

Plan Ahead For The Recruiting Game

(Nancy Nitardy)

Athletes and their parents can make the college search process less stressful and more enjoyable by planning ahead academically, athletically and financially.

Prior to your senior year in high school you have opportunities to help yourselves become a better recruit to college coaches. Strong academics can give an athlete an added advantage with admissions departments and coaches.

Plan to challenge yourself academically throughout high school. If you are aiming to be the best in your sport, you are continually pushing yourself against tougher competition. The same goes for the classroom.

If your high school offers Honors or Advanced Placement Courses, and you are capable of handling the challenge, sign-up.

Know the academic requirements for perspective college athletes. The NCAA provides free literature for the College Bound Student athlete. Call the NCAA at 913-339-1906 and ask for your copy of the free literature or check out their web site at www.ncaa.org.

Be sure to meet with your high school guidance counselor and have a game plan. Know what courses you need to take each year and what additional opportunities may be available to you as far as extracurricular activities and volunteer work. Yes, volunteer work. Not only can volunteer work help your college application, but it can be a great life experiences for a student athlete.

Many Admission Directors are looking favorably at those perspective students who have been involved in their community. If you are involved now you will most likely be involved later in college campus activities. In addition, many good application essays have come from volunteer experiences.

Athletically, play, play, play, go to camp and play some more. The more you play the better you will most likely become at your sport. Camps are the big summer activity that can be fun and rewarding. Ideally, attending a camp on a college campus or where college coaches are coaching would be the best option.

Camps are a chance for athletes to gain exposure to college coaches. Many college coaches find their recruits at camps. The other place to be observed by college coaches is at the state, regional, and national level playing against the best in your sport. Many college coaches have limited budgets, thus they attend major tournaments where they can evaluate a number of athletes at one stop.

Take the time to visit college campuses while traveling to the many tournaments you participate in across the state, region and nation. Visiting college campuses may not be a priority for a freshman or sophomore in high school, but if you are near by, it can't hurt to check it out. Be sure to do some research on the college prior to the visit. Have an idea of what to expect.

Have a financial plan. If you haven't already done so, figure out what you can do financially to be better prepared for supporting a college education. Good reading material is "Don't Miss Out" by Anna and Robert Leider (Octameron) or check out www.finaid.org on the internet. If you look now, you will find there are a number of possibilities and a variety of options for financing an education.

When the time comes (January 1st of the students senior year), fill in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form no matter what you think you will or will not qualify for.

Try not to eliminate any one college based on the cost only. Most colleges have a pool of money that they use to award grants and scholarships. The money is not necessarily awarded on a need basis, but often on merit or on other criteria.

In addition, many companies and corporations today offer scholarships for various reasons with all sorts of criteria attached. The Women's Sports Foundation (800-227-3988) is a great resource for young female athletes. The Foundation awards scholarships and grants annually and can provide a list of colleges offering athletic scholarships.

Plan ahead, be prepared and you will have choices in your future.

College Coaches and Admissions Directors are looking for those student-athletes that have pushed themselves on and off the field. Remember to give yourself a chance to compete academically and athletically at the highest level. YOU can be better!