
swing. During the season he might dissect minutia of his upcoming opponent by looking for weaknesses in the defense or tendencies on offense.

Do you need to rise to this level of commitment to visual aid to become a college athlete? Certainly not, but you should know that one of the offshoots of the new, ubiquitous video age is that coaches have leapt aboard the video bandwagon for recruiting as well as for game planning. Hockey coaches can’t physically watch all 800 potential recruits that they have in their database, but they can use their off-season/recruiting season to evaluate a player via video. Every winter the football offices of virtually every college program have boardroom length tables littered with videotapes and DVDs of their rising recruiting class. If one of the first jobs in self-recruiting is to get yourself noticed and known by the college coaching community, the videotape can go a long way to help you into the process.

If you decide to use video as a recruiting tool – and if you can, you should – you need to showcase two distinct aspects of your performance: game highlights and skills. Therefore, whether it’s two separate submissions or one well-edited tape or DVD, make sure both components of talent evaluation appear for the coach. A skills tape showcases the individual, specific abilities that an athlete needs to be successful in his or her sport. Stick handling, dribbling a basketball, throwing common pass patterns, etc. – these are the skills that you practice as part of your normal preparation to develop confidence and competence, while enabling you to succeed in your game day performance. The skills tape gives the college coach a chance to see how much you’ve developed, how he or she might be able to improve your performance or how he or she might make you a better player than you already are right now. If, as a baseball recruit, you believe that your speed will be a strength, it’s not amiss to include a clip of a first-to-third sprint with the stopwatch in the foreground. It bears saying that you need to have some self-awareness, however. If you are a female high school basketball player who can dunk, that’ll work just fine on a skills tape; but if you are a high school football player who only bench presses 160 pounds, the coaches don’t want to see it. If you can kick a 50- yard field goal, absolutely get a shot of it on tape; but if you’ve developed a talent for hitting half-court shots, that skill doesn’t usually fit into a normal man-to-man offensive set in basketball, and it would look like you are fooling around instead of being serious about your sport.

If you are in doubt about what to include on your skills tape, call up a local collegiate program and ask them directly what skills they evaluate when they assess talent and what they would suggest you put onto a skills tape.

*In any case, make your tape concise and to the point, quickly moving through your video clips to showcase the skills that would make you a successful college athlete.*
The second aspect of your video should be excerpts from successful competitions: the better the competition, the more it should be included. Everyone knows pick-up basketball players who can rain three pointers when they are just shooting around, but as soon as you get a hand out in their face? Nothing. College coaches know this intuitively and professionally, of course, so they’d like to see how well you perform against live competition. If you can edit down your performances to include the highlights from your most recent season, do so. Some tips for your highlight video:

- **Keep it short** – A coach shouldn’t need to sit there and wait till your highlight appears. They’ll move relatively quickly through their initial assessment, so boring them or drawing on their time is a sure way to get you in the “look at it later” pile.

- **Identify yourself** – One football coach we spoke with laughed when talking about a tape he’d received with no indication of who the player was supposed to be. No number, no position, nothing. Ironically, he ended up recruiting a different player from the one who sent the tape.

- **Provide the situational context** – If it’s a conference championship game or the state finals, make sure they know. If you are playing against your arch rivals and the pressure is fierce, let them know that as well. There’s no harm (and potentially great benefit) in giving them a description of the clips.

- **Give highlights and a longer sample** – While part of your tape will be snippets of strong performances, certainly, you should still have a section of your submission that shows the full ebb and flow of your particular sport. Coaches want to see what you do when you aren’t the center of attention during a contest, so give them the opportunity to evaluate you fully.

- **Make it easy on the coach** – If you can’t edit the tape and you are sending a single game tape, provide a quick table of contents to guide them based on the number counter on the machine. This goes beyond “I have at-bats in the first, third and sixth inning on the tape”, but instead should read, “My at-bats appear at counter number 160, 388, and 612 on this tape.” As you might imagine, DVD’s make this remarkably easy.

- **Keep up the contact** – Send in your résumé with the tape, even if you’ve already mailed it with your letter of introduction. Things get lost, coaches change jobs, different assistants have different opinions, so keep the information out there with your materials.
• **Label everything** – Remember, you are trying to make this as easy as possible for them, so make sure everything you send has your name, school, hometown, email address and both home and cell phone numbers.

Follow up your videotape submission with a phone call. This doesn’t mean that if you mail the tape on a Monday you should call the following Monday; but it does mean that you should pursue the evaluation. Stagger the follow-up phone call depending on your sport and what time of year you fall into the recruiting cycle. If your sport is lacrosse, for example, and your season has just ended, send in your tape as part of your self-recruitment as the school year ends. Then call mid-summer to see if any of the coaches are interested. Chances are they’ll call you right away if you’ve hit the mark, as you might imagine, but even if they are not interested in recruiting you, the phone call enables you to continue with your own self-assessment. A coach might tell this lacrosse player that he’s already secured commitments at his position, so he won’t be recruiting him, but he can also tell him at what level he can play so he can target his self-recruiting accordingly.

**Self-Recruiting: Follow-Up Contact and Communication**

In self-recruiting, your main task is to reverse the flow of information. When coaches recruit players, they roughly follow the standard Timeline as we’ve described in order to flesh out their incoming class. You’ll need to follow that Timeline, yes, but you will also need to fill in the gaps in the process for those coaches. They haven’t sent you a questionnaire? You send them one. They haven’t requested a videotape? You provide one for them. They aren’t currently recruiting you? You help them to recruit you through your own contact.

Once you’ve passed though the identification phase, sent out a slew of videotapes, mailed your Letters of Introduction, and made sure a full slate of coaches and programs have your athletic résumé. Now what? Well, if things go well, you’ll start to receive email responses from the programs, written questionnaires in the mail and perhaps even a quick phone call from an assistant coach or a recruiting coordinator to check in with you. While the latter is somewhat unlikely at this stage in the process, do not take that as a lack of interest. At this stage of the Timeline the coaches are assembling their A, B, and C lists and are starting to organize the depth and breadth of their recruiting lists. There’s time to go yet. Does this mean that you should sit tight until the fall hits and hope for the phone to ring? Absolutely not.

Your goal at this stage is to have all the rhythms of regular athletic recruiting in the works with follow-up communication and email contact, even if you need to be the active agent of this communication. Once you have set things in motion:
• Respond to any requests for information.
• Never break contact for a significant period of time.
• Develop a similar relationship with the admissions office by arranging interviews, requesting applications, and/or making campus visits.
• Forward information regarding tournaments, showcase camps or other opportunities for a coach to evaluate your abilities.
• Ask questions at every opportunity in order to clarify your standing as an athlete or a recruit.

While you do not want to get into the habit of pestering college coaches to the point of annoyance, self-recruiting means that you need to make sure you are on their radar screen. Get the information you need to accurately assess your particular situation and act as your own catalyst for the recruitment process. All of this involves responsible follow up on your part.

**Self-Recruiting: Phone Calls**

So it’s the middle of July and the phone hasn’t been ringing. Is this a problem? No, it’s not a problem, but it serves as a reminder that you will have to be your own agent for recruitment; and given where we are in the timeline, your role in self-recruitment shifts gears. It’s time to get yourself on the “phone list.” As we’ve discussed at length, just because you aren’t considered a blue-chip Division I prospect in your junior summer does not mean you’re prevented from playing your favorite sport in college. However, it does mean that you need to take charge. As the summer unfolds, it’s now time to follow up on your Letters of Introduction and your questionnaires with your potential colleges. Given that you’ve sent information to a wide number of schools, you have a great deal of work to do when you begin your follow-up. In the traditional process, coaches call recruits to look for information on their interest in the college and on their interest in the program. They will also get any academic information they might need to determine whether they will be able to support the recruit. Flip it around. You’ve already done the research on each particular college and you have an introductory level of knowledge on each program, so you need to facilitate a reverse path of information to get to the finer details of self-recruitment. Start the phone calls to coaches, talk to all your potential schools and ask questions along these lines:

Have they received your information/questionnaire/Letter of Introduction?

**If No:** Introduce yourself right then and there to the coach and discuss the best way to get your information to him or her. Ask about their recruiting process, their time-
line, and the best way to contact the program again once they’ve evaluated you.

**If Yes:** Have they looked at your materials? Your tape? Your résumé? Is there anything else they might need to better evaluate your ability?

What’s their assessment of your athletic ability? Can you play at their level?

**If No:** Ask for specifics. Why not? Size? Speed? Can you improve your athletic standing in any way that would make it possible? Based on their analysis, where could you play? Which level? Which potential school at that level? Do they have any suggestions as to coaches or programs you could talk to that would be a good fit?

**If Yes:** Talk about your interest in their program, the college and what you are doing currently to improve your athletic standing. Discuss ways for further evaluation, e.g., camps you are attending, summer athletic contests, potential unofficial visits to campus, etc.

Are they interested in you at all as a player and potential recruit?

**If No:** Press for specifics. Why not? A logjam at that position? They’ve already filled their recruiting class at that spot for this year? Find out what could make you a recruit at that school eventually. If, in the end, it seems like a dead end, again, ask them where you could play. Which level? Which potential schools at that level? Do they have any suggestions as to coaches or programs you could talk to that would be a good fit?

**If Yes:** Talk about your interest in the program and the college at length. Discuss opportunities for further evaluation as listed above. Discuss visits to campus, either official or unofficial. Begin to develop a relationship with that coach and program.

If the coach supports your application based on your ability, are you admissible at that college?

**If No:** Find out why. Recruiting restrictions? Academic standing? Standardized tests? What could be done, if anything, to change your admissibility at that institution?

**If Yes:** Ask about ways to strengthen your application nonetheless. Ask about what needs to take place for them to support your application.

If the coach does not support your application, does he or she have a walk-on policy which would allow you to participate if you were admitted to the college of your own accord?
If No: Move on. If they cap squad sizes, they are not interested in you athletically at this point, and they only allow recruited athletes on the team, you either get yourself on that recruiting list via ability and interest or you keep looking. This is a crushing confluence of factors. It negates any opportunity for you to play there and its one of the reasons that you start with a broad list of potential schools.

If Yes: Get the details. How many walk-ons have they had in the past? What’s the process for trying out? What’s their philosophy? Will anyone who tries out be able to practice?

Finally, make sure you have a clear sense of what the next step is in the process for your self-recruitment at each college. Do you need to call back in two weeks? Do you need to send more information? Do you need to make arrangements to visit the school? Who will be in contact with whom at the next signpost for recruiting? Will they call you once they’ve reviewed the tape? Should you call once you have your new SAT scores in?

Don’t allow for issues to be unclear. You aren’t pushing the coach to the point of rudeness, of course, but you do want to know what the next step will be so you can follow it. Write it down in your logbook or recruiting diary so you do not forget. Repeat the next step aloud on the phone to make sure there’s no miscommunication. Be clear, polite and firm that you will take the next step in recruiting if it’s your responsibility or that you will be expecting the coach to take the subsequent step.

In both cases, make sure you know what’s supposed to happen next in the recruiting process, when it’s to happen and who will initiate it.

The overarching goal of this conversation (and every subsequent one, really) is that you have a clear understanding of where you fit with that college in its recruiting timeline and its assessment of your athletic abilities. This clear understanding may be painful or it may be hopeful, but either way, it needs to be clear. Asking good questions gains you a measure of understanding as to where you fit within the larger recruiting process and in the estimation of that specific athletic program. Remember, though, that this is just one source of information. If you are self-recruiting well, you have many more sources yet to mine and many possible paths by which to reach your goal. Most importantly, however, is with that one phone call and with your list of questions, you’ve inserted yourself onto their phone list, the process is underway and the train is now rolling down the track with a little more momentum.
Self-Recruitment: Official/Unofficial Campus Visits

As we discussed in the section on “Recruiting – The Coach’s Perspective,” if you are invited for an official NCAA visit, you are considered one of the priorities for that particular program. Your travel will be paid for by the school, you’ll be allowed to visit for 48 hours with an assigned host and all costs for meals, entertainment, etc. will be picked up by the athletic program. You will see the facilities, meet the coaching staff, sit in on classes, listen to a discussion by the admissions office on the qualities of the school, and on and on. You are, by definition, being recruited, and their goal is to have you walk off that campus after 48 hours and be so impressed by the scope and quality of the program that you are willing to sign on.

If you are self-recruiting, however, it’s unlikely that you’ll be grabbing one of those limited spaces for official visits. Once again you’ll need to turn the process on its head by organizing visits on your own. Go down your list of colleges and prioritize your visits based on the following set of criteria:

Division III vs. Division I – Division III schools do not have official visits. They have limited recruiting budgets and so they respond the most favorably to students making the effort to visit campuses on their own. Your time spent on a Division III campus is valuable to a coach. On the flip side, Division I schools are more likely to have restrictive walk-on policies, and they are more likely to have well-defined recruiting lists. If you are not invited for an official visit, you are getting a clear signal from that Division I university where you are in their plans. If you have to prioritize, start with the schools where self-recruiting is something of a necessity – Division III.

Large Universities vs. Small Colleges – You’ll find that there’s quite an overlap among the divisions and the size of the institutions, but it’s not absolute. Smaller colleges, however, are the institutions that rely most heavily on an admission practice defined as “demonstrated interest,” which is a fancy term for your showing how much you desire to attend the college by how often you contact it. Given this practice, prioritize the smaller colleges first, and make sure to go through the complete admissions process – interview, tour, information session. Larger universities are less likely to track interest because their applicant pools are too large for it to factor in their decision making. Further, they often have more flexible admission policies as a result of the size of the incoming class. If you find yourself deciding to try to walk on at a Division I university, your minimal contact with the admissions office will not be a factor in the application.
**Contact vs. Silence** – Follow-up with the colleges that have shown the most interest via the initial contact stages. While this may seem obvious, it won’t be so obvious when you find yourself daydreaming about your top choice, alpha-dog college. It will be very easy for you to think to yourself, “If I can just talk to the folks at Florida, I know that I can convince them I can play football there.” No, you won’t, actually, or you likely won’t to the point where Urban Meyer will put you on his recruiting list. Your athletic ability is the only criterion which will do that, so if your tape and résumé do not get you through the front door, your loquacious self certainly won’t. Remember, your overarching goal in self-recruitment is to play your sport in a college that fits you best, so you obviously need to start with the colleges where your athletic ability fits best. How do you know where you fit best? Keep an eye on which college keeps you on the weekly email contact list versus the one where you hear only stony silence.

Once you have your campus visits selected, you have two constituencies to approach – the athletic office and the admissions office. Neglect neither.

**Self-Recruiting: Campus Visits**

We cannot emphasize enough that self-recruitment mirrors the traditional recruiting path, so when you are ready for your campus visit, contact the coach well in advance, let them know of your intended visit and take charge of the information pathway. If you were being recruited, for example, the coach would want to impress you with the quality of the school’s facilities, the passion and ability of the coaches, and the athletic opportunities that the college presents. If you are self-recruiting, you need to impress them with your knowledge of their program, your thorough commitment to your sport, and the depth of your personal character. Remember, at the very least, you will most likely have an opportunity to meet with an assistant coach, so you need to make an impression that leaves that coach with the desire to have you become a part of their program.

How do you accomplish this goal? First, do your homework before you arrive. You can find volumes of information on the specific program, coaching staff and athletic department simply by poking around on the internet, whether it comes from a conference website or the college’s website. Though it comes from a different context, know that nothing annoys a potential employer more than conducting a job interview where the potential employee knows little about the company. Now, imagine if you were a coach and you sat down with a potential player who was completely ignorant of that college and the program. You’d most likely feel that your time was being wasted, right? If you were an A-List recruit and you were on an official visit, the coach’s job would be to give you that information while trying to make that positive impression on you. If you are self-recruiting, you do not have that luxury and you need to be in the know from the start.
Do something as simple as contacting the sports information director at the college to get a copy of the latest media guide. Through that small effort you’ll have information on players, opponents, coaches, recent success of the program, etc., right at your fingertips. Ask the admissions office for any information on the athletic program or on your particular sport, as oftentimes admissions willingly and openly serves as a conduit for self-recruitment. Contacting the admissions office addresses the “demonstrated interest” factor already discussed, your name is passed through the rhythms and patterns of institutional tracking at the college, and depending on the structure of the school, you might find out the philosophy of the institution’s athletic program. At some colleges, you will find yourself receiving a full slate of relevant information written by the head coach and specifically designed for students trying to connect to their program. All this information exists at the college; you need only ask. Do your homework before you visit – it can only help your cause.

Second, be thoroughly prepared and organized for your visit. Have copies of your athletic résumé, your letter of introduction, your schedule of competitions, your camp list, your athletic tapes/DVD’s, etc. when you arrive on campus. Why have all this if you’ve already sent it in? Because you want to facilitate the impression of your commitment, highlight your organizational abilities, showcase your personal responsibility, and maximize the opportunity your visit presents. While it’s a bit of a generalization, athletic programs and coaching staffs tend to be somewhat disorganized in the off-season. Even if the program you are visiting perchance has a seamless recruiting methodology, they are nevertheless constantly juggling the needs of players, the movement of coaches in and out of the programs, wrangling with the athletic department and keeping track of many, many more recruits than they will bring in. They likely have a dozen other balls in the air as well. It’s organized chaos. Plus, in the summer they are likely to be short-staffed in the office, and the person you might have been in contact with during your self-recruitment might not be the person you sit down with on your visit. If you have all your pertinent materials available when you walk through that office door, you will never have to say, “Oh, I’ll send that to you when I get back home.”

