



COLLEGE TENNIS FAQ

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GENERAL INFORMATION ON COLLEGE VARSITY TENNIS

How do I know if I should be playing college tennis or professional tennis?

This decision is actually not as difficult as it seems. If a player has dominated his or her age groups coming up through the juniors and has already had solid pro results then he or she may need to weigh the benefits of each option for his or her development.

Without significant play (and wins) in Pro Circuit and Tour level events, then a player is probably not ready to turn pro.

College tennis is a huge time for player development and growth—99.9% of our junior players will progress to college. From there a small percentage will embark upon a pro tennis career.

How many colleges have tennis programs? And which ones offer athletic scholarships?

There are over 1100 women's programs and over 900 men's programs spread out over five different divisions:

- NCAA Division I
- NCAA Division II
- NCAA Division III
- NAIA
- Junior College

NCAA Divisions I & II, NAIA, and Junior College Programs all can offer Athletic Scholarships—although note that Ivy Group and Patriot League Institutions, which compete at the DI level, do not offer athletic scholarships. See below for **maximum** athletic scholarships allowed at each division. Please note that some programs at the DI and DII level may not be fully funded and will not have the maximum allotment of athletic aid. Even though NCAA DIII programs cannot offer athletic scholarships, many programs can provide a large amount of academic and institutional aid.

- NCAA DI W:8, M: 4.5
- NCAA DII W: 6, M: 4.5
- NAIA W: 5, M: 5
- Junior College W: 8, M: 8

For more detailed information on the three NCAA Divisions, click the following link:

http://content.ncaa.org/ncaa-governance-div3/2014_September_Monthly_Update/94358_DIII_Recruiting_Fact_Sheet_WEB.pdf

Further descriptions of Junior College (NJCAA) and NAIA programs can be found in the **Glossary** at the end of this document.

Where can I get a list of which colleges have men's teams? Women's teams?

For information on college tennis programs go to the ITA website <http://www.itatennis.com>. The Tennis Recruiting Network also has information pages for college that have varsity programs:
<http://www.tennisrecruiting.net>

How many players are usually on a tennis team?

On average, most college tennis teams carry 8-12 members. This may vary by conference, Division, and school.

When/how do I know if I have a shot at an athletic scholarship? When and what do I do to find out?

The first thing to find out is if the school you are looking at offers athletic scholarships. We will provide a list below that shows the programs that offer tennis and the programs that offer athletic scholarships.

College coaches utilize a number of tools to figure out the level of recruits early in the process; these include USTA Rankings (both section and national), International Tennis Federation (ITF) Rankings, Universal Tennis Ratings (UTR), and The Tennis Recruiting Network's Star Ratings. The Tennis Recruiting Network continues to be the most popular site utilized by college coaches as a coach can look up a player's USTA and ITF results along with other pertinent information through that site. You too can utilize these to help you figure out if you are at the correct level for a particular program.

As you start to narrow the schools you are interested in, take a look at their "starters" (i.e. top 6 singles players)—are your rankings/ratings similar to the rankings/ratings of those players? If the answer is yes, you could be a candidate for a roster spot and an athletic scholarship at a program that offers them. It is also important to keep in mind the number of graduating players—and what positions they play. If a coach is graduating his or her #1 and #2 in your recruiting year, he or she is probably looking for two recruits who can play that high right away.

Once you've done your homework, and you know you are probably in the correct "range" for that program, it's best to ask the coach straight out. Most coaches will be more than willing to be honest with you. It also is not a bad idea to start placing your schools of interest into categories based on your tennis fit (e.g. Definite, Probable, Possible, Long Shot) just like you would for your academic fit.

What is the NCAA Eligibility Center?

The evaluation and determination of academic and amateurism eligibility are handled differently by the three NCAA divisions.

- In NCAA Divisions I and II, the NCAA Eligibility Center analyzes and determines both academic and amateurism eligibility for athletic participation in their colleges and universities.
- In NCAA Division III, certification of academic and amateurism eligibility is determined by each NCAA Division III college or university, not by the Eligibility Center.

