

HAZARD AHEAD

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THE PATH TO SCHOLARSHIP DOLLARS IS LITTERED WITH MYTHS THAT CAN SOMETIMES LEAD YOU IN THE WRONG DIRECTION. CHECK OUT THE TOP 10 HAZARDS THAT KEEP YOU FROM BEING IN THE KNOW ABOUT ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS...

EVERYONE WHO GETS A SCHOLARSHIP GETS A FULL RIDE

While some sports, namely football and basketball, give only full rides, softball does not – at least as far as the NCAA is concerned. (Please know this might be completely different for the NAIA, NJCAA and Cal JC programs). The NCAA considers softball an “equivalency sport” which simply means, NCAA softball programs get a pool of money to use for scholarships that’s equivalent to “x” amount of full rides. In the case of NCAA Division I, the maximum number of full rides allowed is 12 – but since we’re an equivalent sport, it also means that coaches can break up that amount of money and use it to spread over as many players as possible. And on top of that, not all Division I programs are “fully funded” (meaning there are even less than 12 scholarships). While being able to split up the scholarship money sounds great since it means more players can possibly receive some money, it also means that very few players receive a “full ride.” It’s far more likely that you’ll be offered books, or housing or tuition as your scholarship offer. Coaches usually try to break up their scholarship dollars in order to field the strongest team possible.

IF I GET A SCHOLARSHIP, I WON’T HAVE TO PAY FOR ANYTHING

Actually, scholarships can only cover tuition, room and board, books and fees. That means that things like plane tickets home, warm clothes if you’re in a cold climate, gas for your car, etc. aren’t covered. When considering what college to attend, it’s a great idea to sit down with your parents and figure out what all the costs will be that you’ll have to pay.

IF MY SOFTBALL’S GOOD ENOUGH, THEY’LL GET ME ELIGIBLE

I can’t say this one enough – it’s COLLEGE SOFTBALL, which means that you’ll be in college! In order to be in college, you have to qualify for college. Every college softball player first had to apply to and be accepted to the college before she moved forward with playing softball for that school. There’s a lot that goes into the academic side of college softball eligibility so if you remember anything in this article, remember this. For NCAA Divisions I and II, all athletes must be certified by the NCAA, and there are two types: Qualifiers – can receive financial aid, and Non-Qualifiers – cannot receive financial aid, cannot practice with the team, and cannot compete with the team. There is a list of components that you must have to be a qualifier, and this NCAA website is very helpful: http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA_EMS/NCAA.jsp. There’s a lot of academic information you need to have in good shape. Dedicate yourself to your studies as well as your softball and you should be in good shape!

ALL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS ARE EQUAL

That’s unfortunately not so. Not all schools have the ability to offer the full amount of scholarships, and different divisions have different scholarship limits. Below are the different NCAA divisions and the scholarship limits each are allowed: Division I: 12 scholarships; Division II: 7.2 scholarships; Division III: no athletic scholarships (academic scholarships are allowed).

AN ATHLETE CAN ONLY RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIP MONEY FOR FOUR YEARS

Not anymore, with the advent of something called fifth year aid. This allows players to receive a fifth year of scholarship money after their playing career is over in order to complete their degree. This isn’t available at every school (based on budget), so be sure to ask the schools you’re considering ahead of time.

MY SCHOLARSHIP WAS TAKEN AWAY BECAUSE I GOT HURT

Scholarships can be offered for one or more years. If an athlete is hurt during the valid scholarship period, her scholarship must be upheld. But, it's at the coach's discretion as to whether the injured player will be offered her scholarship in subsequent years (if not already for five years). During your recruiting process, this is something to be sure to ask the coach, as well as any players currently playing on that particular team. See how this coach has handled injured players in the past.

COACHES GIVE SCHOLARSHIPS BASED ON WHAT THEY THINK YOU'RE WORTH

Kind of, but it's not that simple. Coaches only have a certain number of scholarships to begin with, and the scholarship money they have to offer is based on the number of players and scholarships they lose each year. If a school doesn't have any scholarship players graduating this year and it is up to their limit in scholarship money, then no matter how bad that coach wants you or thinks you're worth, he/she can't offer you a full ride because there isn't one available to give. How coaches use their total scholarship dollars is up to each coach. Some give out all their money in full rides and then hope to fill out their roster with players who can get grants and academic aid. Others will offer only a few full rides and split up the rest of their money to provide something to everyone. Remember that coaches try to stagger the number of players they graduate each year and how much money is tied up in those players. A coach might really want you to come to their school and play for them but only be able to tell you that in words and not in dollars. Listen to everything the coach says about how much they want you and how they plan to use you, instead of trying to think what about it simply in terms of scholarship dollars.

SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS CANNOT BE INCREASED

Again, not true. You might be a walk-on (meaning you were not offered a scholarship at all and simply tried out for the team), or only given books your first year. But the coach might offer you more the next year. Also, a coach might really want you this year but not have any money left to give you, but the following year that coach might have more money (because of graduation) and be able to offer you an increase at that time. It depends on things like how hard you work, how much you contribute, how much money the coach has available each year, and how many other players the coach needs.

FULL RIDES ARE ALWAYS GIVEN TO THE BEST PLAYERS

While this is often the case, the "best" players may be the ones playing a position most needed by the team that particular year. Some players that may be crucial to the strength of a team are also being pursued by numerous other schools, making their value shoot up. Therefore, in order for a coach to get this player she/he may have to offer a full ride. Conversely, coaches might not offer a player a full ride in order to save money to offer other players.

MY DAUGHTER WAS OFFERED A 4-YEAR RIDE

Usually not true. While most coaches will continue to honor your scholarship as long as you stay eligible and do your part on the softball field, a scholarship can be offered for one or more years. Coaches work hard to encourage players to come play for their school, particularly if a lot of different schools are after the same player. As a result, coaches can get pretty creative about how they position their offer over everyone else's. Let's say you're looking at playing at School 1, which is a public school (tuition is \$15,000/year) and School 2, which is a private school (tuition is \$25,000/year). You've been offered tuition in both cases, but in order for School 2 to make their offer stand out and make it seem like you're more valuable to them, they may give their offer in dollars. So they might say they're going to offer you a \$25,000 scholarship. Sounds great! I've even heard of instances where coaches will take their yearly tuition amount and multiply it by four when giving the recruit the amount of money they're willing to invest over four years. This would make School 2's a \$100,000 scholarship offer. That can make it seem like they really want you more than the \$15,000 tuition the state school is offering, even though they're both just offering you tuition.

**The NCAA is currently reviewing the one-year grant-in-aid, and it's possible it may be extended to multiple years.*