Third, be articulate in your interest in the program, passionate about your sport, and mature about your interactions on the visit. Think about it from the coach’s perspective. They are trying to build a team of athletes, yes, but even more importantly, they are trying to build a successful team. The only way they can do that effectively is if they have committed players, responsible individuals and enthusiastic teammates. If you are self-recruiting right now, by definition, you are not an athletic priority for the program. Even so, by giving the coaching staff a reason to consider you as a possible positive contributor to the team, you open up the opportunity for that staff to consider you.

One further – but yet very important – hint for these visits. Do your best to keep your parents out of the front line, even if it means they end up sitting in the car until you grab them for the tour of the athletic facilities. Why? Because one of the great fears and
frustrations for coaches is the over-influence of parents on a student-athlete. If a coach feels that the self-recruitment is in any way driven by a parent instead of the individual student, it sends up glowing red flares of potential trouble down the line. Whether that particular reaction is warranted or fair is irrelevant. It happens. The absolute last sequence you want to have happen on your visit is for your parent to walk into a coach’s office first, inadvertently start talking about your interest in the program before you’ve had a chance to speak, and then hand the discussion off to you to fill in the gaps. That sequence says to a coach, “The parent wants the kid to play and the kid is being pushed along for the ride.” Even if it isn’t true, as a self-recruited athlete, you simply cannot take the chance of giving the coach a moment’s pause about your commitment.

**Self Recruiting: Campus Visits - The Admissions Office**

While the mantra throughout these chapters has been about finding a place where you can continue your sport in college, you certainly have to be admitted to that college first, right? Well, if you look closely at the college admission process, you’ll notice that the athletic and academic sides of the equation reflect each other, even while they simultaneously support each other. Colleges will look at your academic credentials to evaluate your intellectual talent and then decide to recruit you by their admission and matriculation efforts in exactly the same way that coaches evaluate your athletic talent and decide to recruit you. There’s only so much you can do to control the evaluation of yourself athletically or academically, but given that there are two sides to being a student-athlete, ignore neither in your self-recruitment. On your campus visit, therefore, you must show a sincere interest in your dealings with the admissions office; that tells them you are a student first and an athlete second. Remember, in reality, you are exactly that.

Secrets and strategies of the college admission process are topics worthy of many more chapters than can be contained here, but if you follow the same principles for the admission side of your visit, you will maximize your opportunities. First, do your homework regarding the college in question. When you have your interview on campus in the admissions office and then later when you will be filling out the application, you will need to have breadth and depth of knowledge about the institution. Scour websites, order viewbooks, read widely on the institution in guidebooks and other resources. Overall, try to gather as much specific information as you can about programs, classes, professors, and the philosophy of the institution. This serves the dual purpose of giving you insight into the nuances of the college, which will help you decide if you would like to attend, obviously, but it will also give you the information to be able to answer questions in your interview and on your application. Why are you interested in the college? Why do you wish to pursue your particular major? What specifically about the school makes it attractive to you? Why are you a good fit? You can only answer those questions if you’ve done your background
research, and once again, imagine yourself as the admissions officer in an interview who is asking these questions. How would you feel if the only thing your interviewee knew about the college was that they had a football team? You’d be offended, of course, because the student side of the student-athlete ledger had been ignored.

Second, be thoroughly prepared and organized for your visit to the admissions office. Bring an extra-curricular résumé and a transcript with you to the interview. Make sure that you are on time and prepared to answer the style of questions posed above. Dress appropriately. Ask intelligent questions in the information session. (Yes, they will remember you.) Be able to articulate your interest in the college with detail and specificity. Display passion about your academic and extra-curricular interests when asked in the interview. Be mature about your interactions on the visit, all the way through to the end when you send your interviewer a thank you note for the time. Admissions offices consider themselves team builders as well, only it’s an oversized team made up of the entire incoming class of first year students in their case. Nevertheless, the criteria for selection and recruitment remain the same. Admissions offices add students to their “team” who are committed to their academics, who are passionate about the institution and who would make good roommates and classmates by virtue of their character, maturity and responsibility. Do your best to show them during the campus visit and thereafter that you are exactly the kind of person they want on their team.

**Self-Recruiting - Official Support from the Coach**

All the evaluative materials you have assembled for the coaching staffs, all the contact via email, phone calls and campus visits you’ve initiated, and the entire reversal of the flow of the recruiting process is designed to gain you a place in college to play your sport – that is the overall point. But the trigger for gaining that place will come from the support you receive from a coach at that institution, a measure of his or her interest in you which comes in two forms. First, primary support from a coach comes from advocacy of your candidacy in the admissions office. If you are on a coach’s formal recruiting list, you have been offered a letter of intent, you’ve been given a preferred walk-on spot, or you’ve been officially ‘tagged’ in some way so as to identify you as an institutional priority via athletics, then you have primary support. Second, a coach can support your participation on the team separate from where the admission and athletic office intersects. If the athletic program you are interested in has a walk-on policy or has no limits as to squad size, that coach can support your presence on his or her team by virtue of simply telling you that you are welcome to join the team, under the assumption that you will be admitted to that college based on your own academic merits.
Understanding these two differing levels of coaches’ support is crucial to your success in achieving your goals, as your advanced planning regarding potential institutions needs to come full circle on this pivot point. Think back to all those questions you asked yourself about what’s important to you in college athletics. Division I, Division II or Division III? Guaranteed place on the squad versus trying out? Scholarship versus non-scholarship? Willingness to travel far from home? NCAA versus NAIA? After answering those questions, you created a well-defined goal for your self-recruitment, but now that you have the luxury of perspective and information, you know that the broader you set the parameters for your goal, the better chance you have in achieving it.

Look at it this way. One extreme of your athletic goals would be to say that you want a Division I scholarship offer close to home. Given the restrictions this goal presents, your options are limited at this end of the spectrum, and a very specific set of successful conditions would need to come into alignment for it to happen. The other extreme is to say you want to be on a team in any division or athletic body in the U.S., so long as you are participating in your sport. Given the flexibility and sheer number of opportunities this goal presents, your success is virtually guaranteed at this end of the spectrum. No matter where you fit on this spectrum of goals, however, you need coaches’ support, whether it’s primary or secondary. And, if you’ve done your research into potential institutions correctly, you will have a list of potential colleges that support your goals.

The tricky part of understanding the intersection of coaches’ support and your goals is that while the first type of support is preferred, and will most likely facilitate your participation in college, having the second mode of support somewhere on your college list is critical. Let’s suppose you did everything right. Your letter of introduction gets you on School X’s recruiting list. Your game and skills tape hits home and the coaches are confident you can play for them. Your campus visit goes great, your parents love the school, and you can see yourself on the team based on the players you’ve met. You aced the interview, you submitted the application on time and have done well academically. You are in constant contact with the program over the course of the summer and fall. They want you: you want to go there; moreover, you are on their official recruiting list. One problem – the admissions office makes the decision, not the coaching staff. Even after everything you did right and all the primary support you received from the athletic program, the admissions office could turn around and deny your application from the student side of the student-athlete side of the equation. Most frustratingly, you might not have any idea why. Perhaps it is a financial aid issue and your application for aid put you in a different admission sub-pool. Possibly the director of athletics made another sport a priority and cut back on the spaces or scholarships available to yours. Maybe it was a selectivity issue, because the applicant pool that year swelled beyond belief. You can spin yourself into the ground coming up with scenarios as to exactly how the “no” decision could come down from the admissions office, but the fact is that it happens, and you need to plan for it.
Go back to your overall goal. It doesn’t matter which end of the spectrum of self-recruitment you find yourself on, your application strategy must have the secondary type of coaches’ support somewhere – i.e. there needs to be a school on your college list where you are welcome to play if you are admitted. If you are on the end of the continuum where success is only defined by Division I, then you must have a Division I school (or a path to a Division I school) on your list where you will be admitted on your own academic merits. At that extreme, you may need to find a powerful community college program that’s known for placing athletes into Division I scholarship schools as transfers to achieve your goal. If your goal is to play anywhere at any division, you will need to have a college (preferably more than one) where you know you will be admitted and you know from that coach that they’ll take you on the team if you show up for pre-season practice.

The frustrating tales of athletic recruiting gone awry would all disappear if prospective student-athletes would remember this one point described above. The bewildering stories of great athletes having their careers end at their high school graduation would vanish if they would follow that singular piece of advice, so let us repeat it for emphasis. You will undoubtedly achieve your goal of playing your sport in college if you hold on dearly to this one mantra – you must have colleges on your list where you are confident you will be admitted based on your academics and where you have received secondary support from the coach as a potential player. Primary support is wonderful to have, because you have found a coach who openly desires your presence in his or her program, but secondary support means that no matter what happens, you will have found a place to play.

Until you have the letter in your hand, be it a Letter of Intent/scholarship offer at a Division I school or a letter of admission at a Division III school, you must have colleges on your application list that support your overall goal, regardless of what you’ve read, what you’ve been told by a coach, or what you expect to happen in your application. The admissions office determines your potential place in the class, and the coach determines your potential place on the team. Both must exist for your self-recruitment to be successful.

How do you know that you have this support? You ask. In the traditional recruiting process there will be a point at which the coach calls the player and asks for a commitment to attend his or her college and be a part of their program. Again, you reverse the flow of information and turn the process around. As you finalize your college list and prepare your applications, talk to every coach and program you’ve been in contact with to find out one last time where you stand, if you do not already know. Review all the questions and possibilities for participation, ask specific questions about your evaluation, and find out if you will have support with admissions. If you are not on a recruiting list, understand what the walk-on possibilities are and whether you feel comfortable with the possibilities. Cover all the ground you’ve set from the first moment you started your research. Then, make a final appointment with your guidance counselor or college advisor. Ideally that person has been
in the mix all along, of course, but before you send out those applications you need to be
dead-on sure that the schools which serve as the back-up plan for you – the ones where you
will be admitted and where you have an opportunity to achieve your athletic goal – will do
just that from the admission perspective. Once you have all this information, athletic and
academic, you are ready to put your strategy in motion. Whether the timeline has left you
with a fully supported early decision application at a Division III college, an offer of a Let-
ter of Intent at a Division I university or you sit in January with a full slate of applications
to a wide range of schools, programs, and levels of athletic competition, you are ready to
roll. Apply, succeed, and pursue your dream.

If you’ve followed all the advice regarding self-recruitment, been honest with your-
self about your goals, and been organized, proactive and directed about your search for the
next phase in your athletic career, you will undoubtedly have options to continue your sport
in college. There are countless paths to achieve this goal and a myriad of twists and turns
to the possibilities, but you can and will achieve this goal if you put the same commitment
into self-recruitment as you have into your sport.

In the next section, we’ve provided case studies of student-athletes who’ve under-
gone this exact process. The case studies, while fictitious, are based on actual students
and are rooted in the rhythms and factors that affect anyone who self-recruits. It’s likely
you will see something of your own situation in these case studies, so use their successes
and snags to educate yourself before you dive in.
Chapter 5 – Case Studies

In this chapter we present you with case studies of different fictitious student-athletes from various sports, all sorts of academic backgrounds and different socio-economic circumstances. By evaluating the athletic, academic, and personal credentials of these students, you may very well see parts of yourself and your particular situation within the case studies, thereby providing you with a mirror on your own athletic recruitment. Recognizing the connecting threads between these fictitious students and your own recruiting process can only help you down the line, for while the individuals might be made up, the various issues surrounding their candidacies are quite real. Rather than creating examples in each and every sport, however, we have selected three athletes from each of the three high school seasons, as each season of the year has its own particular characteristics and distinct differences. We hope as you read through these case studies that you learn about athletic recruiting from these young men and women. Finding a bit of your own circumstances in these nine stories will also help you appreciate the complexities in your own self-recruiting as it progresses.

While these students are fictitious and the names of the high schools, courses, towns, grades, scores, etc., are all fabricated, the students in the case studies themselves nonetheless resemble student-athletes with whom we have worked over the years. Further, the circumstances in the case studies directly match those of students we have known to go through this process. The college lists and the projected admissions outcomes are equally fictitious, though the colleges and universities listed are very real. Know that the predicted decisions are formulated on our experience working in college admissions and college counseling, so while each set of decisions on a case study might not have 100% correlation to the decisions rendered on an actual application with those characteristics to the colleges listed, you can rest assured that we have seen similar scenarios unfold with students we have worked with over the years. Without question, the rationales behind the proposed decisions in the case studies are undoubtedly similar to those that colleges use in their admission process.

Please note that the academic components of each student in the case studies should only be evaluated within the context of his or her own school. Comparing one student with another across the case studies is simply not appropriate, nor is it the methodology that college admissions offices use. In the actual college application process, each student’s file is solely evaluated within the school context from which it came. Accordingly, the details and circumstances in each case study should be considered exclusive to that particular student-athlete.
The Students

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<th>Fall</th>
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<td>Jennifer</td>
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The Details:

Background: We have provided a detailed description of each student’s family background in order to give you a sense of the personal, academic, social, and athletic circumstances which may impact his or her college process. These details establish an overall context for the student-athlete as he or she enters the college application and athletic recruitment process.

School and Community: Colleges incorporate the specific type of high school a student attends into their decision making rationales, as well as considering any potential influence a student’s community might have on the applicant’s profile. Therefore, we have provided this type of background information for each student in the case study.

The Academic Profile: This section includes a fairly detailed academic picture of each student-athlete. We have standardized the academic profile for consistency, so every student’s grade point average will be cumulative, based on a 4.0 scale and calculated on college preparatory courses only. When appropriate, we will provide such indicators as class rank or percentile ranking to help pinpoint where a student might fall in his or her class. Standardized criteria such as the SAT I - Reasoning Test, SAT II – Subject Test scores, ACT, AP scores, and TOEFL scores will be given when appropriate, as will ratings for such important things as counselor and teacher recommendations.

Providing full teacher recommendations would be overwhelming and potentially distracting for the case studies. Instead, we’ve distilled the thrust of a recommendation into a standardized rating system based on commonly used categories. The scale is as follows:

**Superior**  The instructor considers the particular student one of the best students she or he has taught in his or her teaching career.

**Excellent**  This student is considered by this faculty member to be one of the top academicians in the current year’s graduating class.
Very Good An accomplished student. This student is certainly capable of strong work on the college level and is most likely considered in the top 25% of the graduating class.

Good A solid achiever, though not an academic star, likely found in the top 50% of his/her class.

Marginal Recommended with reservation. This student would be considered an academic risk in college.

Poor Not recommended.

The Athletic Profile: This section puts into context the student-athlete’s relative skill and talent level, as well as giving an insight into the types of colleges that might find the student attractive from an athletic standpoint.

The Process: What transpired in each case will be detailed here. The proposed circumstances behind the projected decisions will be included for contextual understanding.

The Wrap Up: An overview of the application and recruitment process as a whole for the case study, with information provided on each student’s final situation and matriculation decision.

The Case Studies: Fall

“Carol” - Field Hockey

Background: Carol is a four-year senior at Lindonwood Prep, a prestigious private boarding school located somewhere in New England, where she has been a varsity starter on her field hockey team for the past four years. As a senior co-captain, Carol had an outstanding season and led her team to the New England prep championship. As a highly skilled player who plays with intensity and heart, Carol is a coach’s dream. Bright, bubbly and engaging, Carol has also been a major “player” at her school. She is a member of the Student Government, a senior dorm advisor, an active participant in Lindonwood’s community service organization, and a fine lacrosse player as well. Her parents, both college-educated and financially secure, need no financial aid to send Carol to college. Additionally, they fully expect Carol to attend a prestigious college and they consider themselves “well-connected” with people they expect are influential. Carol’s dad is a Princeton graduate who is
actively involved with its alumni association. Understanding just how difficult it is to gain admission to Princeton, even for the daughter of a Princeton alumnus, the father silently struggles with the prospect that his daughter’s chances of gaining admission there are slim. Nonetheless, both Carol and her parents hope to gain admission to the “best” school possible coming out of Lindonwood Prep, which means that the college process is something that has taken on a life of its own in Carol’s household. As Carol is the oldest of three daughters, she and her family have been looking forward to going through the process for some time now.

The Academic Profile: Lindonwood Prep is one of the top private schools in the country. 100% of its graduates move on to four-year colleges and many attend the most prestigious post-secondary schools nationwide. Admission to Lindonwood Prep is highly competitive, so the overall quality of its students is very high. The academic rigor of Lindonwood is considerable and it is not unusual for students to have three or four hours of homework each night. The pressure to perform well academically is intense. Expectations among the students and the faculty to attend top schools are very high, so the competition within the Lindonwood community to gain admission to these schools is extremely keen. Carol’s vital academic data:

- **Cumulative GPA:** 3.4 in a strong though not exceptional program
- **Best SAT I:** 660 Critical Reading / 640 Math / 660 Writing
- **Best SAT IIs: ** US History 650, Chemistry 610
- **Recommendations:** Very Strong
- **Extracurriculars:** Very Strong

By almost anyone’s standards, Carol has crafted a fine overall record. Compared with the other students at Lindonwood, however, Carol’s academic record isn’t quite so exceptional. Even though Lindonwood does not rank its students or weight its courses, savvy admissions officers at the colleges she’s considering know her high school and they know that if rank were available, Carol would sit solidly in the middle of an exceptional senior class. Many of her classmates have taken more challenging academic programs than Carol and have earned higher overall marks. The average GPA for seniors is around a 3.3 and the average SAT I score is around 2010, so relative to her classmates at Lindonwood, Carol is a pretty average student. Carol’s college aspirations are lofty. She very much wants to attend an Ivy League or highly rated small college and hopes that field hockey will be the difference maker in the admission process. Carol is fortunate in that she does not need financial aid, so the high cost of a private education is not a deterrent.