For Divisions I and II, the NCAA Eligibility Center determines a student's eligibility for athletics participation. It analyzes and processes a student's high school academic records, ACT or SAT score, and key information about amateurism participation to determine the student's initial eligibility. Students who want to participate in sports during their first year of enrollment at an NCAA Division I or II college or university must register with the Eligibility Center after their junior year in high school. Register at www.eligibilitycenter.org.

What is a National Letter of Intent?

The National Letter of Intent (NLI) program is a voluntary program administered by the NCAA Eligibility Center. The NLI is a binding agreement between a prospective student-athlete and a NLI member institution.

A prospective student-athlete agrees to attend the institution full-time for one academic year (two semesters or three quarters). The institution agrees to provide financial aid for one academic year (two semesters or three quarters).

If a student-athlete does not fulfill the NLI agreement, he/she has to serve one year in residence (full time, two semesters or three quarters) at the next NLI member institution and lose one season of competition in all sports.

It is very important that the prospective student-athlete register with the NCAA Eligibility Center if he or she wants to participate in the National Letter of Intent program, because a school cannot offer a student an NLI until the student is registered.

There are two signing periods for the National Letter of Intent, an early one in November, which lasts for one week, and another that starts in early April and ends on August 1 of each year.

If I don't get an athletic scholarship can I still play in college?

The simple answer is yes, absolutely!

At institutions that offer athletic scholarships, some college coaches actually recruit walk-ons while others hold tryouts in the fall. This is something you can discuss with coaches on the front end of the recruiting process if you aren't a candidate for a scholarship.

Division III institutions do not offer athletic scholarships, so all players at those schools either pay their own way, have financial aid or academic scholarships, or utilize student loans—or a combination of the above—to pay for their education. Division III tennis is a great opportunity for players of many ability levels.

If Varsity tennis isn't for you, Tennis On Campus provides an opportunity for the top non-varsity players on a campus to compete both sectionally and nationally through USTA sponsored events.

The USTA Tennis on Campus website (<http://www.tennisoncampus.com/>) has a directory of all Tennis on Campus programs nationwide.

If your school does not have one, you can find information on how to start a club team through the Tennis on Campus Website as well.

What are my financial aid options? How do I apply for it?

BACKGROUND

There are three primary sources of financial aid:

- **Scholarships**, which can be awarded on the basis of need, ethnicity, merit (**academic or athletic**), or any number of other criteria
- **Merit-based** aid, which is generally given to students in recognition of special skills, talent (**tennis**), and/or **academic** ability, and
- **Need-based** aid, which includes **grants** that do not have to be repaid and do not require a service commitment, and **loans**, which do require repayment and at times a service commitment.

TENNIS-SPECIFIC AID

Athletic scholarships awarded by member schools of the NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA. As noted above DIII colleges do not offer athletic scholarships but have other financial aid options available.

Athletic scholarships are awarded in a variety of amounts ranging from “full-ride” (tuition, fees, room, board & books) to small scholarships (e.g. books only)

The total amount of financial aid a student-athlete may receive and the total amount of athletic aid a team may provide can be limited.

USTA Serves is the charitable and philanthropic arm of the USTA. Each year it awards scholarships to high school seniors who have excelled both academically and in tennis. www.ustaserves.com

USTA Sections-several of the seventeen Sections provide financial support toward college expenses to deserving students from within their Section. Each Section that offers scholarships establishes its own criteria and timetable. See Appendix for USTA Section contact information.

Financial Aid/Scholarship resources for Need-based Aid and Scholarships

- www.fastweb.com
- www.fafsa.ed.gov
- www.findtuition.com
- www.scholarships.com

You can also enter “college scholarships” into your search engine. College Board is also a valuable resource: www.collegeboard.com. College Board has a Scholarship Guide and also information on how to spot a scholarship scam.

First Steps:

1. Complete the application for your chosen school and/or the Common Application (including any necessary supplements)
2. Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): www.fafsa.ed.gov
3. Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center: www.eligibilitycenter.org

BASIC RECRUITING INFORMATION

GETTING STARTED

How do I start the recruiting process?

In terms of starting the process, the earlier the better!

