

## CONTACTING COLLEGE COACHES

### CollegelInfo - Tips on Contacting College Coaches

By Ramona Barber

*Ramona Barber is the Iowa State Youth Soccer Association Education Director and a contributor to Sports Communication Publications*

Very few college coaches will offer athletic scholarships to players they haven't seen play. Also, most college coaches will not take players seriously until the completion of their sophomore year. Players who will be juniors and seniors in high school should be sure to contact coaches at colleges that interest them and arrange to have their play evaluated. Here are some tips about contacting coaches.

1. **BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOUR LEVEL OF PLAY.** Contact colleges that are a good academic and athletic match for you. Make sure that you choose colleges that vary in level of play. Don't miss your chance to play in college because all the programs you contacted were above your level of play.
2. Make your first contact in writing in May at the end of your sophomore year. Personalize your letter requesting an evaluation. Let the coach know why you are considering his/her school. Include both athletic and academic information. If possible, include a one page resume. Keep in mind that some coaches do not care to evaluate players until the completion of their junior year.
3. Follow up your letter with a phone call. Talk with the coach or his/her staff. The more personalized interest a player shows in college, the more interest a coach usually shows in a player. When looking at NCAA colleges, be aware that although there are rules limiting calls a college coach can make to a player, players are not restricted in the calls they can make to a coach.
4. Don't wait until you get a tournament schedule to contact a college coach. Send information early on all the events you plan to attend. FAX your playing schedules to the coach when you receive them. Include your team name and jersey number each time you fax a schedule. Make a special note if you are changing jersey numbers or attending as a guest player.
5. Contact coaches in the geographic area that you are traveling to but also consider contacting coaches of colleges that may not be in traveling distance of the tournament. Many college coaches have friends or representatives who they can ask to evaluate players.
6. Once a college coach has been contacted by a prospective recruit, it is customary for him/her to send a player profile sheet. Complete and return profile form immediately! Don't worry if you don't have all the information that the coach requests. For example, you may have not taken your SAT or ACT college entrance exams and have not test scores to report. Fill out as much of the profile as possible and let him/her know that you will send the additional information when it is available.
7. You can visit any college campus at your expense any time and talk with the coach or athletic department without breaking any recruiting rules. So, try to visit the colleges that interest you. College coaches usually take players more seriously if they make the effort to visit the campus.
8. Stay in contact with the coach after he/she has evaluated you. Let him/her know if you are serious about his/her program. Ask him/her if you are a potential fit.

- Keep him/her updated on your activities. Keep in mind that NCAA coaches have limits on contacting players. Don't take offense if you don't hear from the coach on a regular basis. You need to make sure that the coach knows that you have a serious interest!
9. Remember that many coaches are busy with their own team during the fall season and out of the office during the summer. Try to make contact early and if you don't hear from the coach continue trying. Call to be sure the coach has received your information. If you get no response, check with the athletic office to see if there has been a coaching change.
  10. After all your efforts, if you get no response realize that the coach is probably not interested in recruiting you. If the coach tells you that you are not a good match for his program, accept it and move on.

Good Luck!

## RECRUITING

### **CollegelInfo - Recruiting Tips, Tricks and Traps**

By Ramona Barber

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Every year there are always a small number of athletes known as blue chippers. A blue chip player is an athlete who is considered a superstar. Penny Hastings author of *How to Win a Sports Scholarship* says that blue chippers "typically are national record holders, state champions and/or holders of national scoring titles." They are individuals who can come into any high-level program and make an immediate impact. Coaches seem to have an inner radar that makes them very aware of these athletes. However, blue chippers are a scarce commodity. The vast majority of players are not blue chippers. The rosters of most college teams are filled by serious, competent athletes who do not stand out quite so much as individuals. In any given year, there are more athletes who dream of playing college sports than there are openings on college rosters. Therefore, the majority of athletes who want to participate in college athletics need to be very proactive in searching out and pursuing all possible opportunities.

There is no magic formula that can guarantee automatic selection to a college sports program, but, there are some guidelines which can improve an athlete's chances. After five years of traveling throughout the U.S. giving athletic workshops, visiting colleges, and interviewing coaches, I have concluded that those student-athletes who do both their academic and athletic homework have the most success in getting college coaches to give them a chance. Coaches are more inclined to select players who seem to value the academic as well as the athletic programs available at their schools. Very few coaches are even remotely interested in athletes who are just fishing around for a place to participate without looking into the total experience that their college offers.