The Athletic Profile: Carol had an outstanding senior year athletically, leading her team to a prep state championship and receiving significant postseason recognition. Accord-
According to her field hockey coach at Lindonwood, Carol is “athletic and highly skilled, a team leader and fierce competitor who, despite her size, can play at the college level.” From a college coach’s perspective, however, Carol has some weaknesses. She’s relatively small at 5’4” and 110 lbs. and she does not possess outstanding speed. While she has attended summer camps and has been “seen” by some college coaches, Carol has not competed in the FUTURES field hockey program, designed for the top high school players across the country to showcase their talents, so coaches simply have not seen her play against superior competition. Though Carol does not know it herself, another concern for the college coaches is that the league in which she competes is not known for producing players who have distinguished themselves in Division I programs. Even though Carol is highly skilled and a wonderful competitor, a lack of size and speed, and the relative weakness of the competition she’s faced are drawbacks for the coaches at the Division I schools.

**Carol’s College Process:** Carol and her family took an aggressive approach to the college process. She and her parents visited quite a number of schools on their own and met with more than a dozen coaches. She did everything right with regard to college recruitment, though she intentionally kept her search narrow. She sent out letters of introduction and highlight tapes to many college coaches throughout the New England and the Middle Atlantic regions, all within 5 hours from her home in Connecticut, the one stipulation her parents put on her search. Carol’s coach at Lindonwood made many telephone calls in support of her candidacy, as did her college counselor. By December of her senior year, Carol had winnowed down her college list to include a few Division I Ivy and Patriot League colleges and a few Division III NESCAC schools.

**Carol’s Colleges and the Decisions:**

**Princeton**

Deny

Carol was not a recruit at Princeton, so despite her legacy status, Carol was simply not compelling in the applicant pool. To make matters more complicated, 30 of her classmates from Lindonwood had applied, many of who were considerably stronger applicants.

**Brown**

Deny

While the field hockey coach showed mild interest, Carol was not one of the athletes supported in the admission process, so much the same scenario occurred in Brown’s admissions office that occurred in Princeton’s. Carol was not academically competitive in the applicant pool without a coach’s support, especially given the quality of the other applicants from Lindonwood.
Colgate
Waitlist

The coach at Colgate was lukewarm about supporting Carol in the admission process, as she hadn’t seen her play and so was unsure of Carol’s talents. Further, the coach felt that the position Carol played was already in good shape at Colgate. In the end the coach decided to support bigger, more physical players in the admission process over Carol.

Bucknell
Accept

The Bucknell coach, having worked with Carol at a summer camp, was looking for highly skilled players like her. What’s more, the coach loved Carol’s upbeat attitude and spirited competitiveness. Carol and the Bucknell field hockey program and coach were a great match!

Amherst
Deny

While the Amherst coach showed modest interest in Carol and indicated this to the admissions office, Carol wasn’t one of the few that the coach supported. As she wasn’t an athletic priority, she was shifted by the admissions office into the regular admission pool at Amherst instead of the student-athlete realm, a place where the small incoming class size makes admission extremely difficult. Given her academic profile and Amherst’s selectivity, Carol was not a strong enough candidate to get through the general pool.

Hamilton
Accept

Strong support from the field hockey coach and a similarly strong overall record were enough to get Carol admitted to this fine school. Hamilton represented another solid match of athletic and academic credentials.

The Wrap Up: The shock of the denial from Princeton was a bit tough to get over for Carol’s family, given their expectations. Once they realized that Carol had two wonderful choices in Bucknell and Hamilton, however, Carol happily began to focus on making a choice between the two schools. By the way, Carol chose not to remain on the waitlist at Colgate as she felt comfortable with her two accepts and thought it best to move on. After much thought and discussion with just about anyone who would listen, Carol chose Bucknell due in large part to its affiliation with the Patriot League, a Division I conference, and it’s bigger size in relation to Hamilton. Things worked out well for Carol and her family.

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“Anthony” - Football

**Background:** The only son in a working-class family of five, Anthony is the first in his family with the inclination and academic credentials to go on to college. His two older sisters both began working immediately after graduation from St. Dominic’s, and ever since he was a young boy growing up in Steel City, Anthony’s parents had plans for him to go to college instead. Anthony’s father, a pipe fitter at the steel mill in town, has worked hard to provide a decent family life, but he is planning to retire in two years. Anthony’s mother, a teacher’s aide at the local Catholic elementary school, has also worked hard to provide a fine upbringing for their children. Bright yet relatively unsophisticated about the college process, Anthony is hoping that football will help him to get into a well-regarded college where he can major in history or business. Relatively few high school students in his community aspire to move out of the city to go to college, but Anthony would like to see another part of the country and is looking at colleges away from home as well.

**The Academic Profile:** St. Dominic’s High is a solid, respectable, Catholic high school of nearly 1400 students which sends just over half of its seniors on to four-year schools. Most of its graduates stay fairly close to home and often attend the Catholic schools in the general area. Known for its tough, competitive football and basketball teams more than for its academic rigor, St. Dominic’s has nevertheless graduated some fine students over the years and has always had a capable, committed faculty who work hard for their students. As a student Anthony has made steady academic progress, gaining in academic confidence and seriousness of purpose, especially during his junior and senior years. A leader in the school community as well, Anthony is well-liked and respected by students and faculty. While his overall record is not particularly impressive, he has clearly trended upward as a student and as a senior he is taking a very demanding academic program that includes Advanced Placement European History, Calculus and English IV Honors. His parents, having never gone to college and generally unaware of the possibilities of need-based financial aid, are a bit frightened and nervous about college recruiters calling and encouraging Anthony to consider their schools, especially those places without athletic scholarships. To make matters worse, Anthony’s guidance counselor, relatively inexperienced in athletic recruiting, has not been able to counsel him all that effectively on the nuances of the process. Nevertheless, Anthony is fired up for the college process and his college stock is clearly on the rise.

**Class Rank:** 96 out of 322  
**Cumulative GPA:** 3.2  
**Best SAT I:** 570 Critical Reading / 590 Math / 520 Writing  
**Best ACT:** 26  
**Recommendations:** Excellent  
**Extracurriculars:** Excellent
The Athletic Profile: Tough and sturdily built at 6’0” and 210 lbs., Anthony was a dominant force on the gridiron, leading his team to an Ohio state ranking and earning individual honors on the all-city team and 3rd team all-state in Ohio, no small feat in this football-rich state. By all accounts, Anthony is good enough to play football at the college level, but the tricky part is that due to his size, college coaches at Division I scholarship schools consider him a bit of a physical risk. The larger Division I schools, while they respect his talent, work ethic, and toughness, still question if he has the size, speed, and athleticism to compete at the middle or high levels of Division I football. The chances of his receiving an athletic grant-in-aid at his beloved Ohio State or another Big Ten university (or even at a Mid-American Conference school for that matter) are slim. The good news is that Anthony can play football somewhere; the trick is to find schools that will either offer him a football scholarship or a financial aid package that will cover sufficiently his significant financial need.

Anthony’s College Process: Anthony’s coach at St. Dominic’s, a veteran of 38 seasons at the school and near retirement, is not typically proactive in helping his players with college recruiting and has not been that much help to Anthony and his family. In brief, as he was not the high profile recruit he and his family had hoped, Anthony was essentially left to his own devices to make sense of his college prospects. He has relied on his guidance counselor, fellow students, an enthusiastic assistant football coach, and some concerned adults in the community who have offered their help. Despite receiving significant interest from schools back East and other parts of the country, Anthony and his family have decided to focus their efforts in Ohio.

Anthony’s College List and the Decisions:

Ohio State Accept

OSU is the school Anthony has always dreamed about attending and, given his in-state status, the price is right. Though he is not a recruited athlete, Anthony will have a chance to walk on in the fall. The OSU coaches have been honest about his chances of making the squad – not very good. Still, they have been nothing but nice to Anthony despite being involved with some of the best high school players in the country.

Bowling Green Accept

Anthony was not a recruited athlete, but his chances of making the team are considerably better than at OSU. Right now he is considered to have a “preferred walk-on” offer and will receive a “fair look” according to the coach. Bowling Green is a fine opportunity, a bit smaller and more manageable for Anthony than OSU, and again, the price is right. If Anthony is able to walk on and make an impact, scholarship money could be on the table in the future.
John Carroll

The football coaches at John Carroll are very excited about Anthony and would love to have him on the team. Receiving a fine financial aid award from John Carroll makes this school affordable for Anthony as well. As it’s close to home, Anthony knows his parents favor this school.

Mt. Union

As a Division III powerhouse in football and a solid academic institution, Mt. Union is an intriguing choice. Anthony likes the small, intimate feel of the school and that it’s not in a large city. The coaches feel Anthony could play there, maybe after a year of growth and increased strength.

The Wrap Up: Anthony and his family were very pleased with the way things turned out. He was able to choose among four fine schools – all different and distinct – and all are roughly the same cost to his family. For quite some time, Anthony was leaning towards Ohio State, as it’s a great university that offers virtually everything under the sun for an eager student like Anthony. John Carroll was high on his list as well because of its proximity to his home. In the end though, Anthony worried that he’d never make the team at Ohio State and really wanted to “go away” to school in a different environment from the streets of Steel City. He decided on Mt. Union, where he would have the chance to play on a Division III national championship contender and where the small, community-like feeling of a school in a small town setting were too much for him to pass up.

“Jennifer” - Soccer

Background: From an early age Jennifer demonstrated unusual talents as a soccer player. She could run faster and longer than anyone else, she could score goals at will and she had highly-developed skills, even as a youngster. By the time she arrived at high school, she was head and shoulders above her peers and she has remained that way throughout her four years. As a senior at Mesa High School in Toby, Texas, Jennifer distinguished herself as an extraordinary player, earning all-state honors for the fourth straight year and making several national select teams. Even when traveling throughout the United States with some of the best high school talent in the country on her select teams, Jennifer was still often the best player on the field. Both parents, lifelong residents of Mesa City, are community college graduates and her father finished his bachelor’s degree from the University of Texas at El Paso. Both work good jobs in the city and make a comfortable living together.
Jennifer thinks about soccer obsessively, but her dedication to her education is at the other extreme. In fact, Jennifer simply doesn’t care for school and never has. She’s very social, very family oriented and exceedingly polite and well-spoken, but Jennifer has not really given much thought to the prospect of using her soccer talents to go to college, nor has she made much of a connection between her high school efforts and her college options. Not surprisingly, her academic credentials from Mesa High School are less than stellar, and they appear even weaker to an admissions office when looked at in her school context, as Mesa sends only about 40 percent of its senior class to four-year colleges each year.

**The Academic Profile:** Simply, Jennifer never felt the need to put forth the same type of effort on her academics as she did on her soccer, which now has resulted in a severely limited college picture. Jennifer’s parents felt that she could overcome her academic malaise simply by being encouraged to work harder and by getting extra help around exam times. In the end, it didn’t work, as the problems were rooted in Jennifer’s effort in the classroom, which was tepid at best. By the time Jennifer had reached her senior year in high school, her academic record and her course selection were such that Division I and II colleges held back from recruiting her. In fact, she had only managed to take 14 core units as determined by the NCAA Clearinghouse, two short of the required 16 core units, and thus could only receive a soccer scholarship as a partial qualifier. It took only a quick glance at her transcript for a coach to see that Jennifer didn’t have the requisite GPA in her core courses and thus wouldn’t be eligible to participate right away. Jennifer’s overall GPA was boosted by taking weaker, elective classes, but those were not registered as core courses with the NCAA Clearinghouse. Thus, she fell short of the requirements and enrolling at the University of Texas or one of the other Division I or II schools in Texas as a student-athlete was out of the question. Many college soccer coaches across the country noted her poor academic preparation and general lack of interest in being a student. They backed off from recruiting her, so despite her exceptional talent, Jennifer’s college options were limited.

**Cumulative GPA** 2.22  
**Class Rank** 200 out of 251  
**Best SAT I** 470 Critical Reading / 490 Math / 490 Writing  
**Recommendations** Satisfactory/Marginal  
**Extracurriculars** Limited

**The Athletic Profile:** Jennifer is one of only a handful of female soccer players who have the athletic talent and skill to play at the highest level. Many believe that one day Jennifer will play professional soccer, perhaps even represent the United States in the Olympics – that’s how good she is. There’s very little to add from the athletic perspective. Jennifer has the complete athletic package save one small thing; she chose not to make her academic commitment a priority and now it has affected her prospects for college.
Jennifer’s College List and the Decisions:

Prairie Plains JC       Accept

PPJC is a good option for gaining Division I eligibility, which will hopefully come after Jennifer successfully completes two years of academic work, and could lead to a soccer scholarship as a transfer student. Additionally, if she stays local for college, she could continue training with her club, which in this case is recognized nationally for producing great players and can help her athletic growth concurrently with her academic growth.

Austin College       Conditional Accept

As a fine liberal arts school with a Division III athletic program, Austin College would be a great place for Jennifer to gain the academic confidence and foundation she has missed out on in high school. Note that as a Division III school, AC does not need to adhere to the NCAA regulations regarding core courses. She would be arguably the best soccer player the women’s team has ever landed and so she would be a “big fish” all over again. Concerned over the gap between Jennifer’s ability and her performance, however, Austin required her to attend an intensive summer program before matriculating. If she were to complete it successfully, Jennifer could enroll.

U. Dallas       Deny

While she would clearly be a great recruit, Jennifer is a bit over her head here academically. The admissions office felt that the match was just not right, despite the pressure from the soccer coach, who felt that Jennifer’s presence would bring a much-needed infusion of exceptional talent into their program.

Schreiner University       Accept

This is another good match for Jennifer, as the small classes and caring professors would allow her to grow as a student even while she dominated on the soccer field.

University of Texas at Dallas       Deny

Given her academic record and standardized test scores, Jennifer is not competitive in the UT admission pool, much to the dismay of the coaching staff there.

The Wrap Up: Despite the difficulties, Jennifer does have some good options, though much would depend on what her long-term goals are for her education. Her earlier choices regarding her academic career have left the potential paths somewhat truncated, but luck-
ily she can take some positive steps now. In this case Jennifer decided on Austin College because of its friendly, supportive environment, its strong women’s soccer tradition, and its academic reputation in Texas for developing high-quality teachers in its teacher education program – a possible career path for Jennifer at this time.

As all the interested parties look back on the process, they each have their perspectives and their frustrations. Her coaches would have preferred the junior college option because it would likely have led to the most accomplished athletic opportunity down the road. Her parents had hoped she would get a scholarship, though are relieved that she’s settled on a good college and seems to be moving in the right direction academically. Her guidance counselor, in contrast, is ecstatic about her choice, as Austin will be a great place for Jennifer to develop academic passions and right the ship of her education – finally. Even with the (relatively) happy ending, it’s clear that if Jennifer had put the same effort into her high school academics as she did her soccer, her story would likely have had a far different result.

The Case Studies: Winter

“Eddie” – Wrestling

**Background:** Things have never come easily for Eddie. He lost both his parents as a young child and has spent the past nine years with his grandparents in Campbell, NJ, a blue-collar town located in the southern part of the state. Despite it all, Eddie has always been a positive and spirited young man who enjoyed school and who loved sports. Athletic, quick and unusually strong for his size (5’6” and 120 lbs), Eddie showed an unusual aptitude for wrestling, a sport where his size would not be a detriment. In fact, Eddie’s slight build actually worked to his advantage. A late starter, Eddie didn’t begin with organized wrestling until his freshman year at Campbell High School, a large public high school with a very diverse population and more than its share of problems. Still, Eddie was able to navigate the system at Campbell and managed to earn a respectable academic record. While he was not placed in the honors track, Eddie earned solid marks in a mostly college prep course of study.

Always an enthusiastic reader, Eddie spent a good part of his time buried in books of all types, and he developed a love for the works of the poets and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Ask him anything about the works of James Baldwin or Langston Hughes and Eddie could respond with passion and interest. Perhaps most interesting is what Eddie had chosen to do with his passion. Over the summer he organized a reading table in his local library where children of all ages would gather to discuss the works of many of the Harlem Renaissance authors. He even went so far as to incorporate this reading table concept in
his church and elementary school, both programs meeting with great success. Active in his church, Eddie was a member of the church choir that traveled fairly extensively. Thanks to his high school wrestling coach, Eddie had someone looking out for him throughout his high school career, making sure that he did his schoolwork and that he had the right opportunities to improve as a wrestler.