The Tennis Recruiting Network has an excellent chart that reflects all the current recruiting rules and timelines for today's tennis student-athlete:

<http://www.tennisrecruiting.net/article.asp?id=1964>

As early as your freshman year, you should start thinking about your academic and tennis criteria—as well as other criteria for your college experience. See the sample list of questions at the end of this document to help you start shaping that list (**Appendix A**).

It is also important, particularly if you are attending or have attended an online or non-traditional school that you verify that your school and coursework are approved by the NCAA to meet their initial eligibility standards. You can find this information through the NCAA Eligibility Center: www.eligibilitycenter.org

Once you have started to narrow your criteria, you can start building your list of schools that you are interested in. From there you can begin contacting the coaches of those teams.

By the junior year you ideally should have a shorter list of schools, preferable categorized by tennis and academic fit, that you are interested in and also have initiated contact with the coaches at those schools. E-mail is the best way to contact a majority of coaches (See **Appendix B** for a sample e-mail).

What is more important to a coach, tennisrecruiting.net star ratings or a USTA standings list?

Both are great tools for a coach to initially assess a player's level, however both are just that, tools. Other tools coaches utilize include: Universal Tennis Ratings (UTR) and International Tennis Federation (ITF) Rankings.

Coaches are much more interested in players' results; much more so than the number next to their name—regardless of who publishes that number.

A majority of coaches prefer to see someone play more than anything and will make an effort to do so for all the players they are considering seriously. If a coach can't watch a player, often he or she will request a quick video of some match play. Watching a player play a competitive match can help a coach gauge a player's talent level, competitiveness, attitude, desire, love of the game, and ability to improve much better than looking at a ranking or even looking at results.

How do I contact the coach at the school I am interested in?

E-mail is generally the best way to contact a college coach, although **we recommend the student, not the parent**, initiate that e-mail. NCAA Division I coaches are able to e-mail a prospective student-athlete back following the start of his or her junior year of high school (See Appendix B for a sample e-mail).

Coaches may also be contacted by phone. If you initiate this contact, phone calls may be made at your convenience. Keep in mind, however, that a NCAA Division I coach is unable to provide any recruiting materials, make phone calls or send any form of electronic correspondence (e-mails, text messages, etc.) until September 1 of your junior year in High School. After this date, there is no limit on the number of phone calls made. The Tennis Recruiting Network has an excellent chart that reflects all the current recruiting rules and timelines for today's tennis student-athlete:

<http://www.tennisrecruiting.net/article.asp?id=1964>

What do I say in the e-mail?

In an initial email, a player should introduce themselves, indicate their graduation year, and provide a link to your full biography. We recommend linking to a player's FREE bio on the Tennis Recruiting Network (www.tennisrecruiting.net). Through this bio coaches can access a player's information such as USTA Tournament results, Test Scores, GPA, intended major, etc. If you do not link to your Tennis Recruiting Network Bio, please make sure you include that information in your e-mail or in an attachment.

Address the e-mail to the specific coach that you are reaching out to (i.e. Dear Coach John Smith or Coach Smith, not Dear Coach).

Finally, you should express your interest in the school and ask the coach what other information they would like from you. Most of the time the introductory e-mail should be short to ensure that the coach does read it. If they are interested, they will follow up requesting the information that they need.

FINALIZING

How do I know if the college coach really wants me?

Ask questions about scholarships, playing time, and expectations upfront. By answering these types of questions, a coach will be giving you a good idea of where you would potentially stand on their team.

Once I have narrowed down the list, what is next?

Now that you have the list of colleges that meet your academic and tennis criteria, it is time to fill out the applications. Many colleges use the Common Application (www.commonapp.org) along with a Supplement which is specific to the college.

There is a main essay on the Common Application and usually one or more essays on the Supplement. It is important to use these essays to give the admissions officers a real sense of who you are as a person. It is not necessary to write a tennis-oriented essay, although you can if there was a tennis situation that really gives the reader an insight into your personality or values. ***Make sure you have someone proof-read your essay not only for content but for grammar!***

Also, there is a part of the Common App entitled, Additional Information, that you can use to give the admissions officer a complete picture of who you are.

