



Applying to College as a Student Athlete

Whatever your level of play, being an athlete is likely to help you in the college admissions process. While the percentage of high school athletes who win athletic scholarships is exceedingly small, even students who were never on All-County or All League teams can often play in college, and making that known ahead of time can improve their odds of being admitted.

The NCAA allows only Division I and II schools to award athletic scholarships, but Division III schools and even the Ivies, which do not award athletic scholarships despite being Division I, will admit athletes they want for their teams with significantly lower grades and test scores than non-athletes.

David Stoekel, author of *Advising the College-Bound Student Athlete*, suggests that student athletes begin the college search and testing process on a significantly earlier timeline than their classmates need to. Coaches are projecting their needs several years into the future, and making verbal commitments to students as early as their sophomore year of high school. In fact, According to Harry Rosenholtz, who also advises high school athletes on the college admissions process, 60 to 65% of the athletic scholarship money is offered to students by the time they have completed their first semester of sophomore year.

Since college coaches frequently ask students to produce a real SAT or ACT score by the end of their sophomore year, the testing schedule for athletes must be accelerated. In nearly all cases these students will re-take the standardized exams the following year, but coaches will want the early scores and a transcript in order to assess whether a student they're interested in will be acceptable to the admissions office. In fact, they generally pass this information on to the admissions office for a "pre-read."

Both Stoekel and Rosenholtz emphasize the importance for athletes to be proactive so as to ensure that college coaches notice them. Those who wish to play in a D-I school, Stoekel advises, ought to be looking at 50 or 60 schools when they begin the process and contacting that many coaches because the odds are that only ten percent of them (meaning five or six) will respond.

A few rules of thumb for the high school athlete are (1) do your homework to learn everything you can about the teams (and the colleges too, of course, since your

academic experience is of paramount importance as well) and (2) reach out to the coaches yourself, in a manner which projects maturity and confidence. Your current team coaches can guide you, and your parents will have a part to play too, but to make a positive impression on a college coach, take charge of the situation yourself as much as you possibly can.

The first step is to send a letter (Rosenholtz advises it be handwritten) to each coach, accompanied by an athletic resume. This single page document should include personal information (address, phone, email, age, date of birth, height, weight, and sport-specific statistics), academic information (high school name and address, graduation date, grade point average, and standardized test scores broken down by section), and athletic information (high school position, uniform number and colors, coach's name, phone and email, and honors, and similar information for club teams, camps and clinics you've participated in).

The cover letter, Stoekel says, can include comments from your coaches about your attitude and leadership as well as your talent. If possible, indicate that you wish to make an unofficial visit to the school and would like to set up a meeting with the coach. Then attach a link to a YouTube video or a DVD where the coach can see a few minutes of you in action. (That's when the color and number of your uniform become important.)

Coaches may or may not watch the video and respond to you within a reasonable amount of time, but you should not hesitate to follow up with a telephone call, asking if they had a chance to watch it and can tell whether you would be a fit for their team. Even when looking at athletes as young as sophomores, coaches can assess their athleticism and attitude toward their own and their teammates' mistakes, indications of "coachability," which is as important to coaches as talent.

If a coach is interested in you, you may be invited to attend his or her summer camp or clinic. Such invitations are not necessarily that indicative of genuine interest, but these can be excellent venues for the coaches to see you playing your sport. If you receive such invitations from multiple schools, you may not be able to and will not need to accept them all, but be polite and explain that you will have to figure out your family's summer schedule before making a decision.

If you are really interested in a school and the coach seems at all receptive to your overtures, make every effort to stay in touch. Whenever a coach contacts you, be sure to respond within a day or two. Waiting longer than that can convey the wrong impression. Since coaches tend to be fans of social media, especially Twitter, connecting with them by following them there and on Facebook is a good way of keeping yourself in their minds. Stoekel advises students to observe their target schools' games live, televised, or on the web, and communicate their observations and questions to the coach, something frequently done most easily via social media.

Remember that a verbal commitment is not binding, so whether or not you receive one early on, you need to continue the relationship you have established with the coach. The NCAA dictates rules for when coaches are and are not permitted to contact recruits, but during those periods when they are prohibited from contacting you, you may still contact them and should not hesitate to do so.

Even when it begins early, the recruitment process is never final before the written commitment your senior year. You will be asked to send updated transcripts and videos and may have opportunities to participate in multiple camps and clinics during the summers following your junior as well as sophomore year.

Senior year is when coaches invite their recruits on “official visits,” to meet the team as well as tour all the athletic facilities. This is a chance not only for you to gauge how well you would fit in with your potential future teammates, but also for them to assess and then make a recommendation to the coach about you.

If all goes well and you end up being recruited at Ivy League and other top tier schools, you will be instructed to submit a binding Early Decision application.