The Academic Profile: Campbell High School, well known for its great basketball, football and track teams, has produced more than its share of famous athletes. Its academic reputation, however, has not kept pace. Still, there was plenty of academic challenge for attentive students like Eddie. There are some high points to his academic program, including Eddie’s performance in his English classes – A’s across the board – but in other areas where there are clearly some gaps in his background, namely math and science, Eddie struggled. As a senior, Eddie took on the toughest program he could handle, successfully arguing his way into AP English and “wrestling” with the difficult concepts in Precalculus with enthusiasm. Eddie’s academic vitals:

- **Cumulative GPA:** 2.9
- **Class Rank:** 178 out of 460
- **SAT I:** 670 Critical Reading / 490 Math / 650 Writing
- **Counselor Rec:** Very Strong
- **Teacher Recs:** Excellent
- **Extracurriculars:** Excellent

The Athletic Profile: Eddie had made some noise in the sport by the time he was a junior. He placed second in his district tournament and then in the regional tournament he surprised everyone by finishing second and earning a trip to the NJ state tournament, where he unfortunately lost in the first round. Thanks to his high school coach, Eddie was able to attend wrestling camps in the summer of his junior year, where he was named to Team New Jersey and competed in the Junior National Tournament. He wrestled surprisingly well in this highly competitive environment and caught the eye of a number of college wrestling coaches. As a senior Eddie was that much better, finishing 3rd in the state at 112 lbs. Many coaches began recruiting him because of his considerable potential and for his meteoric rise in the sport, noticing that he was “trending up” in a remarkable way.

While a compelling candidate on a number of different levels, Eddie had some issues to contend with, not the least of which was money, so the affordability of his future college was going to be a major factor in his decision. Eddie’s college list was mostly derived from the influence of his high school coach, who attempted to guide him into the best athletic matches he could find.
Eddie’s College List and the Decisions:

College of New Jersey  Accept

TCNJ is a very well-regarded state school in New Jersey with a fine Division III athletic program. Eddie gave it serious consideration, especially as his high school coach had attended TCNJ.

U. Pennsylvania  Deny

Despite being recruited by this Ivy League school, the admission staff felt that there were too many questions surrounding Eddie’s academic preparation. The wrestling coach at Penn encouraged Eddie to consider a postgraduate year, where he could gain the necessary academic background to be successful at such a demanding school.

Rutgers  Accept

As one of the leading research universities in the country, Rutgers is a wonderful choice for many talented students from New Jersey. Eddie would surely be challenged academically at Rutgers, as well as having the opportunity to be part of an up-and-coming wrestling program.

Franklin and Marshall  Accept

F & M, located in Lancaster, PA, is an excellent small liberal arts college with a Division I wrestling program, so Eddie would be well served here on multiple fronts. Eddie found the F & M coach to be unusually helpful and supportive, making the school even more appealing.

Rowan  Accept

Rowan would be a good option for Eddie in that he’d be close to those who have supported him, he would be challenged by the academic rigor and the financial aid package was a workable one.

Blair Academy  Accept

As a boarding school with a nationally recognized wrestling program, wrestlers like Eddie have come to Blair for years to bolster their academic and athletic skills during an extra year of “seasoning.” Eddie and his coach know that doing an extra year of high school would open doors at schools for Eddie that wouldn’t be available right out of high school,
though a post-graduate year is not a common option among his classmates and community. Still, the fact that Eddie considered such an option showed everyone that he was trying to think of any possible way to positively affect his education.

The Wrap-Up: Eddie had received some great college news by the first week in April – admission to most all the schools to which he had applied, save Penn. Even the disappointment of the denial at Penn was softened somewhat when the coach told him that with another good year of schoolwork as a PG, his chances of gaining admission the following year would be very strong. Overwhelmed and mostly confused by his choices, Eddie sought everyone’s help – his minister, his high school coach, his guidance counselor – all of whom encouraged him to strongly consider Rutgers, arguably the best choice given Eddie’s interests. Truth be told, Eddie’s first choice had always been Rutgers. He loved the bustle of its big campus, the diversity, the outstanding academics, and the Division I wrestling. So, while he liked the coach and the family-like atmosphere of F&M, longed for the chance to compete for a Division III national championship at TCNJ and the Blair PG option promised potential great things after a year, Eddie chose Rutgers. From Eddie’s standpoint, it was an easy choice, especially once he weighed the financial aid awards. The price was right, the wrestling fit his ability and interests, and the Rutgers’ English Department was more than he could ask for in terms of future mentors and academic strength.

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“Cassandra” - Swimming

Background: Cassie found swimming quite by accident. Repeatedly dragged to her older sisters’ summer club practices by her mother, she decided to try swimming one day out of boredom, choosing to swim laps instead of sitting under an umbrella in a corner reading and waiting for practice to end. As so often happens with those who might resist at first, Cassie fell in love with the sport. By the time she was thirteen, Cassie had joined the USS Swimming team in her hometown of Enchilada, CA, an area where competitive swimming has been a very popular sport since the early 1960’s. In a town such as Enchilada, where there are so many talented swimmers, Cassie luckily developed a real sense of perspective on where her skills fell in the athletic world. Cassie comes from a solidly middle class family. Both her parents are college educated, hold reasonably well-paying jobs, and both are very involved members of their community. Cassie leans towards Catholic colleges in California, which was the direction taken by her older sisters, though her parents and sisters have not put any pressure on her in that regard.

The Academic Profile: Cassie is a brilliant student from a fine Catholic high school that sends nearly all of its graduates on to four-year colleges. Academically she has made excellent use of the work ethic and discipline she’s developed from swimming by pouring it
into her classes. Given all her strengths, Cassie will have many fine options for college; however, there is much for her to consider. First, as a top student who is passionate about her studies, Cassie is looking for true academic challenges as an undergraduate, hoping to attend the best school she possibly can. Second, as an accomplished swimmer but not an elite one, Cassie could make the team at almost any college in the US, but probably not at such places as Stanford, Cal-Berkeley or UCLA, three of the great universities in California. Third, Cassie has the opportunity to head back East, where she would be considered the quintessential student-athlete at colleges that actively seek students with the balance she possesses. Given her parents’ financial situation, she would probably not qualify for any need-based financial aid, though she might be a competitive candidate for merit-based aid because of her stellar academic credentials. Her record from Pedro Rios Catholic:

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<th><strong>Cumulative GPA:</strong></th>
<th>3.99</th>
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<td><strong>Class Rank:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Teacher Rec:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SAT’s:</strong></td>
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**The Athletic Profile:** Cassie has been diligent about her training and has developed into a strong, competitive swimmer, even by California high school standards. In a state rich with swimming talent, Cassie certainly has had her moments, placing in the regional meet (top 16) in the 200 and 500 yd. freestyle events in both her junior and senior years. While that is quite an accomplishment, her times are quite a bit off the top tier of swimmers in the state, who simply compete on a more national level. Cassie has the height (5’9”) and the potential for growth that all college coaches love to see, so she has a sizeable upside as a swimmer. Cassie’s weakness is that she hasn’t fully developed any of the other strokes, so she is not all that versatile in the eyes of the coaches. Her times make her fairly attractive to all but the top 40 programs in the country, but because she’s such a talented student and a wonderful young lady, just about every college coach she’s spoken with has some level of interest.

**The Process:** Cassie is eminently well-prepared for college by anyone’s standard, plus she is a competitive candidate at virtually any school she might consider by virtue of her academic profile. Unfortunately, however, her swimming times are simply not attractive to UCLA, Stanford and Cal-Berkeley, three of her top choices, so while she would fit academically, it’s unlikely she could continue swimming. As swimming in college is a priority for her, Cassie and her USS coach have contacted a number of the Eastern schools where her times are more in line with those of the other women on the teams. The allure of such places as Harvard, Cornell, and Middlebury is strong, and Cassie is
being encouraged to consider these types of schools by her coach and her family. Many of the top Division III schools would love to have her, of course, which has generally added confusion to her college plans, given the view in her hometown that “athletes” compete at the Division I level. In the minds of many people she knows and trusts, anything less than Division I isn’t real college sports. After much debate and discussion, Cassie has come up with the following list of schools:

*Cassie’s College List and the Decisions:*

**Harvard**
Deny

While she was not a strong enough swimmer for it to make a difference in her admission review, Cassie was still a competitive candidate in the admission pool. However, like thousands of highly qualified candidates, Cassie simply didn’t make the final cut given the hyper-selectivity at Harvard.

**Cornell**
Accept

Cassie was offered a place at Cornell, much to pleasure of her family, friends, and high school guidance counselor. The Cornell admissions office simply found Cassie’s application to be unusually well-done and compelling. This wonderful school, with its spectacular campus and outstanding facilities, is very hard to pass up and Cassie knows it. Not surprisingly, it is everyone else’s top choice for Cassie.

**Georgetown**
Accept

Cassie is just the type of student-athlete Georgetown seeks and so she was supported in admission by the swimming coach. The allure of being in Washington, DC is strong for Cassie, as is the chance of attending such a fine school.

**Boston College**
Accept

While not recruited for swimming, Cassie is a rock-solid applicant at this popular school in an engaging and fashionable college town.

**UCLA**
Accept

UCLA is one of the many great state options in California, though swimming there is not a reality for Cassie. A bunch of her friends plan to attend UCLA, which at some levels is comforting, but Cassie has a strong interest in venturing out to a smaller, more community-like environment.
Lafayette

Accept

Lafayette came into the picture when an admission representative came to visit her high school and spoke about the college. Her remarks piqued Cassie’s interest, which was bolstered when the swimming coach recruited her actively. What’s more, Cassie was offered a generous merit-based financial award that made the cost of attendance at the school very affordable.

Kenyon

Accept

Her USS coach encouraged her to apply to this Division III swimming powerhouse. Like Lafayette, Kenyon found Cassie a very attractive candidate and offered her a merit scholarship, though as a Division III school it cannot offer her any financial aid based on her swimming ability.

University of San Diego

Accept

The swimming coach has offered her a partial grant-in-aid, quite an accomplishment for Cassie and a great source of pride for the family. The stunning USD campus, the proximity to home, and its affordability make USD a compelling option.

The Wrap Up: Clearly Cassie hit the college admissions jackpot by being admitted to so many top-flight schools. While she had every reason to lean toward Cornell because of its reputation, Cassie knew that she would pay dearly for the privilege, both in terms of the cost and swimming. The same is true at Georgetown, though the swimming situation was such that she could clearly be a contributor there. In the case of Cornell, Georgetown, and Boston College, Cassie and her family would be paying the full cost of attendance, as her parents did not qualify for any need-based financial aid. Both Lafayette and Kenyon have made generous merit aid offers, which are very attractive and something for Cassie to consider. USD, a fine Catholic school, has offered scholarship money, making it a surprising yet compelling choice. Further, UCLA keeps coming back around in Cassie’s mind as a possibility because of its great reputation, cost and proximity to home. While Cassie’s parents have insisted she not worry about the money and that she pick her college without regard to cost, she questioned whether paying more at the undergraduate level was the smart thing to do. The allure of heading back East was strong, and so was swimming at a Division I school. After her April visits and to the surprise of many, Cassie settled on Lafayette College, due in large part to its generous merit-based aid award, its strong academics and Division I swimming schedule, all wrapped up in a small college environment.

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“Michael” - Basketball

**Background:** Michael has been an exceptional basketball player for as long as anyone can remember. Standing six feet tall by the time he was twelve, he was playing with boys much older than he from an early age, and yet he was still holding his own. Everyone in the rural community of Malaski, Michigan, expected great things from Michael. By the time he reached his senior year at Millard Marshall Regional High School, Michael had earned all-conference and all-state recognition for his hard-nosed play and his leadership. A great kid who has grown up in farm country, Michael has always been a model citizen and fine student. Michael’s family life has been a challenge, however, as Michael’s parents divorced when he was just three and money has always been very tight. Through it all, Michael’s mother has done everything possible to enable Michael to have a fairly normal childhood experience and has been his biggest basketball supporter, driving him long distances to find competition and paying for him to attend summer camps. Like everyone in the rural community of Malaski, Michael’s mother has hopes and dreams of Michael’s earning a basketball scholarship and a free education.

**The Academic Profile:** While not gifted in the classroom, Michael has always been a responsible student and a fine, upstanding citizen at Millard Marshall Regional High School, a relatively small high school in north central Michigan, where about 60% of its graduates regularly attend four-year colleges. Millard Marshall’s students are typically conservative in manner and locally oriented in their college choices. Most choose to attend community college and/or local colleges and universities in Michigan, where public higher education has always been very strong. Throughout his high school years, Michael has challenged himself by taking on the most demanding schedule possible, and as a senior he picked up two Advanced Placement courses in English and US History. While he hasn’t earned the highest marks in his graduating class, Michael has made a point of being an engaged and active learner. What’s more, Michael is a leader among his peers, having been elected as President of the Student Body and a member of the school’s Governing Council. Inducted into the National Honor Society as a junior, Michael has fashioned an impressive overall record.

**Cumulative GPA:** 3.55  
**Class Rank:** 29 out of 160  
**ACT:** 24  
**SAT I:** 530 Critical Reading / 560 Math / 570 Writing  
**Counselor Rec:** Excellent  
**Teacher Recs:** Excellent

**The Athletic Profile:** A four-year starter on the varsity basketball team, Michael has helped Millard Marshall gain respectability in Michigan basketball circles. As senior captain, he
led his team to the state playoffs for the first time in years, earning plenty of recognition for his inspired, determined play in the process. According to his coach, no one plays harder than Michael. On the team he is known for doing the “dirty work,” such as enthusiastically rebounding, passing and setting screens to permit his teammates to play their best. At 6’4” and 185 lbs., Michael is a bit undersized to play forward in college, his natural position. Nonetheless, Michael has always made the most of his talents and has learned to make up for his physical deficiencies by doing the little things that are so important to the game. Hoping to catch the eye of some college recruiters, Michael has gone to play in summer leagues and camps wherever he can. In doing so, Michael has both impressed his summer league/camp coaches and has caught the eye of some college coaches. The underlying problem, however, is that these coaches are from schools he’s just not particularly interested in attending. Michael and his mother are very pragmatic about what may be possible, and they very much hope that he will be able to land that elusive scholarship and free education.

**Michael’s College Process:** Michael and his mother played the college recruiting game well, utilizing the help of a former college basketball player living in the community. College coaches were contacted and game tapes were sent to those interested. Michael helped himself by having a great senior year and by “showing his wares” in a few all-star games in Michigan after the season ended. Even so, Michael knew by March of his senior year that his prospects of a scholarship at a Division I school were slim, so he began to focus on the schools that showed the most interest in him.

**Michael’s College List and the Decisions:**

**Hillsdale College** Accept

This Division II scholarship program offered Michael a full grant-in-aid, but also wanted him to commit right away. Not being ready to do so, Michael and his mother thought it best to pass on the offer even though it was what they had always hoped for financially.

**U North Dakota** Accept

UND, a strong Division II program with available scholarships, showed considerable interest in Michael, but in the end the coaches felt that his size would be a detriment. While he was not offered a scholarship at UND, Michael was invited to “walk on,” with a chance for a scholarship later depending on his performance.
Kalamazoo College  Accept

An excellent liberal arts school with a strong Division III program, Kalamazoo offered the type of academic challenges Michael was looking for when he began his college search. While the basketball team was hardly high profile, the school’s academic reputation in the Midwest is outstanding and the financial aid offer he received made Kalamazoo a very real possibility. What’s more, the coaches at Kalamazoo showed great interest in Michael, which was flattering and, frankly, well-deserved.

Cedarville University  Accept

Cedarville, a NAIA institution, appealed to Michael for its solid basketball program and its Christian foundation. Michael’s uncle attended Cedarville and suggested Michael investigate the Ohio school. He liked what he read about it, applied, and was accepted. All in all, it is an interesting option on Michael’s college list.

Hope College  Accept

A similar situation developed at Hope as did at Kalamazoo, so Michael was intrigued, given that Hope is a fine liberal arts school with a top Division III basketball program. Hope also showed genuine interest in Michael academically as well and offered a great financial aid award.

Michigan St.  Accept

MSU is a wonderful public university with outstanding programs in many different areas, so this is an intriguing option for Michael. The coaches were great to Michael and did invite him to try out for the team, though both he and his high school coach knew that Michael simply could never play for the Spartans of the Big Ten Conference. While Michael could probably handle the size of MSU, he really wanted to play basketball in college.

The Wrap-Up: There were other schools that came calling after admission decisions were mailed, as many smaller colleges throughout the Midwest expressed an interest in Michael for both his personal attributes and his basketball skills. Nothing shook free enough to change his mind over the options in front of him, however. The truth be known, Michael’s ego took a hit in the process, because not one Division I school actively recruited him, even though many low-end Division I schools came to see him play. Coaches were intrigued, but the level of competition was such that they were nervous about his ability to take the next step. Add in some worry about his size, and it was enough to put off the Division I scholarship coaches. Even though Michael was an excellent pure shooter, a great rebounder, and a wonderful team player, being an athletic force in high school wasn’t enough to project him to be a contributor in Division I.
The good news was that Michael had a strong academic record that, when combined with his athletic ability, gave him numerous options. As money and distance from home were enormous issues for Michael and his mother, he recognized that the two small Division III colleges – Kalamazoo and Hope – were probably in his best interest. After all, he would be a top recruit at both schools; the coaches were wonderful to him; moreover, the campuses reminded him of what college “should be” like. After a good bit of going back and forth, Michael settled on Hope College. He grimaced a bit about the student loan portion of his financial aid package, but being less than 45 minutes away from home and playing for a top-rated Division III team overrode that particular concern. Of course, the people at Hope couldn’t be happier, as they knew they were getting a great kid and a fine player for their program.

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The Case Studies: Spring

“Anna” – Tennis

**Background:** Things have been challenging for Anna and her family, beginning with their emigration from Spain to the United States when Anna was just 6 years old. Settling in the southern Florida area, Anna and her family assimilated into American culture slowly, though tennis served as a great “ice-breaker” for Anna. She took lessons in the local park and started playing in local junior tournaments by the time she was 12. Anna’s parents, who owned and operated a restaurant, worked tirelessly to provide their only child with every advantage, sacrificing to send her to well-regarded Coral Country Day School, a K-12 day school in the Miami metropolitan area with a strong reputation for producing well-qualified students for college. Despite her parents limited English skills, they made every effort to speak English at home to help her acclimate. Nevertheless, it was often a challenge for Anna to use the language, as she was usually more comfortable speaking in Spanish.