There are different categories of admission decisions:

Early Decision application deadline is usually November 1st and is a binding decision. If you are admitted, you must attend that college. You may only apply to one Early Decision college.

Early Action deadline is usually November 1st also, but is not a binding decision so you are not required to attend if you are accepted. Decisions for both Early Decision and Early Action are sent out mid to late December.

Early Decision II or Early Action II is usually in January.

Early Evaluation is an informal non-binding “heads up” on your application.

Rolling Admissions means that a number of weeks after you apply you will be notified of the admission decision.

Regular Action applications are due in early January with notifications in late March or early April.

It is important to know the application category and deadline for each college you are considering.

Write deadlines down!

DURING COLLEGE

How many hours are devoted to playing college tennis?

Playing a college sport is very demanding of an individual's time. Between travel, practice, matches, strength training, and meetings, college athletes' days are filled with activity.

The NCAA at the Division I level has implemented rules to limit the amount of time a student-athlete is required to participate in his/her sport each week.

During the **off-season** this number is **8 hours**, and **during the season** the number is **20 hours**. Even though each week may vary in schedule, at least players know how much time may be blocked out of their schedule.

Other divisions and sometime conferences have similar sets of rules—some are even more strict.

How can I make up classes I miss due to away matches?

While classes are usually not able to be made up, teachers and professors are usually more than willing to work with student-athletes.

The key to balancing the relationship between academics and athletics successfully is communicating with teachers ahead of time. If students let their teachers know that they will be missing classes but would like to make arrangements to complete the work there is not usually an issue.

Where can I get academic help?

Most institutions have an academic center that is solely for use by their student-athletes and/or one for all students needing additional academic help.

While each school may have different resources, the basics usually include a study center/computer lab and an academic counselor(s). These counselors are in place to help students learn study skills and successfully navigate their way through their courses.

In addition, academic support centers for student-athletes generally hire tutors to assist in studying.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

What is the ideal parental involvement in the college tennis recruiting process?

One great thing to remember is that the student, not the parents, will be the one actually attending college and playing on the team. College coaches and recruits forming a solid relationship is key in the recruiting process and hopefully will help the student select the best school for him/her.

In addition, coaches will be impressed with the initiative that the student is showing – something that they are definitely looking for when recruiting student-athletes for their teams.

With all of that in mind, parents should be there to support and guide their children through the process—but not to run the process!

Should a player attend a summer tennis camp on a college campus to be recruited?

Summer camps can be a wonderful opportunity for young players. Taking a break from the individual nature of junior tennis, summer camps allow players to interact with others, spend multiple hours a day practicing, and compete in a team atmosphere that mimics that of college tennis.

It is also a great opportunity for you to start to get a feel for colleges—and their campuses.

However, attending a summer camp should also be something that you want to attend as coaches rarely use their summer camps for recruiting.

What should parental involvement be once a junior player transitions to college?

Parental support and encouragement is always appreciated by both players and coaches. However, keep in mind that this period of your student's life is one of much development. They are, in essence, becoming adults throughout their college experience.

Therefore, parents should encourage their children to assume responsibility for both their schedules and their actions. If parents step in and assume too much of a role in assisting their children, they are actually hampering their child's development.

This is actually a great question for a parent to ask a college coach during the recruiting process. Some have very specific parent policies for their teams.

APPENDIX A: CHOOSING A PATH THAT WORKS FOR YOU

What do I need to know about myself in order to choose a college that will be right for me?

Following are lists of academic, tennis, and general criteria to consider in the selection process. Only you can determine how important each criterion is to your ultimate choice. These questions will help you evaluate what is and isn't important to you in the selection of a college. Remember, not only should the school you select be compatible with your interests and goals, but also with your abilities.

ACADEMIC CRITERIA

- Do I want a rigorous academic environment? Will I meet the entrance requirements and be able to balance the academic workload with my athletic commitments?
- How strong are the programs in my fields of interests?
- Is summer school available?
- Are there academic support programs specifically for athletes and for the general student population?
- In what size college will I flourish? Under 6,000 students? 6-15,000? Over 15,000?
- Is the student/teacher ratio acceptable?
- Can my family afford this college or university? If not, does it give financial aid or will I qualify for other sources of financial aid or scholarships?