The main reason that many good athletes never get the chance to compete in college is their own unrealistic perceptions of their personal ability. It is also sad but true that athletes are too often sabotaged by well meaning parents or club/high school coaches who foster inflated expectations. Unrealistic dreams and expectations often lead athletes to severely and unwisely limit their options by refusing to consider anything but the most highly visible, nationally ranked programs. These programs have athletes competing for a chance to play. For example, Creighton University's nationally ranked men's soccer team processes over a 1,000 letters a year from would-be players. This does not include e-mail inquiries. In a normal year, they will receive over 700 telephone requests for information. The competition for the few positions open on the squad is intense.

While Coach Bret Simon makes a serious effort to evaluate all potential players each year, only a very few athletes are offered chances to compete at Creighton.

When contacted by a prospective recruit, most coaches will reply with a form letter and a profile sheet. The profile sheet should be returned promptly. A player should continue to send the coaches additions to their profiles and updates on their sport schedules. There are a variety of rules governing when a coach can call a player but there is not rule against a player calling a coach. Players should be reasonable about the calls they make. It won't help their cause to call a coach on a daily basis. If after repeated attempts, a player fails to get a response, he/she should read between the lines...the coach is not interested!

If a coach is interested, he/she usually prefers to communicate with the prospective player and not parents or others during most of the recruiting process. If a player is recruited to a college, he/she is going to have to be able to communicate with the coach. College sports are not like youth sports which foster personal interaction between coaches and parents. College coaches view students as young adults. While they are more than willing to communicate with parents about legitimate concerns regarding their children, they are very wary of the parent who makes himself a nuisance before the athlete is even offered a position. I have heard many coaches say, "I would have recruited the kid, if it weren't for his parents."

With the exception of those sports that feature timed or distance events, there is no universally accepted or objective standard to judge the performance of young athletes. During the recruiting process, it is the college coach's perception of an athlete's ability that counts. As strange as it may seem, a recruit at one college may be considered a reject at another school. There is a fine line between communicating an athlete's abilities and outright bragging. Coaches like self assured, confident athletes but still expect them to be respectful and humble. Coaches do not take kindly to players who give them the impression that they are doing the coach a favor by considering his school. A player is always better off if he/she remembers the old saying "show, don't tell!" Prospective collegiate athletes should try to arrange for coaches at colleges that interest them to evaluate their performance one or more times. The more highly rated the sports program, the more times a coach will want to evaluate. Parents and club/high school coaches should remain in the background during the evaluation process. The more pressure that parents or others put on the college coach, the more likely that the coach will begin to look for fault in the player's performance. After the evaluation period, the player should politely ask if the coach thinks that he would be able to earn a spot on the squad. Very few college coaches enjoy having to tell young athletes that they do not

have a place for them. If the coach says no, his response should be accepted with good grace.

Although it might be hard and unpleasant, it is helpful if a player can ask the coach who is rejecting him/her what can be done to improve and what other college programs the coach might recommend. Some coaches will give helpful responses and some will not. But, if the player has already been rejected, he/she has nothing to lose by asking.

A player should wait until he is sure a coach has a sincere interest before he/she brings up the subject of scholarship money. It is very embarrassing for both sides if a player or parent is asking how much money is going to be available at the same time a coach is trying to diplomatically communicate that there is no opening on the team. Keep in mind that everyone coming into a program is going to be offered money. In many cases, only the blue chip players are offered significant athletic scholarships.

College coaches often communicate with each other. It is not unusual for them to discuss the new crop of hopefuls. Every year I hear stories of parents who disagree with a coach's evaluation of their child and proceed to call the coach and tell him that he is an idiot. Publicly venting disappointment will not help any one and will give the athlete a very bad reputation. The coach has the right to have who he wants in his program.

In very high profile athletic programs, it is not uncommon for the assistant coach or coaches to be responsible for recruiting. While the head coach makes the final decisions, he often depends on his assistants to separate realistic prospects from those who have no chance. Sometimes a head coach does not get involved in talking to prospective recruits until the final stages of the recruiting process. It is a major mistake for players, parents or others to pass over the assistant coach and insist on talking with the head coach. You should realize that when there are close decisions as to who to make offers to and who to pass up, the assistant coach's input is often the deciding factor.

Keeping in mind that "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush." Players should seriously evaluate the programs of all the coaches who show an interest in them. If a school is definitely not a good match, they player should thank the coach for his interest and tell him the truth. On the other hand, if a player discourages coaches who are genuinely interested simply because they aren't his/her first choice, then that player may end up with no place to play in college. This is sad because, a player doesn't have to be a blue chipper to be a significant and valued member of a team!