



Counseling the College-Bound High School Athlete

College recruiting beyond eligibility & the Clearinghouse



Introduction

This is CaptainU's guide for college counselors

Why a guide for college counselors?

The majority of information available for high school athletes in college guidance offices focuses on eligibility, getting through the NCAA Eligibility Center (aka Clearinghouse), and athletic scholarships. What's usually missing is a clear strategy on how to navigate the nuances of the recruiting process which, for better or worse, often begins as early as sophomore year.

College recruiting is different

The college sports recruiting process is a different beast from the standard application process for three primary reasons:

- **Recruiting requires a different strategy** -- To be successful, athletes have to be methodical and strategic over an extended period of time.
- **The process lasts a long time** -- For most competitive athletes, recruiting begins junior or even sophomore year.
- **College search is more complicated** -- Understanding what schools are the right fit academically, socially, *and* athletically can be very challenging.

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.](#)) Click [here](#) for more on how CaptainU helps college counselors.

Other CaptainU Publications

Download a copy of our free eBook "Make the Team," 26 chapters of recruiting guidance, which Anson Dorrance, head women's soccer coach at the University of North Carolina called "The book that every college-bound athlete should have." To download the book, go to <http://www.captainu.com/ebook>.

Author of This Guide

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Self-marketing

Athletes have to promote themselves to college coaches

The key to recruiting success

To be successful, athletes have to actively promote themselves to college coaches. This holds true for both “blue chip” athletes (the top 2%) and “yellow chip” athletes (the remaining 98%.) Promoting oneself is more than just sending an email here and there. It requires a concerted effort that progresses through 5 distinct phases:

1. Find the right colleges

Focus first on academics and social characteristics

2. Introduce yourself

Make a great first impression on college coaches

3. Build relationships

Communicate with college coaches on a regular basis

4. Get coaches to see you play

Convince college coaches that they need to see you in action

5. Make the team

Have the tough conversation, earn a roster spot, and discuss scholarships

These five steps are discussed in detail on the subsequent pages.

Insights From College Coaches

CaptainU conducted a study with 30 college coaches across a wide range of divisions, geographies, and ability. There were a number of key findings, including:

- College coaches spend 50% percent of their time recruiting. They spend as much, if not more time recruiting than they do coaching their teams.
- Often they are only looking for 5-6 new athletes but have to sift through as many as 2,000.
- College coaches are frustrated with the amount of time they spend recruiting and lament how recruiting eats into time they would otherwise be spending with their families.
- College coaches love it when qualified high school athletes take it upon themselves to communicate with coaches.

Opportunity For High School Athletes

This brutally inefficient market creates an incredible opportunity for high school athletes. An athlete who makes a college coach’s job easier, is much more more likely to succeed. Athletes have to take control of the recruiting process.

1. Find the right colleges

To start, forget about athletics and focus on academics

As with normal guidance counseling, the focus has to be on fit -- not just finding any old college. With athletes, of course, there's an added layer of complexity. Finding the right balance of academics, social criteria, and athletics at the outset of the recruiting process is essential. It paves the way for a successful self-marketing campaign.

How to find the right colleges

- **Start with academics and social criteria** -- It's counterintuitive, but the best place to start finding the right college teams is to initially disregard athletics. Focus instead on putting together a broad list of schools that fit the athlete's academic and social needs. Counsel the athlete as though he is any other student assembling an initial list of colleges.
- **An honest self-evaluation** -- If you sit down and have a candid conversation, most athletes have a pretty clear sense of where they stand athletically among their peers.
- **Assess the athletics** -- Once the initial list has been assembled, the athlete should look at the colleges' teams and determine whether his athletic profile fits the team. The self-evaluation from the previous step is a key tool.
- **Rank order colleges** -- As with any student's college list, athletes should sort their schools into reach, match, and safety schools. The difference, of course, is that athletics is part of the sorting equation.



There is no such thing as “the DI level”

How many times have you heard someone say, “He can play DI.” It's a false characterization. There's actually a vast range of ability in Division I and many DII and DIII teams are better than some DI teams.

What really makes DI different is the number of scholarships and the amount of time coaches may spend with their teams. (For more, [listen](#).)

2. Make an introduction

Make a great first impression on college coaches

College coaches like nothing better than hearing from qualified athletes. It makes a coach's job dramatically easier. Imagine the challenge coaches face every year as they have to find five or six athletes out of many thousands. And just when it all seems to be ending, they have to start over from scratch with their next recruiting class. It's sycophantic.