TENNIS CRITERIA

- Would I have the opportunity to develop as a tennis player?
- Where would I likely be in the team lineup and how much would I get to play?
- What is the coach's background, reputation, and teaching philosophy?
- Are the coach and assistant coach people I could see myself developing with as a player and person over the next four years?
- Would I still want to attend this school if the tennis coach (or assistant coach) were to leave during my time there?
- Is the coach supportive of the academic needs of team players?
- What are the current players on the team like and would I be compatible with them?
- What is the in-season practice schedule—both frequency and length?
- What are the off-season practice requirements?
- What is the overall quality of the tennis facilities? Indoor & outdoor courts? How many?
- Is there a strength and conditioning program?
- Does the athletic department provide sports psychology and nutritional counseling services?

CAMPUS LIFE CRITERIA

- Do I have a preference regarding where the school is geographically—North, South, East, or West?
- Is climate a factor in my decision?
- Do I want to attend college in a big city, small city, college town, or rural area?
- Do I prefer to be within a short commuting distance to your home? Or is distance from home not a factor in my decision?
- How important are other campus activities to me, for example, fraternities, sororities, clubs, concerts, movies, dances, etc., and does this college or university provide them?
- Do I see myself fitting into the general student body?
- What do I want in living accommodations? Dorms or off-campus? Private or community bathrooms?
- What is the distance from my housing to classes and the tennis facilities? Quality of food?

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE E-MAIL TO A COLLEGE TENNIS COACH

Dear Coach Smith,

My name is Jane Doe. I am a junior at Central High School in Anytown, USA. I am a member of the varsity tennis team, and I also play USTA Junior Tournaments. I have been ranked as high as #10 in our section and #175 Nationally. I am a three star recruit on www.tennisrecruiting.net; my Universal Tennis Rating is a 7.4 . You can check out my Tennis Recruiting Network profile here:

<insert link here>

My GPA is a 3.75. I have recently taken the SAT and scored a 1950:

Critical Reading: 600

Math: 700

Writing: 650

I am very interested in learning more about your university and your tennis program as I believe I may be a great fit both academically and athletically. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane

GLOSSARY

ITA: The Intercollegiate Tennis Coaches Association Inc. oversees men's and women's varsity tennis at all levels - NCAA Divisions I, II and III, NAIA and Junior/Community College. The association administers numerous regional and national championships and the ITA College Tennis Rankings for all divisions. The ITA also has an awards program for players and coaches to honor excellence in academics, leadership and sportsmanship.

ITF: The International Tennis Federation administers and regulates the game through over 200 affiliated National Associations, together with six Regional Associations. The ITF is responsible for the Rules of Tennis, including the technical specifications for courts and equipment, and the running and enforcing of a joint anti-doping program. The ITF also controls the major international team events for all age groups. (Source: [ITF](#))

ITF Pro Circuit: The ITF administers a series of Men's (Futures) and Women's Pro Circuit events with prize money ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000. These events usually have large qualifying draws, which allow unranked players to enter tournaments and earn ranking points. As with the USTA Pro Circuit, players who succeed on the ITF Circuit can earn sufficient points to be eligible for qualifying draw or main draw entry to tour-level ATP or WTA tournaments. (Source: [ITF](#))

ITF Ranking: The ITF uses a Combined Junior Ranking as its sole junior ranking, which takes into account both Singles and Doubles results. A player's ranking is calculated using the best six singles results plus one quarter (25%) of the best six doubles results. Rankings are updated on a weekly basis. (Source: [ITF](#))

Merit-Based Aid: Scholarships are the most common type of merit-based aid (though some do have a need-based component). Merit includes a variety of categories: academic, artistic, athletic, and the list goes on. Assuming need is not a condition, a student with extensive assets and income is just as entitled to a merit-based award as a student with limited assets and income. (Source: [Princeton Review](#)).