Ever since entering Coral Country Day School in the 6th grade, Anna had worked very hard to establish herself as a top student, earning excellent marks in all her courses and establishing a reputation as a great student. Anna understood very well that excellence in every endeavor was the standard by which she was judged by her parents, who expected that she take full advantage of every opportunity they provided. Focused, directed, serious-minded and unusually diligent in all her undertakings, Anna was her parents’ shining jewel. They had every reason to expect great things from her.

**The Academic Profile:** At Coral Country Day Anna had always been a model student – hard-working, serious, and committed to mastering English. By her senior year, Anna
had taken every honors and Advanced Placement course in the sciences and mathematics at her school, and so she enrolled in an intermediate calculus and botany course at the local community college, where she earned A’s even on top of her high school courses. Despite her stunning record in math and science, Anna struggled in the advanced and AP sections of English. She could speak the language easily, but grammar, structure and literary nuance eluded her. Each year she was advised to take the regular English section; each year Anna petitioned to remain. The result was fairly ordinary marks, mostly C’s, in English throughout high school, which kept her from being at the top of the class. Anna slogged through her humanities requirements as well, though she managed pretty good marks in those classes nevertheless. By December of her senior year, Anna had certainly written a fine overall record and had distinguished herself as an outstanding math and science student. In addition, Anna found the time to work part-time at her parents’ restaurant, to do community service, to perform in the winter musical, to get private tutoring for the SAT twice a week throughout the year and to play tournament tennis on most weekends. How she was able to squeeze everything in and do everything so well was perhaps her most impressive quality. Anna had truly made the most of her opportunities at Coral Country Day. Needless to say, her parents and the entire Coral Country Day community were justifiably proud of what she was able to accomplish. Her academic vitals:

**GPA:** 3.68  
**Class Rank:** 10/92  
**SAT I:** 520 Critical Reading / 770 Math / 550 Writing  
**SAT II:** LT 500, M2 740, PH 750  
**TOEFL:** 273 (Computer Based)  
**Counselor Rec:** Excellent  
**Teacher Recs:** Excellent  
**Extracurriculars** Excellent  

**The Athletic Profile:** As a tennis player Anna worked her way up to Number 1 singles on her team, competing against the best players in southern Florida, and earning the respect of her coaches and opponents with her unrelenting style of play and her mental toughness. Anna earned a ranking of 28 in the Under-18’s of her USTA section, one of the most competitive in the country. Try as she might though, Anna was never able to earn a national ranking, which would have helped considerably in the recruiting process. Anna had letters written on her behalf from both her club coach and her high school coach, had a tennis video done professionally, and mailed out a very impressive recruiting package to as many as 50 college coaches across the country. Her target audience – indeed her parents’ target audience – was all the top academic schools in the country. Nothing would have pleased her parents more than to earn a place in the class of an Ivy League school. It became Anna’s ultimate goal.
Anna’s College Process: After much discussion with her parents, Anna settled on the following list. It’s important to note that the final iteration of her college list was against the advice of her college counselor, who felt that it was too ambitious, i.e. too ‘top-heavy’ with highly selective schools. Her counselor, experienced working with very ambitious students like Anna, encouraged her and her parents to add breadth and range of selectivity to her college list. Anna and her family thought otherwise.

Anna’s Colleges and the Decisions:

Columbia
Early Decision: Deferred, then Denied

While a competitive candidate academically, Anna was not pursued by the tennis coach, who felt that she wasn’t up to the challenge of playing at the national level found in the Ivy League. Anna and her parents thought that her chances would be better if she applied Early Decision, at which time she was deferred to the regular admission pool of candidates. Her modest critical reading score and her writing skills were a marked weakness in the super competitive regular decision round at Columbia, so despite her strengths, her application was eventually denied.

U. Pennsylvania
Deny

Essentially the same story took place at Penn as it did at Columbia. Penn’s admission staff saw the same weaknesses in Anna’s application and, unfortunately, the decision was the same. Without support from the tennis coach, Anna fell short in the applicant pool.

Yale
Deny

Once again, the combination of Division I tennis and a highly selective university resulted in a deny letter.

Northwestern
Wait List

While playing Ivy League tennis is certainly very difficult, playing for nationally ranked Northwestern of the Big Ten Conference is even harder. Anna was not going to make their team and she was not supported by the coach, which meant that her application was considered in the overall applicant pool and she needed to gain admission on her own. Nevertheless, as an appealing candidate given her unique background and credentials, Anna received a wait list decision and kept hoping that things would work out there.
Stanford  Deny

Playing tennis was out of the picture at Stanford, though Anna had hoped that maybe, just maybe, they might find her interesting and put her in the class. It was not to be.

Tufts  Wait List

At Tufts, a wonderful Division III school, Anna’s tennis stock was worth a bit more. On all levels Tufts was a better fit, but sadly Anna and her folks didn’t really show much interest in Tufts. She missed the alumni interview as well as the counselor visit to her school in the fall, which Tufts assumed was a lack of interest in the school.

Emory  Wait List

Despite being Division III in tennis, Emory fields a very strong team each year and Anna is a marginal player for them. Again, Anna and her family chose not to pursue Emory with the same energy and commitment as they did the Ivy League schools. While a good candidate for Emory, Anna gave the school the sense that she was using the school as a clear safety option and had only marginal interest, which is not a wise course of action at such a highly selective school.

U. Florida  Accept

Playing tennis is out of the question here and Anna knows it. Still, the University of Florida is an outstanding institution and a great academic and financial option for in-state students.

Anna’s Wrap Up: Given Anna’s results (unexpected from the family’s perspective, though not surprising from her college counselor’s perspective), she and her family felt like failures. No Ivy admits, only wait lists at the schools she fully expected to be admitted to, and the only option available to her in April was her state university. Where Anna and her family went awry is that they didn’t listen well. They didn’t listen to the college coaches who kept trying to tell her that playing tennis at their schools was “going to be very difficult,” which was a nicely coded way of saying that first, she’d never see the court and second, she was not going to receive any support in admission. She didn’t listen when coaches from such schools as Johns Hopkins, Carnegie Mellon, University of Rochester – all places her counselor encouraged her to consider – called to encourage her to apply. What she and her parents banked on during the admission process was hope, pure hope that things would work instead of planning for all the possibilities. In Anna’s case, things didn’t work out and everyone around her ended up frustrated. The good news came in early May when Tufts University contacted Anna’s college counselor at Coral Country Day to say that they
were prepared to offer Anna a place off the wait list, which she quickly accepted. Fortunately for Anna things worked out, but not without some heartache and pain.

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“Sandy” - Softball

**Background:** Sandy always played every organized sport she could. Her parents, proactive in the athletic recruiting process, were successful high school athletes themselves, so much so that Sandy’s athletic interests, especially in softball, have been “cultivated” by her family at every juncture. Family vacations were often athletic in nature. Trips to vacation spots near ballparks were common and visits to sporting goods stores or batting cages were as frequent as visits to the grocery store. At any rate, Sandy was just as passionate about sports – particularly softball – as anyone could be. Her technical prowess and knowledge of the game have enabled her to become an accomplished high school player.

Window Pane, Oregon, is a working-class town where high school sports have always been important, and it has had a tradition of producing some great athletes. In fact, the Window Pane High School girls’ softball team has won back-to-back conference championships and has made its way far into the state tournament the past two years, thanks in part to Sandy’s inspired play. Sandy’s parents have done everything right to sell Sandy as a scholarship softball player, up to and including financial sacrifice to support her passion. They have sent Sandy to every clinic and camp they could possibly afford, invested in private hitting and fielding instruction from a former softball great living three hours away in Portland, and spared no expense in the making of an impressive video, which was sent to all the Division I and II softball programs in the Northwest. In short, no stone was left unturned and no expense spared in Sandy’s parents’ pursuit of a scholarship for their daughter.

**The Academic Profile:** Sandy has always been a dutiful yet uninspired student at Window Pane High. At the behest of her coach, who sensed that Sandy needed to be pushed academically, Sandy managed to keep her grades respectable in a mostly college preparatory course of study. Sandy generally enjoyed school and her classes, but not at the expense of her sports and her friends. She did her work and was quite good at flying below the radar in the classroom, i.e. always doing enough to stay away from academic difficulty but choosing not to push herself to excel. Window Pane High School, with a fairly diverse student body of just under a thousand students, could best be described as “standard.” Approximately 50% of its graduates go on to four-year colleges, mostly to the state schools in Oregon. Another fairly large percentage of students opt for the nearby community college, which offers excellent preparation in a wide range of programs and represents a very affordable option for local students. Pretty much everybody sticks around Window Pane,
and so “going away” to school is more the exception than the rule for most of Window Pane’s graduates. Sandy’s high school record:

| GPA: 3.0 |
| Class Rank: 68/231 |
| SAT I: 550 Critical Reading / 540 Math / 510 Writing |
| ACT: 24 |
| Counselor Rec: Very Good |
| Teacher Recs: Very Good |
| Extracurriculars: Adequate |

**The Athletic Profile:** A committed athlete, Sandy has worked extremely hard to fashion herself into a fine softball player. An excellent fielder and a powerful hitter who has set school and league records for hitting home runs, Sandy handles her position better than most. Her Achilles heel is her foot speed; she simply doesn’t run well. As a result, she possesses limited range, a problem that is mitigated somewhat by playing third base, a position where foot speed and range aren’t apt to hurt her too much. While her lack of speed has never been an issue at third, getting around the base paths has frustrated her and her coaches. Still, Sandy has always fielded her position beautifully and has always hit for power and average. In terms of skill level and softball savvy, Sandy is about as good as one can find in high school.

Unfortunately, coaches at Division I scholarship schools look for athleticism as well as skill in their recruits, which has put Sandy at a disadvantage at those schools. Based on her proactive approach to the recruitment process and her coach’s phone calls, Sandy was clearly being considered for scholarships at a host of schools. Many were interested early on, including both the University of Oregon and Oregon State, but nearly all of them lost interest later in the fall of her senior year, mostly because they worried she simply wasn’t athletic enough to compete at that level. By January of her senior year, Sandy’s in-state options, Oregon and Oregon State, had found other players to support, though they still encouraged her to try to walk on to the team. Her last hope of receiving a softball scholarship was to have an outstanding senior campaign, but both Sandy and her parents knew that her chances of receiving a late grant-in-aid were slim given the rhythms of recruiting in a spring sport. There was some interest at a few other Division I schools, but no concrete offers. Nervous and frustrated, Sandy’s parents expanded her list to include some smaller schools that would be happy to have a player of Sandy’s experience and skill level.
Sandy’s College List and the Decisions:

**Oregon**
Accept

A fine option for Sandy and her family. Despite not receiving a softball scholarship, Sandy would be happy to try to walk on to the team. Throughout the process, Oregon has been her top choice.

**Oregon State**
Accept

Pretty much the same story took place here as at the University of Oregon. Sandy will need to try out for the team as a walk on. Given her academic interests, Sandy is leaning toward the University of Oregon, though OSU is a bit closer to home and more of her friends will be matriculating there.

**Portland State**
Accept

Though she is still in the running for a partial softball scholarship late in the process, Sandy is not altogether crazy for the coach and the school. Because there is the possibility of scholarship, Sandy, and especially her parents, are keeping this school in the forefront.

**Simon Fraser**
Accept

As one of the strongest NAIA softball programs in the Northwest, the combination of the level of play and the favorable currency exchange rate makes this Canadian college a fascinating wild-card in Sandy’s considerations.

**Willamette U**
Deny

Despite being a strong prospect for softball, Sandy’s academic record is a too spotty for them to overlook. She simply wasn’t competitive in the admission pool.

**Linfield College**
Accept

She might be one of the best recruits for the Linfield softball program in years. Even though as a private school it’s more costly for Sandy and her parents, she likes the attention they’ve heaped on her and the small, friendly atmosphere of the school.
Western Washington U  Accept

In mid-May the softball coach at Western Washington offered Sandy a half scholarship – great news for everyone involved. She is not sure, however, that she wants to attend because it would be hard for her parents to watch her play. Distance from home is an issue for Sandy.

The Wrap Up: Sandy, after much thought and soul searching, came to see the reality of her athletic situation and admitted to herself that she did have physical limitations which might hamper her ability to play at Oregon and Oregon St. The more she thought about her college choices, the more she thought about going to Linfield, where everybody seemed really excited about her. Her parents, who had initially been impressed by the schools that offered athletic grants-in-aid to Sandy, began to feel that the actual grants she received were not equating to happiness for their daughter. Hoping that Sandy would be excited about her choice of college, they came to understand that Linfield, although the most expensive option, seemed to be the best match for their daughter. By May 1, Sandy had sent her deposit to Linfield, a fine liberal arts college where she would be able to play softball for four years.

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“Eric” - Track

Background: Growing up in the solidly upper-middle class bedroom community of Deer- ing, Illinois, has been easy for Eric in many ways. The only child of professional parents who were able to provide every opportunity for him, Eric immersed himself in tennis lessons, youth soccer, and club swimming to satisfy his passion for sports. By the time he had reached high school, Eric had turned into quite a good athlete, holding a real interest and aptitude for soccer. As a freshman on the 9th grade soccer team at Deering High School, a well regarded but very large public high school, Eric found the competition for playing time far keener than he had anticipated. Most of the boys on the team were bigger, stronger and more mature, which came as quite a blow to his ego. Being one of the smaller boys in his grade, Eric didn’t even make the freshman tennis team in the spring and worried that his athletic career at powerful Deering High might be over before it had a chance to begin. Frustrated, Eric thought that as a sophomore he might try cross country, a sport he knew nothing about. The best part of the switch, he thought, was that it was a sport in which size was not crucial to success. Eric knew he could run well and he seemed to be able to do so for long periods of time in effortless fashion. He took to cross country so well that by the end of his sophomore year, Eric had established himself as a varsity distance runner for Deering High. From an athletic standpoint, things were beginning to look up for Eric, who wanted very much to be recognized as an athlete in his school.
The Academic Profile:  Eric had always been a bright student. It seemed school came easily to him, plus he always performed well on standardized testing. After a rather ordinary ninth grade year, where he had earned mostly C’s in his classes, Eric decided that he was going to get going academically. As a sophomore the C’s turned to B’s and a few A’s, and as a junior Eric became a very focused and serious student, earning mostly A’s in a very demanding academic program. To no one’s surprise, Eric did well on the SAT Reasoning and SAT Subject tests. By the time he was a senior, Eric was in good shape as a student and was well-prepared for college. Expectations ran high for his parents, who fully expected that Eric would gain admission to one of the most selective schools in the country, even with Eric’s early mediocrity in the classroom.

Cumulative GPA:  3.6 (Weighted)
Class Rank:  102/530
SAT I:  630 Critical Reading / 770 Math / 710 Writing
SAT II:  AH 650, M2 750, PH 640
AP:  Comp Sci 5, Calc AB 4, PH 4
Counselor Rec:  Very Strong
Teacher Rec:  Very Strong
Extracurriculars:  Very Strong

The good news about Eric’s transcript is that there is clear evidence of upward trending – a quality admission folks love to see, especially in boys. Eric had actually performed better than his cumulative GPA and class rank would suggest, improving steadily since his freshman year, where C’s appeared on his transcript regularly. Eric has a demonstrated aptitude with computers and hopes to pursue computer studies as an undergraduate. Despite the strength and reputation of his high school, Eric found himself finishing barely among the top 25% of his class, an objective measure that complicates matters at many of the schools Eric and his parents would like to consider.

The Athletic Profile:  By the end of his junior year, Eric had made his way up the cross country/track ladder as a distance runner of some renown. In cross country, he was the number two runner on an excellent team that placed high in the state rankings. During the spring of his junior year, Eric ran a strong 4:31 mile in an important conference meet, good enough to place among the top runners in the greater Chicago area. In August before his senior year campaign, however, Eric suffered a badly sprained ankle, which took longer to heal than anyone expected. Missing a good part of the early fall training hurt Eric and he never quite regained his form from the spring. Track season would be coming soon, but his college selection process would be close to complete. The two processes were at odds due to timing.
When winter track season rolled around, Eric had blossomed physically (6’1” and 150 lbs) and became a much stronger runner. He improved his time in the mile to 4:18 during the subsequent spring season, which was the fastest mile run in the metropolitan area. His high school coach, seeing the potential and the improvement, called numerous coaches on his behalf, but many had already dropped Eric due to his injury-riddled cross country season.

_Eric’s Colleges and the Decisions:_

**Dartmouth**

Deny

By the time the Dartmouth track coaches had a sense of how good Eric was, it was too late for them to help him through the application process. Without support from the athletic office, Eric simply was not a competitive candidate in the very tough Dartmouth applicant pool.

**Brown**

Deny

The same thing happened here as at Dartmouth, so without support from the coach, Eric was non-competitive as an applicant. At both Brown and Dartmouth, Eric was probably as good a runner as anyone the coaches recruited, but missing his senior year campaign in cross country hurt his chances to prove himself.

**Lawrence U.**

Accept

Eric was a great recruit for this fine school in Appleton, WI, his parents’ alma mater. While he likes the school, Eric would prefer to attend a school with well-known and expansive engineering/computer science programs.