How to make an introduction

- **Get smart** -- As with applying for a job, athletes should research the colleges on their list before they contact the coaches, who have a strong distaste for form letters.
- **Write a cover letter** -- The best way for an athlete to introduce himself is through a polished cover letter that describes the athlete and his interest in that particular school. The more specific the athlete can be about why that school is the right fit, the better. Coaches love it when athletes show that they've done their research.
- **Include a recruiting profile** -- The cover letter should include an attached recruiting profile or a link to an online version. Pictures, grades, test scores, and a thorough athletic history are key components of the recruiting profile, ([Here's an example.](#))
- **Demonstrate academic qualifications** -- An athlete's first interaction with a coach must show that the athlete is academically qualified for the college. This is the first hurdle to clear.
- **Get a folder** -- The goal of this step is to get the coach to look at the athlete's materials and say, "Hmm, that's interesting," and then create a file folder with the athlete's name on it. This sets the stage for the next step.



College coaches won't find you

The odds of "being found" are slim. There are 1.5 million high school athletes competing for spots on college rosters.

The safest approach for an athlete is to assume that coaches have never heard of him. This means that he has to make the introduction. When he does, his odds will increase dramatically.

3. Build relationships

Communicate with college coaches on a regular basis

College coaches get tons of introduction letters. The vast majority of athletes never follow up. They mistakenly think that once they introduce themselves, their work is done. The faulty logic goes, "If the coach is interested in me, he'll follow up." The reality couldn't be further from the truth. Athletes have to take it upon themselves to contact coaches on an ongoing basis, until they've signed with a team.

How to build relationships

- **Don't disappear** -- After making the introduction, athletes can't disappear from the radar for months on end. They have to make their presence known. Winning the recruiting game is about persistence.
- **Email coaches** -- Stay in touch through email. Athletes shouldn't be dismayed if they don't always hear back from coaches, who may not respond for a number of reasons that have nothing to do with their interest in the athlete.
- **Call coaches** -- Coaches can't call athletes until their senior year, but athletes can always call the coaches. It requires persistence, because coaches can't even return messages. When a coach is finally reached, the athlete should have a list of talking points to make the conversation engaging.
- **Visit campus** -- A visit to campus, whether official or unofficial, shows a coach that the athletes is serious about the team.
- **Stay overnight with a player** -- Staying overnight with a player is a great way to get the inside scoop on the team and the coach. Athletes should remember that they have a huge amount of say in this. It's not just about whether the coach wants them.



Don't worry about "bothering" coaches

It's hard to contact college coaches too much. Calling every night at dinnertime is excessive, but generally speaking, it's difficult to have too much contact.

Athletes should email and/or call coaches at least once a month with updates and informed questions about the school and team.

4. Get seen

Convince coaches to watch the athlete in action

Most recruiting events -- tournaments, showcases, meets -- feature hundreds if not thousands of athletes. The odds of randomly "being seen" are slim -- let alone being seen while the athlete is doing something exceptional. Too many athletes think that just by being on the right team and playing at the right tournaments, they'll be seen.

How to get seen

- **Find out where the coach is going** -- Ask the coach what recruiting events he plans to attend. A simple question in an email along the lines of, "What tournaments are you going to be recruiting at over the next few months?" will do the trick.
- **Get to one of those events** -- The athlete needs to find a way to participate in one of those events. If his team isn't planning on being at one of them, he can often guest play with another team.
- **Attend 1-2 camps** -- College summer camps are expensive, but are an excellent opportunity to show the coach what the athlete is capable of.
- **Don't stress** -- The natural tendency when a coach is watching it to "try too hard." Instead, remind the athlete to just be himself and not feel like he has to do something spectacular.
- **Ask for an evaluation** -- Once the coach has seen the athlete, the athlete should ask the coach for an evaluation. Does the coach feel like this is a good match for his team?



Get on the coach's short list

College coaches go to recruiting events with lists of the athletes they want to see. The goal for the athlete is to be on this list.

Athletes who are on a coach's list are far more likely to be seen than those competing at the event who are anonymous. How do you get on the list? Step 3: build relationships.

