



## **Athletic Recruiting and the College Admissions Process**

With college coaches increasingly observing high school athletes at showcase tournaments and camps rather than at their high school games, and coaches beginning to recruit students for some sports younger and younger, the college application process for students wishing to play collegiate sports is undergoing some significant changes. The following information is from a workshop for counselors given by Jeffrey Durso-Finley and Holly Burks Becker of The Lawrenceville School. Both have considerable expertise working with athletes on the college admissions process, and Durso-Finley is the author of a book coming out in a second edition later this month, *Understanding Athletic Recruiting: A Comprehensive Guide for High School Student Athletes and their Parents*.

The first question high school athletes need to consider is their goals. Are they interested only in Division I teams or Division II or III? Are they looking for a scholarship? Are they hoping to use their athletic talent mainly to improve their college options? Do they want to be guaranteed a spot on the team, or would they be willing to sit on the bench for three years? Durso-Finley points out that the less students restrict the colleges they'll consider in terms of geographic region, academic reputation, division and the likelihood of playing on the team and obtaining a scholarship, the more likely they are to achieve their goal.

Getting on the coaches' radar is the first step high school students need to take. In the vast majority of cases it is the student who must take the initiative by doing things like completing online questionnaires on college websites, sending letters or e-mails to college coaches, submitting an Athletic Resume to coaches or programs, sending unsolicited videos of themselves via YouTube links, enrolling in summer camps where coaches go to watch athletes, and sending their game and tournament schedules to coaches they hope will come to see them.

As soon as a student makes contact with a coach, the coach begins the evaluation process. This involves observing the student in action, analyzing game and skills tapes, speaking with the high school and club coaches about the student's ability and attitude, and doing statistical performance comparisons and competition comparisons. It also entails requesting test scores

and transcripts because at this stage the coach generally asks the Admissions Office and Financial Aid Office to give the potential applicant a “pre-read.”

Unfortunately, it is easy for students to become confused by their interactions with the coach and think they are being recruited when they really are not. Durso-Finley explains that when a coach tells a player that the Admissions Office “gave the green light,” it only means that the coach has permission to recruit him or her, but not that he is actively doing so at this point.

Typically the Admissions Office gives each team’s coach the opportunity to recruit at most two or three athletes per year. When a coach says to an applicant, “We’d love to have you for the team; you’ll have a better chance if you apply early; I’ll talk to the Admissions Office to support you, and I’d like you to come meet the team,” this does NOT mean the student is actually being recruited. Everyone who applies early has a better chance of getting in, and these statements mean exactly what they say but not that the coach is willing to use one of his two or three spots on this student at this time.

So how is a student to ascertain what exactly the coach is up to? The frequency of contact the coach is having with the student is one indicator of the coach’s interest in him or her as a possible recruit, but only if the coach rather than the student is initiating these contacts. Coaches are not trying to be misleading, but they want to maintain good will with the students they’d love to have on the team even if they aren’t able to actively recruit them.

Ultimately students are advised to ask coaches for clarification, to ask directly, “Are you recruiting me or just saying that if I get in, you’d love to have me walk on the team?” If the coach answers, “There are people in front of you, but you’re on my list,” it’s perfectly acceptable to ask, “How many people are ahead of me on the list?”

As with all aspects of the college admissions process, students are advised to behave like adults and handle the inquiries and follow-up communications themselves. They should definitely not rely on their parents or even on their current coaches to do the talking for them.