**Lehigh U.**

Wait List

The real appeal at Lehigh comes in the form of top level engineering/computer science programs and Division I cross country and track at the same institution. The Lehigh coaches are very interested in supporting Eric and have encouraged him to remain on the wait list.

**U. Illinois**

Accept

The combination of a world class engineering program and the chance to run in the Big Ten is very appealing to Eric, who was contacted by the track coach after his great spring season.
Washington U.    Wait List

As Wash. U is an outstanding school with a wonderful engineering program, it has excellent potential for Eric’s choice, save for the wait list decision, of course. The coaches in both cross country and track are excited about Eric and are doing everything possible to get him to remain on the wait list there.

The Wrap Up: Looking back on the process, Eric can see clearly why things didn’t work out at his top two choices, Brown and Dartmouth, even with the early interest they showed in his candidacy. It was simply a matter of “too little, too late.” Some bad luck in the form of a sprained ankle, coupled with a relatively weak freshman year record, essentially closed the door at these most competitive schools, because without some sort of outside support a student needs to have a truly distinguished overall record to have a legitimate chance of gaining admission. Eric didn’t quite make the cut athletically because of his bad luck; and, he didn’t quite make the cut academically because of a late start. Of Washington University and Lehigh, both very attractive options, Eric decided to remain on the Wash. U wait list and hope for the best.

Otherwise, Eric had decided on Illinois over Lawrence, mostly because of the strength of the engineering and computer science programs. In early May, after making a deposit at the University of Illinois, Eric received a call from a Wash. U admissions officer, who offered him a place in the class. After talking it over with his parents and his track coach, Eric decided to enroll at Wash. U, much to the delight of his parents, who saw the school as being a better match for their son.
Chapter 6: The Coach’s Corner

When considering the college recruiting process, what better resource to tap than the college coaches themselves? In this chapter we have profiled a number of highly respected, highly successful coaches from non-scholarship schools in a variety of sports. Interestingly, and not surprisingly, the coaches with whom we spoke had some characteristics in common. All considered themselves educators as much as coaches; all saw their responsibilities as contributing to the greater good of their respective schools beyond their successes in their sport; all possessed a clear vision of the type of student-athlete they were looking for; and all had an uncanny ability to articulate that vision.

It is no surprise that these coaches have distinguished themselves for reasons other than wins and losses. Rather, their coaching success stems from a personal vision where they see themselves as part and parcel of a much larger enterprise called the “college experience.” Each coach we profiled understands that while sport is a central part of their players’ lives while in college, their experience needs to be more than simply games, practices, and training. Somehow these coaches can communicate to institutional administrators, parents, and prospective student-athletes the importance of sport as a conduit for a successful and beneficial experience in the larger scope of college life. For that reason alone – and as it is in so many endeavors – communication has become the foundation upon which these coaches have built their programs.

In the college coaching world, communication takes on many different shapes and forms. Coaches must sell their program to prospective student-athletes and their families; they must motivate and train athletes to perform at their peak level athletically; they must understand how to mentor their charges best on a personal level; they must know when to counsel and intervene when their athletes are struggling away from their sport; and they need to communicate with college administrators in an effective way. Amazingly, these coaches do all this while guided by the overarching mission to win. Despite their personal strengths and support of broader institutional goals, wins and losses are still the measurable “bottom line” for these coaches at their respective schools.

Coaching college sports is far from an easy job, and the coaches profiled here happen to be quite good at every aspect of their profession. We’re hopeful that when you learn more about how these coaches do their business, you will gain a greater understanding of how the recruiting process works. As their own words will attest, the recruiting process on many levels is just as much about the individual coaches as it is about the student-athlete. During the past few years, a few of the coaches interviewed have moved on to different endeavors. Nevertheless, the insights they provide remain as important today as ever.
Bill Tierney, long time men’s lacrosse coach at Princeton and one of the most successful coaches in NCAA history in any sport, is equally proud of his teams’ non-athletic successes as the on-field ones. One hundred percent of his players have graduated in four years and just six players have left the Princeton program during his tenure, as remarkable an achievement as the six NCAA Championships and the numerous NCAA tournament appearances his teams have garnered. Without question, these non-athletic markers of his program deserve mention and praise right along with his stunning success on the lacrosse field. Coach Tierney attributes his comprehensive success in retaining players and winning games to his student-athletes’ happiness playing the game at Princeton, a school where sport is important but does not overshadow the bigger college picture. “During the recruiting process, I tend to talk more about happiness as a college student at a great university with the prospective students and their families more than I do about lacrosse. The question, ‘What makes you happy?’ is one that all prospective student athletes need to wrestle with as they go through the college process. From where I sit, it might be one of the most important.”

A working class kid from Levittown, New York, and a graduate of SUNY Cortland, Tierney taught and coached at Great Neck South High School on Long Island in 1976, and then at Levittown High in 1980, where he gained an appreciation for working closely with high school athletes. Moving on to his first college stop, Rochester Institute of Technology, Tierney brought that program to national prominence with NCAA Division III tournament appearances in 1983 and 1984. After a three year stint as an assistant coach at Johns Hopkins, where he helped to produce national titles in 1985 and 1987, Tierney left the Baltimore school in 1988 to become the head coach at Princeton, where the Tigers had won just five Ivy League games in the four years before his arrival. “I remember driving onto the Princeton campus for my interview and thinking that I’d never fit in here. The town and the school were “way too much for a kid from Levittown,” Tierney mentioned. “After a short time, though, I came to realize that Princeton is a great place not because of all the impressive ivy covered buildings, but because of the wonderful people there. I’ve come to understand that at Princeton, it’s all about the people; they make the place so special.” During his 19-year campaign at Princeton, his teams have gone on to win six NCAA Championships and 11 Ivy League Championships. He has produced two National Players of the Year and scores of All-Ivy players, but more importantly, he’s had the pleasure of mentoring countless other fine young men who came to Princeton not necessarily as top-flight recruits, but as young men of good character who worked hard to improve as lacrosse players. It is of those young men especially that Tierney is justifiably proud.
Tierney would describe his approach in the recruiting process to be a bit old fashioned and labor-intensive. “We return every letter we receive with a letter, though it could be a form letter that makes it clear that it is not a recruiting letter but a response letter. Even so, kids and their families still get the wrong impression sometimes.” Tierney and his capable staff work especially hard to downplay any sense of elitism the Princeton name might conjure. “While we don’t recruit everybody, we feel that responding to all inquiries is the right and proper thing to do. The exception to that might be when a young man inquires in, say, November of his senior year, he’s got C’s and D’s on his transcript, and has 1,000 on the SAT. [Note: 1,000 on the previous SAT Scale roughly equates to 1500 on the new SAT scale.] That kid we probably wouldn’t get back to because of the lateness of the inquiry and because he simply would not be competitive in the Princeton applicant pool. Otherwise, we try our very best to be responsive to all letters of interest and in a timely manner. We think it’s important to be as responsive and as approachable as possible.” When asked how he and his staff winnow down a potential list of literally hundreds of prospects to the dozen or so young men who are invited each year to campus, Tierney mentions, “Many of the initial prospects become academic casualties…they simply won’t project to be strong enough students for Princeton. As well, quite a number of them will be deemed not good enough players by our staff (hopefully we’ve seen them play at camps or showcases, on video, or spoken with their high school or club coach) to compete at our level. And, of course, a certain percentage will not be interested in us. Once those three factors are taken into account, we’re usually left with a far more manageable number of prospects, perhaps around 50, whom we can evaluate in more depth. That’s when we look hard at all the issues that we feel will make the young man successful here at Princeton.”

Tops on Coach Tierney’s “to do” list when recruiting a player is to determine his “happiness quotient.” He comments, “We want to really try to find out what will make a player happy. Often that will tell us if he will find a home at Princeton and if he will enjoy his experience. Have you ever sat on the bench?…Do you understand the importance of being a role player?…How hard are you willing to work in the classroom and can you accept the fact that there will be tremendous academic competition here?…Are you willing to switch positions for the good of the team?…Can you take not being the focus of attention?…[These] are some such questions that when asked of a student, especially in the presence of his parents on a home visit, can be illuminating. Watching and listening to the answers to these questions from the young man – and sometimes his parents – can tell me a lot about how and where he will fit into our program.”

During the early years of his tenure at Princeton, Tierney and his staff looked to recruit for character even more than talent at times. “It used to be that before we got really good during the mid-nineties, we were all about character. Of course, the kids had to be good players, but we looked for those kids who were tough, hard-working, team-oriented, great kids who would give their right arm to be at Princeton because we felt we could be
successful with those types of kids. Turns out that at Princeton we could be competitive with those kids, and they became the backbone of the program during the early years. When we won our first national title in 1992 against Syracuse, we didn’t really belong on the field with them in terms of talent and athleticism. Still, we found a way to win. I can’t tell you how proud I was of what those kids accomplished!” During the mid-nineties, Tierney’s Princeton teams captured three consecutive NCAA lacrosse championships (1996, 1997, and 1998) and by then had become the lacrosse program in the country, which meant that Tierney could almost have his pick of some of the best lacrosse talent in the country.

Not surprisingly, the 1998-1999 recruiting class was, in terms of talent, his best ever. “I think in that class, which came in on the heels of three wildly successful teams, we had six or seven All-Americans, and so naturally everybody thought there would be no end to our winning national championships. While we have continued to have tremendous teams during the past few years, I think we were all reminded that talent alone does not assure greatness and that championship teams are comprised of all sorts of players—some great, some good, and some pretty ordinary—the sum of which will always be greater than any of the individual parts.”

Of course, Tierney hopes to continue to emphasize character right along with talent in the future. “You need two or three great players, for sure, but the remaining cast of characters needs to understand their role and be willing to work for the greater good,” he says. “I want to make sure that the young men who play at Princeton will cherish their time here, lacrosse being a part of that experience.” Borrowing from an old television ad for Star Kist Tuna, in which one Charlie the Tuna, a flamboyant caricature for sure, constantly tried to demonstrate in any way possible that he was Star Kist quality, Tierney mentions with a slight smile, “We don’t want lacrosse players with good taste,” he says, “We want lacrosse players that taste good.” By that reference Tierney means that talent and potential don’t guarantee greatness. Such things as determination, work ethic, intelligence and selflessness are essential ingredients in the making of a champion. “Looking for and finding young men with those qualities of character can take you far,” he adds in his understated way. Bill Tierney should know. He’s built a dynasty with just that kind of young man.
“Three Steps to Recruiting”

A Profile of Penny Siqueiros
Softball Coach
Emory University

As all college coaches know, the recruiting of student-athletes is fraught with unforeseen circumstances and situations that make the process as tricky as predicting the weather and every bit as fickle. Yet Penny Siquiers, softball coach at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, has a system in place to help manage the process as effectively as any. Emory, a leading academic institution that just happens to compete in the decidedly academic University Athletic Association (Brandeis, Carnegie Mellon, Case Western Reserve, NYU, University of Chicago, University of Rochester, and Washington University in St Louis are the other members), thrives in NCAA Division III athletics due to her leadership on the diamond. Having played and coached at the highest levels, Siquiers, a former star at Florida State and former assistant coach there, understands full well what it takes to handle the vicissitudes of Division I athletics. Simultaneously, however, Siquiers also has a strong appreciation for the various challenges that make up the recruitment process at Division III. Her efforts have made a softball power of Emory, where her teams have amassed a career winning percentage of .747, have appeared in two World Series, and won two NCAA regional championships and three conference championships. Yet, her players are always students first and foremost. Interestingly, Siquiers worked as a manager for Disney before becoming a coach at Emory, a corporation where strong communication skills, organizational talent, “keeping it clean” and maintaining a strong sense of family are expected. Managing people in business – or in any undertaking for that matter – is not much different from “managing” a college softball program. By bringing with her some impressive management training skills and considerable coaching credentials with her to Emory, Siquiers has “grown” the softball program into one of the most successful in the country. Her excellent communication and organizational skills, coupled with an unwavering sense of propriety, have enabled her to climb to the top of her profession in just six years.

Siquiers’ ability to take the mystery out of the process for student-athletes and their families is readily noticeable; when she speaks about the process at Emory, it all seems so easy. “We have a three step process in place here that we find works well. Once we have identified a kid, however that might have occurred (either we’ve received a letter of inquiry, been notified of her, or we’ve seen her play), we respond by sending out an introductory letter and questionnaire. Step One is complete when we get the questionnaire back. For Step Two, we send out another letter requesting a video. To complete Step Two the prospective student-athlete needs to send back a video for us to evaluate. If we like what we see, both on the video and on the questionnaire (academics, testing, etc.), then we contact the kid by
telephone or email and wait to see if the kid is receptive to us. If she is, then that finishes Step Three and the young lady will become someone we’ll try to recruit to come to Emory. The key to this process is that a girl has to stay with it for each step. Usually we’ll know if we have a legitimate recruit if they follow the three steps, though many young ladies will drift away for a variety of reasons as the process wears on.” Like most good things that are worth waiting for, the recruitment process – specifically following through with the three steps – is at the heart of Siquieros’ organizational success. “I find that those kids who are willing to move through the steps with us are usually the types of kids we like to have in the program,” states Siquieros. “Staying on task through the steps reveals much about a kid’s willingness to work toward a goal, [which is] an important quality of character I like to see in my players.”

Unlike such sports as basketball and tennis, where watching a kid perform live can allow a coach to make a strong evaluation, seeing a kid play softball can sometimes be fruitless. “Watching a kid play could mean not seeing her do anything but maybe take a few swings in an hour and a half,” comments Siquieros. As a result, she and her staff rely heavily on the video as an important part of the evaluation process, especially for those young women they won’t get the chance to see play. “Of course, we love to watch kids live, and we in fact do get to see quite a few games and tournaments during the course of the summer. But there are times when we can’t see a player, or, if we do, she may not make a play for the entire game. As a result, watching a video of a kid can tell me a good bit about her skill level, though capturing such things as intensity and relative speed and quickness is not so easy on tape. We find that a combination of the two – assessing the video for skill level and watching a kid play live – is the optimum situation to evaluate all aspects of a player.” For those who get through the three steps and who pass academic muster (Emory’s admission standards are among the most stringent in the country), Siquieros will encourage them to visit the campus. For the hundreds of other young ladies who don’t make all the steps for whatever reason, Siquieros and her staff will have tried to communicate with them in an honest and responsible way. In fact, there seems to be little confusion when it comes to communication with Siquieros. “We actually lose kids because we’re so honest in telling them where they fall on the recruiting list. If the kid’s a pitcher, I will tell her how many pitchers we’re looking at in addition to her, and where she stacks up against the competition. The same holds true with those I think might not be able to play here. More than anything, I want all potential players to know where I think they fit – or don’t fit – in our program. I will tell them straight out what their chances are of playing at Emory and when I think they will be playing. Sometimes telling a kid that she might not be a first-year impact player can turn her off, but I really want the kids who come here to understand the bigger picture.” In dealing with the marginal recruits, Siquieros is particularly careful. “For those kids, I feel it’s really important to communicate in an honest and accurate fashion, because if they come to Emory with unrealistic expectations and never see the field, they could be very embittered, which could lead to their having a bad experience here.”
Siquieros and her staff at Emory run a first rate program, as the number of victories and championships would suggest, but when it comes to the recruiting process, she and her staff are equally as competent and successful. “Paying attention to every kid who communicates with us is at the heart of our commitment to doing it right at Emory.”

“Character over Talent”

A Profile of Roger Reina
Former Men's Wrestling Coach
University of Pennsylvania

Note: Reina retired from coaching in 2006 and is now working in administration at the University of Pennsylvania, where he remains a loyal supporter of the wrestling program.

Don’t let his boyish looks fool you. Roger Reina, head wrestling coach at The University of Pennsylvania from 1986 until 2006, has the heart of a lion and a sharp eye for those young men with the strength of purpose and fortitude to compete at the highest levels, both in the classroom and on the wrestling mat. Reina and his Penn Quakers scaled the Ivy wall in wrestling during his tenure, earning the respect of wrestling programs across the country. His 2001-02 team was ranked among the top ten teams in the country, and his teams garnered eight Ivy League titles since 1994. An overall record of 180-66-6 (.657) makes Reina the winningest wrestling coach in more than a century of Penn wrestling, an impressive feat given the condition of the program when he took over in 1986. “In a wrestling rich state like Pennsylvania, with outstanding programs already in place at Penn State, Pittsburgh, and Lehigh, I initially needed to focus my recruiting efforts on those “diamonds in the rough” who might be overlooked by some of the more established schools,” says Reina. “My staff and I worked very hard to find those great kids who possessed character of the highest order, because in wrestling such things as mental toughness, perseverance, and work ethic are essential for them to compete to the best of their ability. I built my program on the backs of some great young men who may not have been the most talented, but who did the most with what they had.”

