

Student Athletes

If you are a high school athlete and hope to play in college, read on for some important considerations before becoming a collegiate athlete.

Most college and universities belong to the **NCAA**, and are designated within three divisions. **Division I** schools are generally the large sports powerhouses that you hear about in the media. They recruit many student athletes and usually offer substantial athletic scholarships. **Division II** institutions aren't as well known but also recruit and offer scholarship money. They typically offer much less than Division I schools but are still competitive and popular. **Division III** schools may or may not actively recruit athletes, and cannot offer athletic scholarships. There are also **NAIA** colleges, which have competitive sports programs, but do not offer athletic scholarships.

The NCAA has regulations about whether a student is eligible to play college athletics, so students who are interested in playing at a Division I or Division II school need to register with the **NCAA Clearinghouse** by the spring of their senior year of high school, though the NCAA recommends student-athletes register at the beginning of their junior year. There are core class requirements, test score and GPA requirements. Registering can be a frustrating process, so start early. To get registered, go to the NCAA Eligibility Center: eligibilitycenter.org. There is a fee to register, so make sure you have a credit card on hand. For more information go to: www.NCAA.org/playcollegesports.

A major factor to consider when deciding which level of athletics to pursue, is deciding to what extent you would like to devote yourself to athletics while in college. All DI college sports are year-round commitments, and your free time and homework time can be significantly diminished if you choose to pursue DI athletics. DIII usually offers the athlete more of a chance to really play and more freedom to purposefully do homework, pursue extra curricular activities and have some down time.

You need to be realistic about your talent and if possible, have someone assess you that is not a friend or family member. High school coaches, too, may have a bias so seek out someone who will truly be honest. Having the best RBI on your high school team may end up being lower than the worst RBI average at a DI school.

Another factor to consider is the rigor of your intended academic program. Ask questions to the coach and current players about their GPA and their time commitments for both studies and sports. Some college athletes say 60% of their time is devoted to their sport...remember college is for an education.

As you start to narrow down your college choices be sure to schedule time to meet with the coaches and/or the athletic director during a visit. Watch a practice and/or game if possible. And be sure to tour the athletic facilities. Are they on or off campus? How convenient are they to get to? What condition are they in?

It is highly recommended you speak with the current players and have your important questions for them already thought out. This will give you a good perspective on what playing for the college will really be like. Be sure to find out the answers to these questions and write them down – depending on how many schools you are considering, it could get confusing with whom you've spoken to; coaches, players, recruiters.

- Do the athletes live together, or are they mixed in with the rest of the student body?
- Is there positive chemistry among the team?
- If one of the coaches left, would the team still be happy and successful? Would a coach leaving affect your decision to attend that school?
- Are the athletes successful academically? What are the GPA requirements to stay on campus and to compete on the team?
- What is the reality of you being able to see game time as a freshman?
- What happens during school breaks? Do you stay to practice or do you get to go home? Find out specifics about time requirements in season as well as off-season.
- How accessible are the coaches for discussing academic issues?
- What are your opinions of the coaching staff?
- How often does the team practice?
- What is your typical daily schedule like?
- Do you have time for academics?
- How do the student body and professors treat athletes?
- How is the travel? Do you miss a lot of classes? Do tutors come on trips?

It is important to get a sense of how current student athletes balance academics and athletic responsibilities. Make an effort to schedule some time to talk to the coaching staff. Find out the coaches' philosophies and determine if they will be a good fit for you as a person and an athlete. Ask these questions:

- What position do you see me playing?
- What is your coaching philosophy about freshman playing time?
- What is the pre/post-season commitment?
- What are the expectations/requirements for off-season practicing?
- What academic assistance is available for athletes?
- What happens to my scholarship if I get injured?

Student athletes generally have unique opportunities for scholarships and financial aid. Specifically ask the admissions office and coaches about what kinds of aid you might be eligible for as well as the requirements to maintain the aid. Remember that the admissions office, not the athletic coach, offers admission! You may sign a letter of intent with a college when you and the athletic coach reach an agreement, but the admissions office has the final say on whether you will be accepted or not into the school and the financial aid office has the final say on your award package. It is important not to believe any promises from a coach unless they are in writing.

REMEMBER – you need to really like the college you choose; you are going to school for the education they can provide, you will be part of that community for 4-6 years, you may get hurt during your college career and not be able to play, the coach may leave and the new coach may not renew your scholarship in the same amounts; you may tire of the sport (37% of collegiate athletes stop playing by junior year).