



# What college coaches think about recruiting

What high school athletes need to know, according to 40 top college coaches

# How to make recruiting better

## This is CaptainU's comprehensive recruiting study

One college coach summarized it best when she said, "Off the field, recruiting is by far the most important part of college sports." And yet recruiting remains a frustrating, time-consuming, and disorganized process for high school athletes and college coaches.

This is CaptainU's comprehensive study of the college recruiting process. Our hope is that by identifying and exposing the major trends and opportunities, recruiting can become a better experience for everyone involved.

**Methodology:** To get the inside scoop, we conducted 40 interviews with college coaches across a broad range of divisions, conferences, and regions.



### About CaptainU

CaptainU is a Chicago-based software company. We make web-based software that makes college recruiting easy. Our team is comprised of college recruiting experts, former college coaches, and technology experts. Our flagship product CaptainU Recruiting Software provides high school athletes with a complete recruiting toolkit that walks them step-by-step through the recruiting process. ([Take a tour.](#))

### Author of this study

Avi Stopper is the founder and president of CaptainU. He coached at the University of Chicago and played at Wesleyan University. Avi has an MBA from the University of Chicago and hosts our podcast, Radio CaptainU.



# Coaches want recruiting to improve

40 college coaches shared their opinions and experiences

Stanford

Duquesne

Marquette

San Francisco State

Salisbury

Drexel

Roger Williams

Southern Methodist

Harding

Loras

Oregon State

Case Western

Georgetown

Drew

Ohio Wesleyan

Quinnipiac

Hardin-Simmons

Christopher Newport

Stony Brook

New England College

Rochester Tech

Transylvania

Youngstown State

Washington

UChicago

Wesleyan

Notre Dame

Illinois State

Kenyon

Central Connecticut

Aurora

Otterbein

Metro State

Rhode Island

Louisiana State

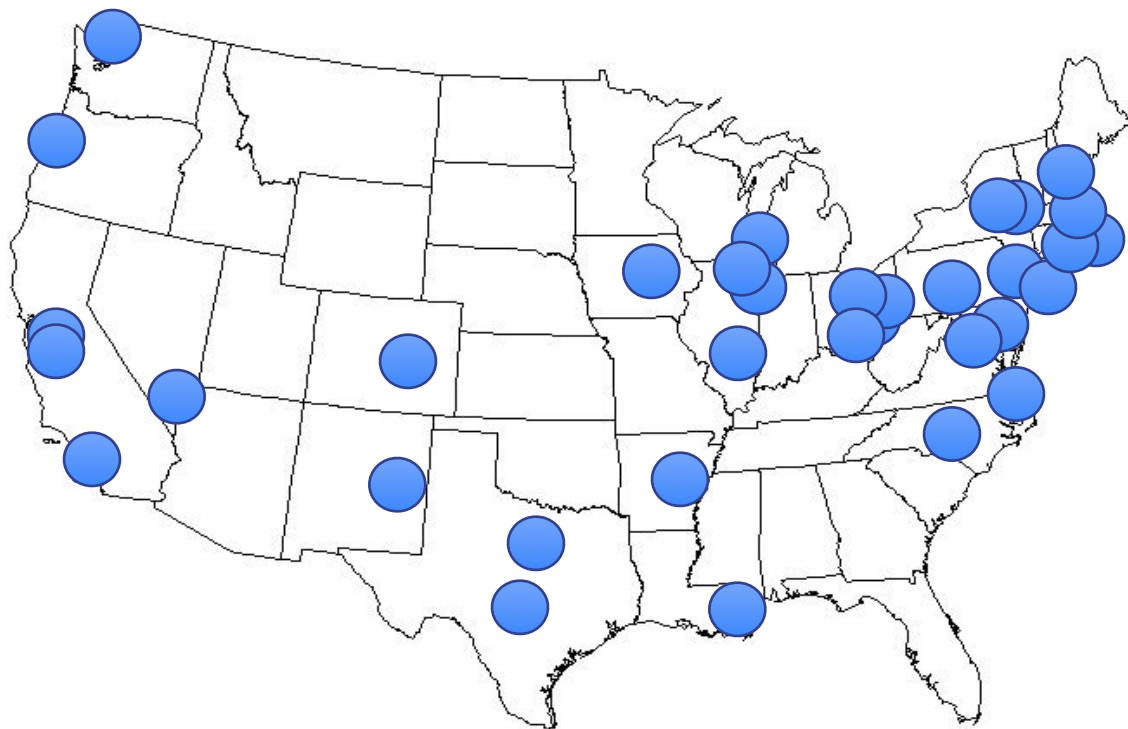
Pomona-Pitzer

DePauw

Eastern New Mexico

North Carolina

UNLV



# 7 key insights from college coaches

This is what college coaches want athletes to know

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Time and again, coaches raised 7 specific issues as their biggest concerns about recruiting.