When it comes to the recruiting process at Penn regarding wrestling, Reina offers an effective analogy between finding the right student-athletes and running a hurdles race in track and field. “Each hurdle represents some aspect of the col-
lege process/recruiting process. For example, the first hurdle might be a student’s academic record; the second might be SAT’s; the third could be wrestling talent; the fourth might be the financial aid review; the fifth might be the fit for Penn; and so on. Once a prospect cleared these and the other hurdles in the race and went the distance, then we had found a bona fide prospect for Penn.” He adds, “And it was not just a one way race, because we as a staff needed to clear some hurdles in deciding whether we liked the prospect. In many cases, student-athletes who had Penn in mind could not clear all the hurdles and subsequently fell out of the race. They may have been able to get over some, even many of the hurdles, but in order for them to really be ‘right’ for Penn, they and we had to finish our races.” Reina and his capable staff received literally hundreds of inquires from interested student-athletes. Imbued with a sense of humor even in the face of the difficulty recruiting sometimes brought, Reina mentioned that each year there were “a few kids who confused us with that other school that has the word Pennsylvania in it (Penn State), but we would still talk with them,” he says with a smile. “Seriously, the sheer number of interested student-athletes was pretty overwhelming, but there were quite a few who fall from the initial list, mostly due to academics. For the ones who cleared the hurdles, we worked hard to get them to consider Penn, which has quite a lot to offer wrestlers looking to challenge themselves in the classroom and on the wrestling mat.”

A Penn graduate and former wrestling captain, Reina took particular pride in selling the school, which really doesn’t need any extra marketing. “Because we don’t offer athletic grants-in-aid,” Reina says, “there were always students and their families who felt they couldn’t possibly afford a Penn education. In fact, Penn offers generous aid awards to needy students, which often made coming here very affordable.” He mentions that getting athletes and their families to think in terms of affordability and value in place of an athletic grant-in-aid (a.k.a. scholarship) was sometimes confusing for students and their families. “If I could get a student-athlete to visit Penn and to understand that coming here could have many advantages, including life-long financial advantages,” say Reina, “then we were often successful in recruiting despite all the hurdles that needed to be cleared.”

When it came to assessing talent, Reina and his staff typically didn’t have to look far and wide for capable student-athletes. “We concentrated on Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York and New Jersey because the quality of wrestling is very good. Though we were fortunate to have so many good kids in our back yard, we still liked to recruit nationally to find the best student athletes possible. One such “diamond in the rough” is Brandon Slay, Olympic Gold Medalist in 2000. Slay came to Penn
from Amarillo, Texas, which is by no means a wrestling hot spot in comparison to
the Lehigh Valley in eastern Pennsylvania and northwest New Jersey, where wres-
tling is king. “Brandon may have been overlooked a bit in high school because he
didn’t come from a strong wrestling state,” Reina comments, “but I could tell that
he had what it took to be successful at Penn, and so I recruited him when other top
programs weren’t sure about him. The rest is history…an Olympic Gold Medalist
and a two-time All-American, Brandon Slay is exactly the reason I worked so hard
to find the right kids to come to Penn.”

Coach Reina still takes seriously his role in helping the young men and their
families navigate the college process, whether it’s Penn or a rival school. “The
transition from high school to college for any young man or woman – athlete or
no athlete – is a critical juncture in their lives, and so what I say and do really does
have an impact. I was, and am, ever mindful of those young men and their families
who may not be right for Penn, as I want them to know that there are other great
options just waiting for them and that moving on to college will be one of the most
important things they’ll do during their lifetimes. Being sensitive to their needs and
helping them to move through the college process as best they could was also part of
what I was expected to do as a coach representing the University of Pennsylvania. I
wouldn’t have wanted it any other way,” he says with conviction.

For Roger Reina and his Penn Quaker wrestling team, substance over style
was clearly the order of the day. For the young men who came to Penn to wrestle
for Reina, their being happy with their choice was important. “My goal for our stu-
dent-athletes was that they were happy about coming to Penn, they’re happier with
their situations as juniors and seniors, and that they’re most pleased with coming to
Penn ten years after leaving here. I know I’m a bit biased, but coming to wrestle at
Penn can be a truly life-altering experience, and knowing that I’ve had a role in that
is deeply gratifying.”
“Recruiting Is A Two Way Street”

A Profile of Ann Gold
Women’s Field Hockey
Lafayette College

Note: This May, Ann Gold, a Lafayette institution, retired after compiling a stunning career record and producing countless top-flight players at this Patriot League school. She will be missed in the Lafayette community.

Ann Gold, veteran field hockey coach at Lafayette College, speaks about recruiting in terms of relationships. “When I speak to prospective student-athletes and their families, I want to know that they’re as interested in being honest and up front about their intentions as I am. I want student-athletes who want Lafayette.” Oftentimes students and their families have the wrong impression about Lafayette. A liberal arts college of 2,200 students in Easton, Pennsylvania, Lafayette is one of the smallest schools in the country that competes at the Division I level. “Because we’re so small, many students and their families think that we must be a Division III school, and quite a few people don’t understand just how competitive our athletic programs are, or how difficult it is to get in here.” As a result, a big part of Gold’s job is to get prospective students and their families to see Lafayette in the proper prospective, a high-powered school with very competitive athletics, all wrapped up in a small package. As the numbers would suggest, Gold must be doing something right on College Hill. In twenty seasons, she has compiled an impressive 247 victories, eight Patriot League titles, numerous trips to the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) championship, and a bid to the NCAA field hockey tournament in 1999. When prospective student-athletes and their families learn more about Gold’s program, their first response is often surprise – how can such a tiny little place have such a big-time program? Truth be told, once on the field Gold’s Lafayette Leopards surprise very few people as her teams regularly compete with a fair amount of success against many of the best teams in the country.

Gold and her staff of two part-time assistants work hard to sift through the hundreds of inquiries they receive from interested juniors through the spring, with the goal being to winnow down the list to a workable number of hopeful recruits over the course of the summer and into the fall. “We do our best to see as many girls as possible during the summer months at regional tournaments and other showcase events. For us, seeing a young lady play is very important, but we also use video quite extensively, especially for those girls who are from different parts of the country or whom we might not get to see otherwise.” Undeterred by the mountain of paperwork and hours of watching videotape, Gold is unusually well organized and systematic when it comes to maintaining files on prospective athletes. “Many people don’t realize how much time I spend ‘coaching’ in the office to keep our files up-to-date and accurate. We give ourselves the best chance to find the players we need by being effective in the office.” To a large extent Coach Gold counts on the
high school or club coach to be involved in the screening process. “We send out a rather detailed questionnaire to the high school or club coach in an effort to learn as much as possible about the player,” she says. “In most cases the high school or club coach can help us to find out things about a player that we might not see on video or in person watching her play.” While finding talented players is a big part of her job, Gold finds that many excellent players will fall off her recruiting list due to academics. “Because Lafayette is small and very selective, many prospects won’t measure up academically, so that tends to eliminate quite a few prospects. For the 50 or so recruits who still remain from the 200 odd inquiries, we like to invite them to make an official visit. Typically about 20-25 of those will take us up on the offer, and then once we have them here, we try to decide if they would fit into our program. From here, we [team members and others who interact with the recruit] try to assess whether the recruit will be a good match for Lafayette. Oftentimes we won’t really have a good sense of this until after she leaves and we have the chance to absorb it all. If things go well on the visit – she feels comfortable with the team and likes the school and we feel she’d be a good fit here – then we have a good chance of getting her to come to Lafayette, provided things will work out financially.” While the College and the reputation of the program sell themselves, it certainly doesn’t hurt to have Ann Gold – a true believer in Lafayette – as the lead salesperson.

Growing up in suburban Philadelphia, a known field hockey hotbed, Gold is a product of a small liberal arts school, Ursinus College, where she played both field hockey and lacrosse on some very fine teams. Not surprisingly, Gold understands well what the Lafayette experience will be like for her recruits, and so talking to prospective student-athletes and their families comes naturally. “I consider athletics an arm of the admissions office, so it’s important for coaches at schools like Lafayette to be able to articulate the strengths of the school, not simply their athletic programs. I feel it’s important to speak with those great kids who are superior students and who would be wonderful at Lafayette, even though they might not be contributing players for us. I feel that part of my responsibility is to encourage that prospective student-athlete to look at Lafayette seriously as well. For many of those kids, they’re happy just being a part of the program here, which is a great situation for all involved. More than anything, though, I look for student-athletes who want to be here, for in the end that fact contributes to their success and happiness as much as just about anything else,” Gold comments.

Success, then, takes many forms for Ann Gold. “Of course, it’s wonderful to land that special player you know will be a great contributor to the program. Over the years we’ve landed our fair share of great high school players. Just as rewarding, though, is finding that young lady from a small school who hasn’t had the exposure or build up to make her a big-time recruit. Looking for and finding that hidden jewel is equally as gratifying, as some of our best players over the years have been just those types of young ladies.” Ann Gold considers herself fortunate to work with such fine student-athletes in an environment
that reflects her personality so well. It seems that Lafayette and Ann Gold are perfect to-
gether, which in no small way has contributed to her stunning success.

“…Because There Isn’t a Division IV…”

Dick Farley and Mike Whalen
Football Coaches
Williams College

Note: Since the writing of this piece, Dick Farley retired from his position as Head
Football Coach at Williams, but still serves as an assistant coach of track and field
at the college. Recently inducted to College Football Hall of Fame, Farley remains
a very real part of Williams football.

You can find the expression, “Because There Isn’t a Division IV,” on the back of
a Williams College football T-shirt, for no other reason but that both Farley and Whalen
have seen the other side of the mountain, if you will. Farley, now retired, was a thirty-
year veteran coach at the small liberal arts school located in the northwest corner of Mas-
sachusetts, and Whalen, has made a number of coaching stops, including the University
of Pennsylvania, Lafayette College and Colgate University, all highly selective academic
institutions. Still, both men possess a strong sense of humor and a clear understanding
of where Williams football falls on the all-important college football paradigm. For the
unaware, Williams College just happens to be one of the top liberal arts colleges in the
country, where outstanding students abound and where some wonderful athletes looking
for a different type of college athletic experience can be found. A member of the New
England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC), Williams and its fellow NESCAC
members (Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Connecticut College, Hamilton, Middlebury,
Trinity, Tufts, and Wesleyan) have competed against one another for years. While the
NESCAC is about as far away from the “big time” of NCAA sports as you can get, NES-
CAC schools most closely reflect the purest form of college athletics, a setting where real
student-athletes compete in relative obscurity for the love of the game.

Head coach Dick Farley came to Williams nearly 35 years ago when he saw an
advertisement for the position of football/track coach in the Boston Globe. “At the time I
was coaching and teaching in the Boston area and read about the vacancy. It sounded like
a perfect job for me, as I had competed in both sports and wanted to coach them. I didn’t
know anything about Williams College at the time…I figured it would be a good ‘stepping
stone,’ yet here I am, 35 years later, having really enjoyed my time at Williams. The qual-
ity of life here has been great.” Farley’s right hand man, Mike Whalen, having coached at
a number of schools, understands well the transitory nature of coaching college football. “When my family and I first arrived at Williams, I told my wife not to unpack the bags. I really had hoped to get back to coaching at the Division I level and wasn’t sure how long I’d be here. Well, it’s been six years now, my family and I have found a home in Williamstown, and coaching both football (and wrestling until a few years ago) at Williams has been very rewarding.”

Interestingly, as he was recruiting a young man some twenty years ago who was also considering Penn State, Farley had occasion to speak with Mrs. Joe Paterno, wife of the legendary Penn State football coach, who politely asked whether he had planned to make a home visit in an effort to recruit the young man. When Farley mentioned that at Williams neither home visits nor on the road recruiting was allowed, Mrs. Paterno commented, “You probably have the best coaching job in America!” Certainly Mrs. Paterno had a point. In relative terms, there is certainly much less pressure at Williams to win football games. Don’t think for a minute, though, that recruiting top players and winning within the confines of the NESCAC’s strict guidelines and high academic standards aren’t important to Farley and Whalen.

When it comes to recruiting, Farley and Whalen have looked for and continue to look for that special young man who has the talent to play at the next level, most typically a player suitable for lower level Division 1 programs (previously called I-AA) such as are found within the Ivy or Patriot Leagues. Simultaneously, they search out players who possess the academic talent and drive to survive the academic rigor at Williams, who might be looking to play two sports in college, or who would prefer a small college experience. “Over the years we’ve gotten some very good players who didn’t make the cut athletically at places like Dartmouth or Harvard. Those who have fallen off such Ivy recruiting lists often became our bread and butter,” mentions Farley. “As a rule, I was a bit less interested in that young man who came to me in October of his senior year saying that Williams was his top choice and that he hoped to apply early decision [with the sub-text of hoping it would help his chances of gaining admission, especially if he was not being recruited at an Ivy or Patriot school]. Until we had a chance to evaluate him relative to the other players we were looking at, I was reluctant to encourage him to any extent. Because we could support relatively few players in the admission process, we wanted to be as sure as possible that the players we supported were the best possible players we could find.”

As far as finding the players, Farley, Whalen and the rest of the Williams staff continue to make good use of the summer football camps to see potential players. “Because we can’t go on the road to recruit, working at camps is a great way to see kids,” Whalen adds. “We usually have coaches working camps at Dartmouth, Yale, BC, and Harvard, and so we get to see a number of players who have an interest in those schools. It’s then that we have the opportunity to present Williams to them. At camps we can also find out what
our competition will be in the recruiting process. For example, if the Dartmouth coaches
do not show much interest in a kid at their own camp, then that’s a pretty clear indication
that he might be a guy for us to pursue. I often say to a kid: ‘Did Coach X talk to you
about his school while you were at his camp? Did he tell you he was going to have you up
for an official visit later in the fall? If that didn’t happen while you were there, chances are
that Coach X is not interested in you. Don’t hold on for them; they’re probably not going
to recruit you.’ Of course, this is not an easy conversation, but it’s one that needs to take
place at the appropriate time, certainly for the kid’s sake.”

Farley mentions that with the recent limiting of the number of football recruits at
NESCAC schools, there’s very little margin for error during the recruiting process these
days. “With only 14 spots available for football, Coach Whalen needs to be as sure as we
can that those young men we support are very interested in Williams and that they can be
players here. [It] used to be that we’d help support maybe 20-25 kids and get maybe 18
who were players. If we missed on a few, well, it wasn’t that critical because we had a
decent base of football players for the program. Now when Mike misses on three or four
of the 14 kids, what is left over is barely enough to field a competitive team.” And, surviv-
ing the admissions office for many a recruit at Williams, one of the most selective schools
in the country, is never easy. “Let’s face it,” Whalen adds, “Getting into Williams is very
tough, but I don’t want kids who are good students to be scared off from considering us
because of our admission standards. Getting in here is tough but not impossible. My staff
and I work hard to find the best students and football players that we can, and part of that
is encouraging young men to follow through with us because we feel it’s worth the effort.
If we think a kid is not going to have a chance of getting in here, we’ll indicate that to him
and his family as early on in the process as we can.”

Never afraid to “tell it like is” and never missing a chance to add his own special
brand of Division III football humor, Farley relates a story of a young man who chose to
attend Princeton over Williams at the eleventh hour. When the boy called to tell Farley of
his decision, Coach Farley congratulated him and asked, “Just out of curiosity, what made
you chose Princeton over Williams?” “Well, Coach,” he replied, “it came down to want-
ing to play Division I football,” “Whoa, wait a minute, son,” Farley quickly responded.
“Princeton is a wonderful opportunity and best of luck to you there, but unless you have
a chance to play on New Year’s Day for the national championship, son, you’re really not
playing Division I football.” A point well made! Comfortable in their own skin, Farley
and Whalen, outstanding coaches in their own right, have kept it both grounded and suc-
cessful at Williams.
“Recruiting With a Little Help From My Friends”

A Profile of Fran Dunphy
Former Men’s Basketball Coach
University of Pennsylvania

Note: In the spring of 2006 Fran Dunphy accepted the head coaching position at Temple University in Philadelphia, a member of the Atlantic 10 Conference and a school which has athletic scholarships to assist in its recruiting. Nevertheless, his experience as head coach at The University of Pennsylvania and in a non-scholarship environment brings a wealth of knowledge to bear for student-athletes looking to self-recruit.

As the men’s basketball coach at The University of Pennsylvania, a member of the non-scholarship Ivy League, but a school with a rich basketball history nonetheless, Fran Dunphy has always looked the part of a high profile basketball coach, handling himself with poise and confidence, even as his Penn Quakers battled some of the top teams in the country on national television. Yet, on other days you might find him lecturing on management at the prestigious Wharton School of Business on the Penn campus. Pretty important stuff, right? Well, “Dunph” is just as comfortable on some outdoor court in town, in a T-shirt and shorts, and working with the neighborhood kids as he is talking about the intricacies of business management. Fran Dunphy is much more than a basketball coach; he’s a Philly guy who loves basketball and his hometown. And, he’s good…and very good. Ask anyone who knows anything about basketball, specifically college basketball, and they’ll know about Fran Dunphy, one of the most well-liked and respected men in the game. His 310 career victories in 17 seasons at Penn places him second all-time among Ivy League coaches, but his reputation as an approachable “Philly guy,” whose heart has always been in the right place, is even more impressive.

