

## *Athletic Scholarships May Not Be What You Think*

My kids are perfect.

I don't know about your kids, but mine are smart, fun and athletic. If they work hard and want it badly enough they can do anything they set their minds to.

Ok, so I'm being a little facetious.

Like most kids, mine are far from perfect. But, like most parents, I see them as being special and I truly believe that they can do amazing things. There is nothing wrong with parent's having high hopes for their children - as long as the expectations are realistic.

You see, I'm not the only one that has a special child. And I am certainly not the only one whose child dreams of playing professional sports or, "at the very least" getting a college scholarship.

But the sad reality is that the vast, vast majority of our kids won't get an athletic scholarship and an even smaller number of those that do will actually receive enough to significantly help with their education costs.

According to a number of sources, including ScholarshipStats.com and a recent New York Times analysis, only about 2% of high school athletes win sports scholarships every year. And of those that do the largest number receive only modest assistance with their education costs.

I recently had a conversation with clients that had been told by a high school wrestling coach that if their daughter wrestled throughout high school that she was almost assured a college scholarship. Their daughter doesn't enjoy wrestling but they wanted me to try and help convince her that it was worth it in exchange for "having her college paid for".

Like many parents, my clients assumed that "scholarship" meant having all of the college costs covered – a "full ride". In fact, there are only six college sports that offer full-ride athletic scholarships: men's football and basketball and women's basketball, volleyball, gymnastics and tennis.

All other sports are considered "equivalency" sports. The NCAA caps the amount of money that a Division I or II school can spend on scholarships for each individual sport annually and the coach will then parcel out the cash as he or she sees fit. In an effort to attract as many hot prospects as possible by offering a "scholarship" to each, this can result in individual scholarships that amount to as little as a few hundred dollars each year. Hardly worth the time and effort that it would take to not only earn the scholarship but to continue to compete in the sport throughout college, especially if it is not a sport the child truly loves.

After talking with me and asking some more thorough questions of the coach my clients decided not to push their daughter to wrestle.

There are other options to consider if your child really wants to play a sport in college but isn't one of the very elite few that receives an athletic scholarship.

Division III schools aren't allowed to give athletic scholarships but they are able to give out need-based aid and award merit scholarships. Many of the schools in this division are private colleges and universities that have the ability to give out generous financial aid packages. And, in an interview for CBS MoneyWatch, Robert Malekoff, a past associate athletic director at Harvard University and a former Princeton soccer coach, said that, "there is no question that there is an admission advantage for students who play sports." Some examples of Division III schools with athletic programs include Amherst, MIT, Tufts University and Emory University.

Playing a sport at a Division III school can provide many of the same perks as it would at a scholarship level school like travel, high level competition and access to state of the art training equipment. And while the national attention that a Division III team receives isn't often going to rival that of a Division I school, the ever growing sports media is changing that as well. Some Division III athletes eventually transfer to Division I schools on scholarship and some go even further. Matt Blanchard, the former UW-Whitewater quarterback that led his team to a Division III national championship, recently signed to play professionally with the Carolina Panthers – and he is not the only player to make that leap.

In comparison to athletic scholarships, academic scholarships are numerous and can range from small one-time awards from independent organizations to full-rides provided by universities or other entities. I personally benefited from a state program for valedictorians that paid all of my college tuition as long as I attended an in-state university and maintained a high enough GPA.

The bottom line is that there is nothing wrong with encouraging your child's love of a sport but if they hope to earn a scholarship make sure they are also hitting the books.

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