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*“Recruiting impacts your program more than anything else. Training your team is the most enjoyable but doesn't improve you as much as recruiting.”*

*college coach perspective*

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## **1. Good athletes are often overlooked**

Many athletes who are good enough to play in college are being missed.

## **2. Athletes have to market themselves**

Athletes who actively market themselves to college coaches are more likely to succeed

## **3. Scholarships are few and far between**

Athletic scholarships are the exception, not the rule.

## **4. Focus on fit, rather than prestige**

Athletes need to find the right overall fit - academic, athletic, and social.

## **5. Recruiting is starting earlier**

Coaches are asking athletes to commit earlier, though most agree this is not a positive trend.

## **6. Honesty is essential**

Athletes should represent themselves accurately to college coaches.

## **7. Recruiting takes forever**

College coaches spend an average of 50% of their time on recruiting.



# 1. “Good players are being missed”

Just because you're good enough doesn't mean you'll succeed

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Too much of recruiting is about being in the right place at the right time.

There are four main reasons that many qualified athletes are missed:

- College coaches don't have enough time to watch each individual for enough time. An athlete who has one bad game may unfairly be ruled out.
- Youth teams can't participate in all the “right events.”
- Even athletes who get to play at the right events, aren't necessarily going to get seen by the right coach.
- Athletes don't promote themselves enough to college coaches. As a result, coaches don't know which athletes are serious.

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*“Finding the right athletes is like searching for a needle in a haystack. There are so many athletes out there, it's a daunting task.”*

*“Too much about recruiting is being in the right place at right time.”*

*“It's unfair to evaluate a player on just one game. That one game could be your make or break, but often that's all we can get.”*

*“Coaches watch for such a small amount of time and have to decide based on that.”*

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*college coach perspectives*

Some college teams have as many as 800 players in their databases.



## 2. “You have to market yourself”

To succeed, take control of the process

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The single most important thing for aspiring college athletes is to actively market themselves to college coaches.

Athletes shouldn't wait around hoping to be contacted by college coaches.

Instead, athletes can actually take control of the process by introducing themselves to college coaches and providing regular updates.

When coaches start the process, they are overwhelmed by the sheer number of potential recruits.

Those who take it upon themselves to communicate with coaches and convince them that the athlete is serious, inevitably get more attention from coaches.

It's hard to “over-communicate” with coaches. Simply put, they want to hear from qualified athletes. It makes their job easier.

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*“At a tournament, I'm obligated to see the players who have really reached out to me. That personal touch is what gets me to go see a player.”*

*“Players need to be the assertive one in the relationship early on in the process. They need to make sure that they're recruited by that school.”*

*“Players never get seen enough at tournaments. It's all about persistence in contacting the coaches and convincing them that you're serious about the program.”*

*“Even the best players need to promote themselves.”*

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college coach perspectives



# 3. “Scholarships are few & far between”

## Don't believe the hype about athletic scholarships

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Athletic scholarships are a major source of confusion and misconceptions.

Athletes and parents should develop a better understanding of the fundamentals of athletic scholarships. Know how many scholarships are available and what it means to be fully funded.

Ask informed questions that demonstrate an understanding of the realities of scholarships -- namely that they are not as common as most people think and a sensitivity to the “political” challenges coaches encounter in awarding them.

Parents who negotiate hard for every last dollar can actually do themselves a disservice. College coaches say that parents who are difficult during the recruiting process are often difficult over the next four years.

Coaches will often evade those relationships, even if it means focusing on other recruits.

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*“Everyone thinks it’s all about the scholarship, but they don’t realize how little money we actually have.”*

*“Even some of our best players don’t have full scholarships.”*

*“Players on our team get more money from academic and need-based financial aid than they do from sports scholarships.”*

*“Sports scholarships have this mystique, which I think comes from DI basketball and football. But the scholarship situation in those sports is completely different from how it is in other sports.”*

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college coach perspectives



# 4. “Find the right fit”

## Balance academics and athletics

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*“College sports” should be about college first and sports second.*

College coaches stress that finding the right fit is the most important part of recruiting.

What constitutes the “right fit?” It’s a combination of academics and sports that fits the athletes’ profile.

Coaches get too much correspondence from athletes who clearly haven’t done any research on the college. More often than not, those emails get deleted.

Athletes who spend time at the outset learning about colleges and selecting

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*“Don’t pick this school just because of our team.”*

*“It’s easy to tell which players have actually learned something about our team before they contact me. Those are the players who are most likely to get a response.”*

*“What are you going to do after your college career is done? What if the coach leaves after your first season there? What if you get injured and can’t play anymore? It’s about more than sports.”*

*“We don’t want kids to come here unless they see campus.”*

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*college coach perspectives*

The best way to find out if a college is the right fit is to visit. Stay overnight with a member of the team, watch practice, sit in on a class, and meet with the coach. Then answer the question: “Do I want to spend four years here?”



