

Advice on the Recruiting Process from Coach

Anyone who knows me absolutely knows my advice has always been, *pick the school you want to go to if you could not play lacrosse.*

Sure, you should consider the lacrosse program and their coaches, but you need to know that college lacrosse programs are designed as fulltime jobs for the player. **Literally, you will "marry" the program**, and just like some marriages, they don't all stay together for reasons that are based on long term commitment. A marriage with a college lacrosse program will be filled with ups and downs, and that is why it is so important to find a place that is committed to you as you are to them.

Here's the deal...currently 6% of HS players (courtesy of US Lacrosse) go on to play lacrosse at the NCAA collegiate level. And here is an outstanding statistic that is just incredibly informative...*college coaches expect that at least half of their freshman recruits* will not make it through their collegiate senior year as lacrosse players on their team due to injuries, academic and career aspirations, internships that turn into economic opportunity, dissatisfaction with the program or coaching situation and yes, attrition from future competition from the incoming classes of freshman recruits behind you. **So a recruiting class of 15 freshman players may yield an average of 6-7 players who actually finish their collegiate senior year playing lacrosse.**

Why is this important to understand? Because NCAA athletics is simply a full time job that you must love to do because you embrace the following:

1. **Working Out:** Strength, Agility and Cardio training as a continuous routine. College ball is much more physically demanding, much more physical on the field and much more intense than HS ball. Toughness is a matter of mental confidence in your ability to play with a physical presence...so get in great shape and stay in great shape!
2. **Lacrosse Training:** If you think that your skills and concepts are sufficient where there are now, you are mistaken. Get busy and keep busy increasing your stick skills consistency, developing your stick and footwork ability, and work to develop new skills and better athleticism. *Get to a playground with your buddies and play basketball til they turn the lights out!*
3. **Competition:** You must love competing! Because that is what college athletics is! **You will compete everyday in practice for playing time.** That's why Blue Mountain holds tryouts to determine where you will start in our program, not where you end up. Your ability to compete everyday during our practices, scrimmages and in tournaments is truly an experience that mimics the college competitiveness on a team.
4. **Sacrifice:** Your time is not yours, it's your coaches. The coach's job is to win and create a successful program that draws new prospects to enroll at their college for both educational and athletic opportunities. Coaches are hired and fired based on their ability to do just that.

5. Learning: Colleges are about preparing yourself for the world, not just your own little corner of it. That's why it is very important to love learning and explore your choices in academia. Your four year degree in lacrosse is not nearly as important as your four year degree in your area of career interest. But competing on a NCAA lacrosse program for four years of eligibility will be one of the most challenging things you will experience. That challenge, however difficult, can be most rewarding in numerous ways.

Thoughts and Advice:

D3 has longer "no" team activity periods built into their school year. However, that doesn't mean your coach is expecting you to just hang out and go to classes. Quite the contrary, your job may be harder at D3 than with a D1 and/or D2 teams...you have to make your own time to get to the weight room, and work on your skills yourself vs with a coach or coaches and regularly scheduled periods of lacrosse. Your demonstration of self discipline may be more critical at the D3 level.

With that in mind, why is summer ball important:

Playing summer ball allows the college coach to evaluate your ability vs others who are seeking to play ball in college too!

College coaches track players especially if those players who write the coach (email him) and let them know what tournaments they are planning to attend.

What should you include:

Grade, Grad year, GPA, SAT if available, academic successes, athletic history and successes, and his desired areas of study interest. You should mention why you are interested in that college (shows you did some homework), and ***why you would be someone the coach should be interested in taking a look at your abilities.***

Coaches then follow players because of the student's interest in their school. They do realize that players grow into their bodies, do improve their abilities; and they like to track how well they improve throughout a season and into the next season. They will stop tracking you if they do not feel your abilities fit into their program at this time.

College coaches see things you may not see because they see snapshots that they use to see if you have the fundamental skills and conceptual knowledge to be a good fit in their program. Much like I track our players at practices and tournaments, players earn plus/minus points based on their **1. fundamental set of skills, 2. their ability for creating and finishing plays, 3. athleticism 4. nullifying the opponents strength, 5. having the knowledge of taking advantage of the opponent's weakness, as well as 6. how quickly they can learn a system and make adjustments on the field**

What matters is what level your kid is capable of playing at and what level he wants to challenge himself, whether it is Division 1, 2 or 3. There are tiered levels of lacrosse at the D1, D2, and D3

levels. Salisbury University Seagulls could beat most D1 programs for instance that are not in the Top 20 D1 programs, and certainly they could compete with lots of the Top 20 programs.

