

Recruiting information from NCSA

Learn about the different division levels

Once you've determined your level of interest, talent and expectations surrounding college athletics, it's important to consider the various division levels available to compete in:

- **NCAA Division I**—This is the highest level of college athletics and, thus, the most competitive. DI schools typically have large budgets, expensive facilities, and the student-athletes are expected to train and travel extensively.
- **NCAA Division II**—While still a competitive division, DII athletes are provided more balance in their lives, as training and competition aren't as intense. Scholarships are also offered at this level.
- **NCAA Division III**—No athletic scholarships are offered for DIII student-athletes, but there are many other forms of financial aid. The competition levels are still very high, but practice seasons are shorter, and there's more of an academic focus.
- **NAIA**—A much smaller community than the NCAA—with a little over 250 schools—the NAIA is a great option for student-athletes who love their sport but are looking for a smaller or private college, or a specific major.
- **NJCAA**—Junior college (JUCO) is a good option for the student-athlete looking to get a sense of what college athletics are like at a two-year institution before transferring to a four-year college. Many student-athletes compete at the JUCO level because they are working on their NCAA eligibility or are trying to save money before transferring to a four-year college.

Understand academic eligibility requirements

- Academic eligibility is one of the most important aspects of the recruiting process and can be overlooked by families who aren't sure how to get recruited. There are different eligibility requirements for NCAA, NAIA and JUCO schools—and each school will also have its own entrance requirements—so it's crucial to actively work to maintain your grades. A great GPA and/or standardized test score can be the difference-maker between you and another recruit. Think about it: A college coach wants to fill their roster with athletes who will work hard. If you can prove you have the academic chops, they have less to worry about. Being academically sound will also open more doors for you scholarship-wise.

Level set based on your interest, talent and expectations

- Getting an objective view of how you stack up against other student-athletes is an invaluable component of the recruiting process—and often one of the toughest parts of the process as families learn more about how to get recruited. There's no point in striving for a DI scholarship if you don't have the size or skills to compete at that demanding level. There are a couple ways to figure out how you rank: researching college rosters and being evaluated by a third party like NCSA. Most importantly, you should be honest with yourself about your desire to compete at the college level. It's nothing like high school; everything is more intense, from training to the competition itself.

Do you have to get a scholarship to compete in college sports?

- Typically, there are more spots available on a team than coaches have scholarships to offer. So, not getting a scholarship doesn't mean you're out of luck. Student-athletes can walk onto a team, which means trying out without receiving a scholarship. Sometimes, [athletes are asked to walk on](#), in which case they are called “preferred walk-ons.” You may also walk on to a team without a scholarship one year and be given a scholarship the next year, depending on your perceived value.

Who gives out athletic scholarships?

- Athletic scholarships are typically one-year agreements between the college and the athlete, although some are multi-year. They are offered at the NCAA DI and DII levels, as well as at the NAIA and NJCAA levels—combined, that’s thousands of schools. DIII colleges do not offer athletic scholarships, but many DIII student-athletes receive some kind of financial aid.

Athletic Association	Number of Schools	Number of Athletes	Maximum Number of Scholarships
NCAA Division I	348	139,063	74,243
NCAA Division II	292	85,385	36,343
NCAA Division III	418	144,062	0
NAIA	260	56,354	25,778
NJCAA	464	53,248	41,195
Other	276	39,737	N/A
Total	2,058	517,849	177,559

When should I start contacting college coaches?

The recruiting process is starting earlier each year, with recruits as young as 12 or 13 years old getting college offers. However, that doesn’t mean every athlete is ready to start reaching out to coaches as an 8th grader. Start researching schools and understanding the level of play expected at each one. Then, when you have developed your skills to be able to stand out to the coaches at those schools, start your outreach. For athletes who play up on varsity their freshman year of high school, they may be ready to start contacting college coaches then. For athletes who hit their stride later in their sophomore year, this could be a better time to initiate contact with college coaches.

It’s advisable to try to reach out to coaches before the athlete’s junior year, but this isn’t a hard and fast rule. For athletes who hit a later growth spurt or mature later, junior year may be the best time to start contacting college coaches. There’s a common misconception that athletes can’t start contacting college coaches until their junior year of high school. In reality, athletes can reach out to coaches *at any time*—and they should take advantage of this. The NCAA rules only limit when college coaches can recruit athletes. Even before college coaches can begin recruiting—which is either June 15 or September 1 of their junior year of high school—coaches can read recruits’ emails, listen to their voicemails and start following their athletic progress.

Can parents contact college coaches?

Throughout the recruiting process, the athletes—not their parents—should be contacting college coaches. Coach Taylor White, an NCSA recruiting expert who has coached baseball at the DI level, explains, “I’m not recruiting the parent—I’m recruiting the student-athlete. The second I feel the parent is overstepping their bounds, I start to raise a red flag, especially early on.” He adds that, especially at the beginning of the recruiting process, it’s crucial for coaches to get to know the student-athlete. Emails, phone calls, texts, DMs, etc. should all come from the athlete. Not only will it help the coach get a better understanding of who the recruit is as a person, but it will show the coach that the athlete is responsible enough to manage their own recruiting process.