# 5. “Recruiting is starting earlier”

## Starting sophomore year is not unusual

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*“Players and coaches are being forced into situations that they’re not completely comfortable with. But colleges have to because by not getting someone early, it may be detrimental to the rest of your recruiting.”*

*“This is a disservice to the kids. Asking for verbal commitments out of sophomores is a real concern. So many sophomores are already committed and they haven’t even taken an official visit.”*

*“Transfer rates are unacceptably high and I think that’s a result of players making commitments before they really know what they’re committing to.”*

*“There’s a domino effect. Fear spreads among players and parents very quickly. One player will sign and then within a couple of months everyone on the team has signed.”*

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### college coach perspectives

Recruiting is starting progressively earlier in high school. Athletes are making commitments as early as sophomore year. This is a major concern:

- Players aren’t able to go on official visits before they commit. Players often make a commitment before they have even seen the campus and spent time with the team and coach.
- Players who can’t afford to take unofficial visits can’t make well-informed decisions about where they’re going to go.
- Some players change dramatically from when they are recruited to when they enter college. Even if they don’t change as players, they often change as people. As a result, a school that seemed right two years ago may no longer be a good fit.
- A lot of early commitments are driven by fear. When one player commits early, the pressure mounts on the other players on the team.
- There’s a financial incentive to get players to commit early. College programs that get early commitments, don’t have to pay for official visits.



# 6. “There needs to be more honesty”

Be honest with yourself; be honest with college coaches

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**Athletes should be honest with themselves and with college coaches about how good they are.**

It all starts with an honest self-evaluation. Coaches say athletes should be honest with themselves so they don't spend a lot of time promoting themselves to schools where they'll never be able to play.

Similarly, athletes should represent themselves honestly to coaches.

Exaggerations always get found out -- usually down the line, after both the athlete and college coach have invested a lot of time.

If a coach contacts an athlete who isn't interested, the athlete should tell the coach as much. This will save the coach time because he has one less player to worry about.

Athletes should be forthright with coaches about how serious they are about a given college. Coaches accept the fact that athletes need backup plans. But athletes shouldn't lead coaches on when there is no genuine interest on the athlete's side.

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*“There needs to be more honesty from players and their parents in terms of how interested they actually are.”*

*“I would like to see athletes be more honest with coaches up front. Let me know straight off if you're interested in my school. If so, great. If not, that's okay too. You've just saved me a lot of time.”*

*“Many college coaches drag their feet as they wait for other players to commit. College coaches should instead suggest that the player look elsewhere. This is more straightforward and would help players a lot.”*

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**college coach perspectives**



# 7. “The administrative albatross”

College coaches spend 50% of their time on recruiting

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Recruiting is incredibly time consuming. The challenge of honing in on 5-6 athletes out of as many as 800 is a daunting task for even the most organized college coaches.

The good news is, on the whole, college coaches enjoy recruiting. More than anything, coaches enjoy meeting and building relationships with young athletes.

Coaches also enjoy watching youth games and trying to identify the right players. This is all driven by an intense competitive fire. Many coaches relish the “marketing challenge of trying get your message out and attract the right kids.”

There are, however, considerable drawbacks to recruiting. Time spent recruiting is time away from family. Recruiting requires coaches to travel constantly and make phone calls during the evening.

College coaches also spend a lot of time organizing recruiting information, which often consists of tedious data entry.

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*“It’s an amazing thing to think how much time we spend trying to find 5-6 guys.”*

*“Players should recognize how much time college coaches invest in recruiting. I like it when players take the time to educate themselves about recruiting and my team.”*

*“The biggest challenge is finding the best matches, not just random players, but kids who want what we have to offer.”*

*“The thrill of landing a recruit is still a huge buzz.”*

*“I like meeting kids and then going out and seeing them play. It’s exciting getting to know them.”*

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## college coach perspectives

Overall, coaches enjoy recruiting because they like meeting motivated young athletes. This presents a huge opportunity for athletes who take an active role in the recruiting process.



# Feedback & discussion

## Join the conversation

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CaptainU welcomes questions and comments about this study and recruiting in general via the following:

CaptainU blog

[CaptainU.com/buzz](http://CaptainU.com/buzz)

Radio CaptainU call-in

(815) 768-4933

By email

[info@CaptainU.com](mailto:info@CaptainU.com)

By phone

(773) 834-9097

Twitter

[@captainu](https://twitter.com/captainu)

CaptainU Recruiting Software is available in 3 packages:



**Rookie:** (Free) A recruiting profile that includes academic and athletic info, and photos



**Varsity:** (\$19.95/month) Complete access to CaptainU Recruiting Software.



**MVP:** (\$39.95/month) Software plus help from CaptainU recruiting experts.