Other than Football and Basketball at the DI level for men; **full ride opportunities usually only exist for women** because schools must equal the money invested in football scholarships for men (Title IX).

Is that true of everyone who plays summer ball?

Certainly it may not be true of every student-athlete, however summer ball gives your son a significant chance of 'finding' the right program or college because it measures their ability to compete, and helps make a decision that is most realistic or a decision that is most practical for your goals as a student-athlete. I haven't met a parent including myself that doesn't want their son to play D1 and play for Syracuse or Hopkins. *But these programs only have so many spots and you have to remember that there are very good lacrosse players who ride the bench for four years for their programs.* **For some very good lacrosse players, selecting a program where they can step in and make a difference right away and gain 'game experience' at the college level is a very important part of the college experience they are seeking.* ***For some very good lacrosse players, the goal is to find out if they can excel at a higher level, even though it means that they might not see the game field as much as they did in HS for a period of time.* *****No matter your goals, the key is finding what it is you want in the college experience and finding a place that also will help you get that experience.**

Facts:

1. **There is more money available at D2 and D3 schools** for players than at the D1 lacrosse level. One reason for this is that many D1 schools have athletic scholarship football programs that are costly in terms of "men's" scholarships available for their other men's programs. Because of Title IX, schools are required to give the same amount of scholarships to women as they do for their men's program. This means that the D1 men's lacrosse programs do not have nearly as much money for their athletes as the D1 women's softball program at their same school. D1 full ride's are not growing on trees anywhere. They are few and far between. Just the opposite is true for women.

2. **Top D1 programs** are usually done evaluating players in November of their junior year of the student-athlete's, however, they still track those players because verbal commitments are just that...verbal, not written agreements. On one hand it is sad that the recruitment is so critical at that age for Top D1 programs, on the other hand, **it is an opportunity that allows all the D2 and D3 schools to find 'gems' that had not quite developed at that early stage.** This also allows some less storied DI programs that delay the process to catch that gem that all the other programs missed. There are lots of gems out there that get overlooked early on. So don't get down if you were not a star at the 9th/10th grade level...just stay busy!

A neat note: Next time you see a NFL Superbowl game, listen closely to their line ups when they are announced. Curiously, you will find that many of the rostered starters on NFL teams were not on top D1 college teams. Many of them were players who saw tons of playing time at

the D2 level or they were on teams that were not as successful in the BCS or FBS standings; what does this mean? **You can have great success wherever you go to college both on and off the field if you are a determined individual!**

3. **Verbals at the D2 and D1 level:** They are like an engagement between a couple. However, you and the college program are not married, yet. Things can and do change with one partner 'changing' their mind. It is not common that the verbal is broken, however it is not uncommon that one of the partners has a change in heart. The most usual reasons for a verbal commitment being broken are:

a. student-athlete is involved in **drugs/alcohol situation** during their HS year that involves a **school suspension or arrest**.

b. a **change of the head coaching position** at that college or university.

4. **D1 and D2 Signing Days:** these are written agreements (contracts between the school and the student-athlete. A marriage has taken place, cemented in good intentions, that can be severed if the student-athlete is involved in any situation that cause their partner (the school) harm.

Last but not least...and I'll put this as simple as I can possibly put it..."**Your son should pick the school he wants to attend for four years whether he plays lacrosse or not**" and if he choses to play lacrosse he should treat it much like a his girlfriend...."**either the girlfriend loves your son with all her heart, or she is just biding her time with your son until the she finds the one she really wants.**"

If you keep these items in mind, that's how you know you made the right decisions moving forward in the process of finding a great fit for your son.

Here is the good news and the bad news: The popularity of lacrosse is growing so much that it means the competition for spots available is also growing, and the college programs haven't been able to keep up with the demand for enrollment for the need for more college opportunities. However colleges and universities are starting to notice that if they don't have college lacrosse as a program, they are missing out on enrollment opportunities for men at their school. Thus the explosion of men's lacrosse programs at the D3 level; and **you are starting to see a significant rise at the D2 level opportunities**. The D1 level is not increasing with opportunity at the level of D3 schools or the D2 level, but I believe that will be forthcoming.

*Hope this helps as you move forward with your decision making. **I think there is one other item that all student-athletes and parents need to keep in mind...that being, after college, there is very little opportunity to move on at the lacrosse playing level.** And that's why I will stick with my insistance that your son **pick the school he would want to go to if he could not play lacrosse.***
*****Simply, there is more opportunity in life being a great student, than being a great lacrosse player; although the life lessons and people contacts you learn on the field will serve you well.***