On many levels “Dunph” and his Penn Quakers helped shape the course of college basketball in hoops-crazed Philadelphia, where Big 5 basketball is indelibly etched into the fabric of the city. For many a basketball fan growing up in Philly and the surrounding areas, watching Big 5 basketball games on television on Wednesday and Saturday evenings was an important part of their basketball education. On these evenings, Big 5 teams (Penn, Villanova, Temple, LaSalle and St. Joseph’s) would battle each other or other traditional rivals in a doubleheader event at The Palestra, one of the great old basketball arenas in the country. The games between Big 5 rivals are magic still. Rabid fans pack into The Palestra and the heated yet friendly rivalries among the schools have forged a truly special place in college basketball. Dunphy, a former LaSalle star, Penn coach, and now the new coach at Temple, is the embodiment of Big 5 basketball.
Dunphy worked hard at his craft while at Penn, coaching, recruiting, and finding the most talented and capable basketball players to fuel his high octane program. Following in the footsteps of such Penn coaching greats as Chuck Daly, who went on to coach the Detroit Pistons of the NBA to two world championships, Dunphy and his Penn teams competed favorably against the best teams in the country, and without athletic scholarships. Disarmingly understated and as straight-talking as they come, Dunphy is honest about the challenges he faced while at Penn: “I knew that because of the non-scholarship situation and the academic standards, I had to work hard on the recruiting trail. Still, I chose to accentuate the positive. I preferred to think about all the great young men I could recruit instead of thinking about those kids who couldn’t get in or who opted for scholarships. Getting all the help I could from as many sources as possible helped us to identify the appropriate kids fairly early on, which I think was a big part in our process.”

In an effort to find the right kids for Penn, Dunphy and his staff of hoop “junkies” were out watching games – lots of games – along with the showcases in the summer where many of the better high school players could be found displaying their wares. “We really tried hard to see as many players as we could whenever we could,” mentions Dunphy. “Videotapes are nice and so, too, are coaches’ referrals, but for us, seeing a kid play was very important. There was a lot for us to watch when we saw a kid play…how he moved, his skill level, his instincts for the game, his willingness to play within himself, his ability to complement his teammates, his behavior – all when he was playing in front of us. Once we saw a kid play whom we liked, we’d do as much checking up on him as possible to determine if he might be the kind of kid we’d like to recruit.”

For Dunphy, getting the type of help he needed to recruit players to Penn involved contacting such people as the high school or club coach and the guidance counselor, mostly to gain a better sense of a prospect’s interest in Penn and to discern exactly how strong a student he really was. “We’d follow up with the high school or club coach and guidance counselor as soon as possible to determine his interest level and academic strength, to see if he could be competitive in the Penn admission pool. The boy needed to be able to do the work here…that’s an absolute must. Otherwise, there was no use in pursuing him any further.” Dunphy continues, “Likewise, we might see a kid play whom we really liked, and who was a strong enough student, but was intent on earning a basketball scholarship or maybe playing at a higher level than the Ivy League. In the case of that kid, we knew that our chances of recruiting him weren’t good, so we’d try to find out from his high school or club coach early on what our chances were. Of course, if we sensed interest, we’d pursue him, but knowing full well that Penn might not be his top choice, thanks in large part to others.”

At Penn, Dunphy needed to be both a realist and an optimist. “We understood that Penn was simply not a good match for everyone; we were not going to get them all. Still,
we were able to find some great young men who were a credit to the university, who could compete at a very high level athletically, and who understood why they chose to come to Penn. I consider myself fortunate to have had the chance to work with so many great kids who have gone on to do great things in their lives.” As he moves on to begin another Big 5 chapter in his life at Temple, Fran Dunphy can rest easy knowing he had a profoundly positive impact on the Penn community and managed to keep Penn basketball strong. That is, until he brings his Temple Owls into The Palestra to face the Penn Quakers.

“Establishing a Relationship”

A Profile of Jim Steen
Head Swimming Coach
Kenyon College

The long and lonely hours of training in silence for swimming can wear on even the most committed of athletes. For Jim Steen, legendary coach of the Kenyon men’s and women’s swimming teams, no one in the history of the sport has been as successful in getting his athletes to maximize their potential and to enjoy their solitary hours of training just to be a part of something truly special. It is an indisputable fact that Coach Steen’s teams at Kenyon have earned their rightful place among the greatest athletic programs in the history of college athletics, due in no small part to his passion and his love for swimming and his undying interest in his charges. Affable, articulate, introspective, and incredibly inventive, Steen continually puts his program under the microscope in an effort to make it better. Consider this. The 2007 season marked the twenty-eighth consecutive year Kenyon men have won the NCAA Division III Swimming championship and the women have won more than twenty NCAA championships in the past 23 years, a dual athletic dynasty that has not been matched in the history of college sport. Beyond these staggering successes, however, what has made his program so wildly successful is Steen’s commitment to empowering his swimmers to be the best they can be and a keen eye for spotting talent on the rise. “I don’t always recruit the fastest swimmers. In fact, each year we probably are out-recruited by some of our rivals in D-III in terms of getting the fastest swimmers. While we do get some great kids [athletically] coming into the program, some of the best Kenyon swimmers have been those whose credentials coming in aren’t all that impressive. We really like the kids with passion and who are trending up...those who really look to get better in the program. It’s those kids who have
made a great contribution to our program.” In a sport like swimming, where there are relatively few opportunities to be in the limelight, success is measured in tenths of a second, and where improvement often comes at a snail’s pace, the rewards are few and often come in the form of personal improvement, support for one’s teammates, and membership on a team. No one understands the swimming mind better than Steen, who has always seen the individual swimmers in his program as more important than wins and losses.

Located in Gambier, Ohio, a sleepy little town not too far from Ohio’s capital of Columbus, Kenyon College is a top rated liberal arts school with nationally recognized academic programs in a number of areas, most notably in English. Each winter for the past quarter of a century, this picturesque campus is enlivened by swimming in much the same way the Duke University community buzzes about its Blue Devil basketball teams. Never content to rest on their laurels, Steen and his assistants commit each year to re-inventing themselves in order to make sure the juggernaut is lean and mean and hungry for success. “Making each year seem more important than the last is by no means an easy job,” quips Steen. “If my staff and I didn’t figure out which new buttons to push each year, we’d be doing a grave dis-service to every Kenyon swimmer in the program and every Kenyon swimmer who came before them. I want each year to be separate from the previous, so that every swimmer in the program understands the importance of sacrifice, commitment, and teamwork in the achieving of goals.”

One would think that success would beget success and so recruiting at Kenyon would take care of itself now. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, as the business of landing great student athletes – who often have many great options – is challenging at every juncture. Steen and his staff’s mission is to sell the benefits of a great small liberal arts college with an excellent swimming tradition to swimmers who often have other better known choices, sometimes even Division I possibilities, which as you might imagine is not an altogether easy task. “At some levels, recruiting swimmers is all about times. Swimming times are swimming times, but we simply don’t look at the numbers in a vacuum,” says Steen. “What’s often as important is how the times relate to where a swimmer is in his or her development. Is the swimmer trending up? Does he or she continue to get better, or are the swimmer’s best times ones that were swum in years’ past? Obviously that’s very important to know. Another part of the recruiting process, separate from the times, is trying to get to know the swimmer and building a relationship with him or her. Doing that over the phone is not always an easy thing, but we try to gain a sense of what’s important
to the student-athlete as we learn more about his or her swimming talents.”

It’s not unusual for Steen to recommend other schools that might be better matches in his discussions with a prospective student-athlete. “When in the course of discussion we realize that Kenyon might not be the right match for a student athlete, I am more than happy to suggest other schools – often our competitors – that might be better matches. Over the years I’ve learned a fair amount about quite a few schools, especially those with whom we compete, so recommending a place that might be better suited for a student’s interests and talents is the right thing to do. Often I have students and their families thank me for helping them navigate this process. When we have the best interests of student-athletes as a priority, rarely do students and families get upset about Kenyon not working out. Obviously Kenyon is not for everyone, so we are happy to be in a position to recommend other schools. I feel responsible for helping these young student-athletes in any way I can.”

As for the recruiting process, Steen and his staff freely admit that theirs may not be the most efficient or scientific method, but for them a little bit of messiness is just fine. “We kind of like to have a bit of gamesmanship in the recruiting process; refining it too much would take the fun out of it,” Steen says. “I often trust my gut feelings about prospective student-athletes as much as facts and figures in sizing up a candidate. I’m always looking for that student-athlete who will not wilt under the pressure of the academic load at Kenyon and of swimming in such a successful program. Again, it’s a special swimmer who can handle and thrive under these conditions, so the match is really critical.”

Maybe it’s the magic of the place, perhaps it’s just “in the water,” but countless people have offered theories to account for Steen’s unparalleled success without hitting it on the head. From our perspective, however, Steen’s extraordinary success seems far simpler to explain than most would care to admit – it’s the hard work, enthusiasm, passion, and love for the sport that, when combined with a genuine respect and commitment to those in his program, has made Kenyon swimming unique among athletic programs in this country at any level.
“It's Much More Than Hockey”

A Profile of Katey Stone
Women’s Ice Hockey
Harvard University

Amid Cambridge, Massachusetts’ trendy shops, wandering musicians, and vendors of every sort, you’ll find Harvard University, arguably the most well-known and prestigious academic institution in the country. Just the name Harvard conjures up images of preppy-clad students strolling the Yard pursuing high-minded activities, but right along with these beautiful minds you’ll also find Katey Stone’s women’s ice hockey players, who also walk the Yard pursuing their own high-minded academic activities. On top of their academic talent, they also happen to be some of the best ice hockey players anywhere.

For Stone, coaching is in her blood. Coming from a coaching family, her father Larry was the long-time athletic director and football and baseball coach at the Taft School in Connecticut; her brother Mike is the head baseball coach at the University of Massachusetts; and her brother Jim is the athletic director, football and baseball coach at Blair Academy in New Jersey. Katey came to Harvard after coaching ice hockey and lacrosse at the high school level, with stints at Tabor Academy (Massachusetts) and Phillips Exeter Academy (New Hampshire). In her fourteenth season at Harvard, Stone’s teams have compiled an impressive 245-117-7 overall record, while making numerous ECAC and NCAA tournament appearances. During the 1998-1999 season, her team compiled an outstanding 33-1 record and garnered Harvard's first NCAA Women’s Ice Hockey Championship. By the numbers, Stone has enjoyed dazzling success on all fronts. Still, she understands that recruiting the most talented ice hockey players to come to Harvard will always be challenging due to Harvard’s rigorous academic standards. “While we go head-to-head with other fine schools for student-athletes, we also have the high admission standards at Harvard to contend with. Even so, we’re still able to recruit great kids. At Harvard, it’s much more than hockey,” comments Stone.

When it comes to the recruiting process, Stone speaks candidly about the challenges she faces. “Getting all the pieces together from the student in the right order and in a timely fashion is critical. At Harvard everything counts...grades, test scores, counselor and teacher recommendations...it’s really important that a student-athlete has taken care of her end of the process before I present the candidate to admission. Everything really needs to be in; otherwise, it becomes difficult for admission to get a complete picture and gain a sense of whether the recruit will have a chance in the admission process. The message I try to convey to all
prospective hockey recruits is that at Harvard paying attention to the details is an important part of the recruitment process. When students and high school guidance departments don’t stay on task through the process by submitting the necessary materials on time, it can hurt their chances.” As she recruits, Stone likes to focus primarily on the student-athlete. “Parents are great and obviously need to be involved in the recruitment process at some level, but I like to communicate with the student-athletes themselves. I like to see the student-athlete taking charge of the process to the greatest extent possible.”

In no small way, Katey Stone and women’s ice hockey at Harvard have been the beneficiaries of the meteoric rise in popularity of the sport, especially among females, in this country. “Ice hockey is the fastest growing sport in America,” mentions Stone, “so the number of players in the pipeline has increased significantly in the last few years. It used to be the case that we could find one great player out of five or six… now it seems that maybe three of six will have the talent to contribute at our level. Still, there is the “small” issue of admission to deal with. Each year we receive somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 inquires, mostly from juniors, which we are quickly able to bring down to somewhere around 30 or so by the early fall. Of the 30, we try to bring that number down to about 15-20 that we will invite for official visits. My staff and I try to see as many tournaments as possible, and we keep pretty up-to-date folders on the kids we like. We keep track of all sorts of correspondence on the kids we think are in the ballpark, both athletically and academically; otherwise, we let the kids know right away that they won’t be strong candidates for our program. Dealing honestly and candidly with those families is vitally important, as our reputations, along with the school’s, are at stake. In such cases, we might say something like, ‘coming to play here, you’re really going to have your hands full, both with the hockey and the academics,’ which is usually enough to convince kids that Harvard isn’t the right match. That part of my job is never easy, but it’s very important for lots of reasons that we deal with kids and their families squarely.”

Once Stone and her staff get prospective student-athletes to the Harvard campus, she lets them experience the school just as it is. “We want them to experience what Harvard is all about, to understand why they’re coming here. My assistants and I don’t dote over them while they are on a visit; I let my players spend time with the recruits because they oftentimes provide valuable insights into kids that my staff and I might not readily see. I trust my players to help me to make good decisions about the recruits; after all, they’re the ones who will be on the ice with them. In the end, we have to hope that our recruits – often in the face of offers from other schools – can hang in there [to stay with the admission process] if Harvard is where they really want to go.”
Playing hockey at Harvard – indeed any varsity sport – is not for the faint of heart. It takes unusual commitment and determination to stay focused amid a veritable feast of distractions on the Harvard campus and in surrounding Cambridge. Stone puts it well when she says, “Nothing I can say can adequately prepare them for the intensity level – on the ice, in the classroom and in the community – that they will experience here. It really does take a special student-athlete to handle it all. Despite the challenges, it has been a distinct pleasure to work with such extraordinary student-athletes and people who have made my time at Harvard very special.”

“\textbf{A Four-Year Commitment}”

A Profile of Jay Martin
Men’s Soccer Coach
Ohio Wesleyan University

Jay Martin, Ohio Wesleyan’s highly successful men’s soccer coach, believes in supporting his players at every juncture throughout their years at this small liberal arts college located in Delaware, Ohio. “I want every young man who comes to play soccer at OWU to be successful, but not just in soccer. I want each young man to understand that while soccer will be a big part of his experience here, it simply cannot be the most important reason why he’s chosen OWU. I impress upon all my players that academics are first, soccer is second, and then their social life should be part of the experience as well.” Sounding a bit more like a philosopher than a coach, Martin often reminds his players of a very important fact: “Ten years from the time they have graduated, no one will care about how many soccer matches they won or lost. People will care about the institution they attended, the GPA they earned, and how they would characterize their overall experience. Of course, soccer will be a part of that characterization, but that’s pretty much it,” he says. “I want every prospective young man visiting OWU to understand that aspect of their college experience, whether they come here or choose to go elsewhere.”

Martin’s enthusiasm for coaching at OWU is very real. “The relationships I’ve built over the past 29 years, the young men I’ve worked with during that time, [they have] made my time here special. I recently returned from a trip to Paris with my wife to attend a former student’s wedding, where I saw quite a number of my old players, who were happy to be together. That alone was worth the trip. I love my job and really enjoy coming to work each day.” Not surprisingly, given his commitment to his players, Martin has enjoyed remarkable success at OWU, winning the 1998 Division III national championship, establishing an NCAA record of 19 consecutive NCAA tournament appearances (1978-1995),
and compiling a stunning overall record of 500-98-36. Jay Martin is clearly one of the most accomplished coaches in college athletics at any level.

Regarding the recruiting process, Martin is quick to point out those things he finds important. “First off, we look at a young man’s athleticism and skill level, because without the necessary athleticism and skill level he simply won’t be able to play for us. Once we’ve identified that a young man has the requisite talent and skill, we try to determine what type of student he is by requesting a transcript from his high school guidance counselor. Before we do any more recruiting of that young man, we want to make sure he can do the work at OWU, which is pretty demanding. At the same time, we look for young men who want to be successful in the classroom. The desire to achieve is obviously an important ingredient to anyone’s success in college, and college athletes are no exception. I want students to want to achieve.”

Key to the recruiting process for Martin is getting the students onto campus for a visit, which he believes is the best way to land a prospect. “Once we determine that the boy is a good enough player and student, then we invite him to visit us. I want him to come with his parents and to spend the day with us, touring the campus, interviewing in admissions, and meeting with some of the team members. If he likes us and we like him, then we’ll try to get the boy to come back for an overnight. We want the boys to come for Thursday, Friday and Saturday – that way they get to see all sides of the school. On Friday he sees the academic side; on Friday night he sees the social, and Saturday he can see the athletic side. More than anything, after his visit to OWU, he should have a darn good idea whether we’re a good match. Recruiting at OWU is not quite as ‘cut and dry’ as it might be at other need-based [non-scholarship] schools, where I get three players off my list or something like that. Usually each fall, after the team has been set, I get the players together and ask how many of them think they were actually recruited. Often there are quite a few hands, but in fact very few of them were actually bona fide recruits here. Many of the others got into OWU because they were solid student-athletes and fine citizens, not because they were stud players who were going to change the course of the program. That one exercise is always a lesson in humility for some and a wonderful surprise for others, particularly those who turned out to be better players than I had thought.”

“Obviously getting quality student-athletes here is important, but providing a first-class overall experience is just as important to me,” mentions Martin. “We have an extensive mentoring/support program in place to help our younger players through their first year experience. Typically the older, more experienced players take an active interest in shepherding the younger players, and in that way everyone comes to appreciate the importance of watching over each other, which is an important aspect of my program and a great life lesson.”
Like an experienced fisherman who is passionate about the sport on many levels, Martin considers “setting the hook” an important part of the recruiting process, but “landing the fish and returning it back to the water in good condition” is equally rewarding. “I remember the late Bart Giamatti, former Yale president and commissioner of major league baseball, mentioned once that he had a distaste for those college coaches who, once they were finished with a recruiting class, were looking forward with anticipation to finding better players to replace his most recent crop.” Clearly Martin’s players at OWU, throughout their time, feel a part of the program, not just players brought in to continue the program’s winning ways.