NAIA: The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics is an athletic association comprised of 255 smaller member colleges and universities across the country. Its mission is to enhance the character building aspects of sport. In 2010, the association opened the NAIA Eligibility Center, where prospective student-athletes are evaluated for academic and athletic eligibility. (Source: [NAIA](#))

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a membership-driven organization that governs sports across its three competitive divisions (I, II and III). The National Office staff sets rules for fair and safe competition, organizes national championships and provides other resources to support student-athletes and its member schools. For tennis, the NCAA does not set rules for regular season competition nor does it govern officiating (this is done by the ITA). (See also: [NCAA](#))

National Standings Lists: The National Standings Lists (NSLs) are used by most of the national tournaments to select players. NSLs list players who are eligible for national competition in an age division in order of their current standing. These lists are not ranking lists. Standing is based on the number of national ranking points a player has earned in the previous 12-month period. Points are accumulated by winning singles and doubles matches in the national tournaments, 12 tournaments designated by each Sectional Association, and certain designated ITF tournaments (collectively, the National Ranking Tournaments). (See also: [USTA National Tournaments](#))

Need-based aid: This aid doesn't discriminate by any factor apart from need. Eligibility is based solely on the assets and income of the prospective student and his or her family. Factors such as test scores or athletic ability have no bearing on any aid designated *need-based*. Note: Federal student aid is need-based. (Source: [Princeton Review](#)).

NJCAA: The National Junior College Athletic Association is the national governing body for junior and community college athletics. Similar to the NCAA and NAIA, the association sets standards for eligibility and administers national championships. Community and junior colleges in California are governed by the CCCA. (See also: [NJCAA](#) and [CCCA](#))

Star Rating: Each year, TennisRecruiting.net awards Top Prospect accolades to the best players in each class. The very best players are tabbed as Blue Chips, and it also awards 5 Star, 4 Star, 3 Star, 2 Star, and 1 Star accolades to top prospects. (Source: [TennisRecruiting.net](#))

The Tennis Recruiting Network (Tennisrecruiting.net): The Tennis Recruiting Network provides services and content to three distinct audiences: (1) juniors hoping to play college tennis, (2) college coaches trying to identify recruits, and (3) tennis enthusiasts interested in the recruiting process. The heart of TennisRecruiting.net content is the weekly rank lists. Two sets of rank lists - the College Recruiting Lists and TennisRPI - are updated weekly for both boys and girls. (Source: [TennisRecruiting.net](#))

Tour-level Events: Events at the ATP (Men's) or WTA (Women's) Tour level take place internationally and range from lower-level (Challenger or 125K Series) tournaments to Grand Slam competition.

Universal Tennis Rating (UTR): Universal Tennis features 16 levels of tennis and provides tennis players world wide a common language to determine their level of play. The 16 levels of tennis are based on actual match results without regard for age or gender using the Competitive Threshold™ to determine accurate ratings. In addition, Universal Tennis's on-line website allows visitors to view thousands of tennis results. (Source: [Universal Tennis](#))

USTA: The United States Tennis Association Incorporated is the national governing body for the sport of tennis and the recognized leader in promoting and developing the sport's growth on every level in the United States, from local communities to the crown jewel of the professional game, the US Open.

USTA Pro Circuit: The USTA Pro Circuit gives American players more competitive opportunities in the United States, making it easier and more affordable to earn a pro ranking. It is the largest developmental tennis circuit in the world, consisting of approximately 90 tournaments and nearly \$3 million in prize money. The expanded Breakdown of levels found here: http://www.usta.com/Pro-Tennis/Pro-Circuit/about_the_usta_pro_circuit/

USTA Ranking: The USTA uses a Points Per Round Combined Ranking System (PPR) to annually rank junior players and publish weekly National Standings Lists. Ranking Points are earned by winning singles and doubles matches at various types of USTA national tournaments and designated ITF tournaments and extra Ranking Points are earned for winning singles matches over highly ranked players. Ranking Points are combined (with greater weight placed on Ranking Points earned in singles) for a player's Ranking Point total and players are ordered based on this total. (See also: [USTA Rankings](#))

USTA Section: In addition to its National Office, the USTA is supported by organizations in 17 geographical sections. Sections may include a single state but others, may cover a larger region and multiple states.