5. Make the team

Get a roster spot and negotiate a scholarship

The basic goal of recruiting is simple: to win a spot on a college roster. College coaches are completing their recruiting classes earlier than ever before -- often as early as junior fall. While recognizing that coaches make decisions early, athletes shouldn't feel rushed into making a decision. The key thing is to figure out what coaches are interested and weigh the pros and cons of each college.

How to make the team

- **Understand the goal** -- The athlete should not stop promoting himself to coaches until he has an unambiguous guarantee that there is a spot for him on a team.
- **Be forthright with coaches** -- Athletes should ask coaches directly where they stand. Too often, athletes fail to ask the tough questions and, as a result, have no idea what their status is.
- **Ask about scholarships** -- Do a little research to make sure that the team offers athletic scholarships. If the answer is yes, ask the coach if any athletic money is available.
- **Weigh the choices** -- An athlete should only commit to a team when he is absolutely certain that it's the right college. Look at the big picture -- the mix of academics, social factors, and athletics.
- **Make a decision** -- Remind the athlete that this is his choice. Too many athletes make the decision to join a college team, "Because the coach wants me on the team," instead of, "Because I'm convinced that this is the right place for me as a student and as an athlete."



How do you know if you made it? Ask.

Don't assume anything. Too many college careers have ended before they began because athletes assumed that they were on the team.

Explicitly ask the coach, "If I come to your college, will I be on the team?" It's a simple, but essential question. If the coach doesn't answer with a yes or a no, find out what info he needs to make a decision.

Educate your athletes

Create a recruiting curriculum for athletes at your school

Athletes who understand recruiting succeed. The knowledge that they have to take an active role in the recruiting process and an understanding of the specific steps they need to take is empowering.

5 best practices for teaching recruiting strategy

- **Make a recruiting strategy handout** -- We've already created one that you can download, tailor for your school, and hand out to your athletes. ([Get it here.](#))
- **Get the coaches involved** -- Meet with the high school coaching staff and get them to discuss the five-step recruiting strategy with their athletes.
- **Write mini case studies** -- Create a 1-page case study for each athlete who succeeds. Put them in a binder for younger athletes to review. ([Use this template.](#))
- **Schedule junior year meetings** -- Schedule meetings with athletes during their junior year so they know that they should get started.
- **Plan an annual "recruiting night"** -- Invite 3 local college coaches to come to school and participate in a panel discussion.

CaptainU Educational Resources

CaptainU Blog -- Hundreds of articles about all aspects of recruiting with a focus on teaching athletes how to market themselves to college coaches. (Free.)

Make the Team -- Our free recruiting eBook. 26 chapters of step-by-step guidance through the recruiting process. (Free.)

The State of Recruiting -- Our comprehensive study of the recruiting process, featuring insights, trends, and opinions from thirty college coaches. Download it here. (Free.)

Radio CaptainU -- A weekly podcast about all things recruiting. Call in your questions to (815) 768-4933 or by email to info@CaptainU.com. (Free.)

CaptainU Recruiting Software -- Web-based software that provides athletes with a personalized strategy and a toolkit to navigate the recruiting process from beginning to end. (Free or \$19.95/month.)



Collaborate with your athletes

CaptainU is designed to work with college counselors

CaptainU makes it easy for athletes to **share recruiting information and collaborate** with their college counselors.

Find colleges



Use the College List tool to help your athletes find the right college teams and then monitor their lists of reach, match, and safety schools

Make introductions



Use the Profile tool to help athletes build a compelling personal sports resume that they can send to college coaches.

Build relationships



Athletes can use the Mail tool for direct email access to every college coach. Counselors can then use the Colleges tool to stay up to speed on this correspondence.

Get seen



Athletes can use the Events tool to tell college coaches where they can be seen. You can make sure athletes are sharing this critical information with coaches.

Make the team



Use advice from the Strategy tool to help guide your athletes through the difficult conversations with college coaches.

Plans

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.

Families can upgrade or downgrade at will. There are no contracts or minimum subscription length.



Next steps

Join the conversation & make CaptainU part of your counseling team

3 steps to make CaptainU part of your counseling team

1. [Click here to download](#) the free CaptainU College Counselor Kit.
2. Get your athletes to sign up for a free Rookie account. If they like what they see, they can upgrade to Varsity at any time.
3. Ask them to add you to their accounts so you can share their information and collaborate.

Feel free to contact us with questions or to join the conversation.

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