



WHAT IS THE COLLEGE RECRUITING PROCESS?

The college recruiting process resembles a funnel, starting out with a large group of recruits and narrowing down to a select few.

Many coaches begin the college recruiting process by contacting a large group of athletes that they think would be a good fit for their program. For bigger programs, this number can be in the hundreds or even thousands.

Through evaluations, reviewing highlight video and contact with recruits, they slowly start to whittle that number down until they've filled their open roster spots.

THE STEPS IN THE COLLEGE RECRUITING PROCESS

College coaches generally follow specific steps through their collegiate athletic recruiting process. Knowing these steps will help potential recruits understand where they are in the recruiting process and what still needs to occur going forward. These steps include:

1. Gather a list of prospective athletes
2. Send out recruiting letters, questionnaires, and camp invites
3. Conduct evaluations
4. Extend verbal offers and scholarships
5. Sign athletes

STEP 1: GATHER A LIST OF PROSPECTIVE ATHLETES

To start out, coaches need to gather a large group of recruits. They will identify recruits who meet basic criteria like athletic stats, position, grad year, academics, location and more. To do so, college coaches will use the following tools and methods:

- Recruiting media sites
- Third-party (we have the largest network of student-athlete recruiting profiles)
- Recommendations from high school or club coaches
- Emails and messages from recruits
- Camps and showcases where they can see many potential recruits in one place

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

As a recruit, you need to look at the college recruiting process like a funnel, too.

- Start out with a list of programs that would be a good athletic, academic, financial and social fit for you, and then pare that list down based on your preferences and the interest of college coaches.
- Consider attending camps and showcases held by coaches at schools you're interested in.
- Create a recruiting profile so college coaches can easily find your information online and increase your likelihood of getting a camp invite.
- Get your name in front of college coaches as much as possible through emails, social media and other ways to contact college coaches.

STEP 2: SEND OUT RECRUITING LETTERS, QUESTIONNAIRES AND CAMP INVITES

The next step for most coaches is to begin sending out messages to a large group of athletes to get an idea of how many might be interested in their program. Athletes who pass the initial evaluation will likely receive one or more of the following:

- Requests to complete a recruiting questionnaire
- Invitations to a camp
- General interest letters from the school

RECRUITING QUESTIONNAIRES

How do college athletic recruiting questionnaires work? They are forms with fields for basic information that coaches want to see about any potential recruit and are very common in college sports recruitment.

After coaches send these communications, they will see who responds—and consider how genuinely interested each athlete sounds—and narrow their list of prospects down to between 500–3,000 athletes, depending on the size of the program.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Recruiting questionnaires, camp invites and general interest letters from a school may seem impersonal and not worthy of a follow-up. However, they do serve an important purpose.

Respond to each coach with a personalized message, thanking them for the letter and letting them know you are interested in their program. Coaches are very good at spotting generic messages and mass emails.

STEP 3: CONDUCT IN-DEPTH ATHLETIC, ACADEMIC AND CHARACTER EVALUATIONS

Where do college coaches evaluate athletes they are looking to recruit?

At this stage in the college recruiting process, coaches really need to get to know recruits in order to create a ranked list of top prospects. This often means they will get in touch with athletes and start calling their high school and club coaches for an evaluation or recommendation.

They may also travel to large tournaments or showcases where many of their recruits will be competing, or they will send athletes personalized invites to their own camps. Official and unofficial visits can also happen at this time, as coaches aim to create a solid list of top recruits.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Don't wait for college coaches to start contacting you! Instead, take the initiative to show them why you deserve to make it to the next round of the college recruiting process.

- **Send them updated athletic and academic stats and highlight videos** with your best and most recent footage.
- **Ask your high school and club coach to reach out** to college coaches on your behalf.
- **Let coaches know you're coming to their school** for an unofficial visit and that you'd like to arrange a time to meet with them while you're there.

STEP 4: EXTEND SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS AND LOCK DOWN COMMITMENTS

At this point, coaches will have a ranked list of their top prospects and will look to lock down commitments.

When can college coaches make you an offer? That depends on the type of offer.

Verbal offers—non-binding, handshake agreements between a recruit and a college coach—can happen at any time and age. However, one of the biggest problems with early offers is that both the recruit and the coach can back out of them at any time.

For example, if an athlete was given a verbal scholarship offer their freshman year of high school, that offer can still be rescinded by the athlete's senior year of high school. This leaves the recruit in a tough spot if they haven't been communicating with any other schools.

Offers usually become official when the athlete signs their financial aid agreement, which typically occurs their senior year of high school.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

If you've made it to this point of the college recruiting process, you need to be ready to handle some tough conversations about scholarships, offers and financial aid.

Talk with your family about narrowing down your target list of schools and make sure to identify the schools you're prepared to commit to.

STEP 5: SIGN ATHLETES AND ENSURE ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY

The last step for college coaches is ensuring that each recruit signs with their program and meets eligibility requirements.

Here's how the committing and signing timeline works in most cases:

- **The athlete verbally commits to the school.**
- **The college coach extends an official offer.**
- **The athlete signs the official offer.**
- **The athlete continues to meet eligibility requirements** by taking all the necessary core courses and receiving the required GPA in those courses.

Unfortunately, every year, there are athletes who have signed with a college but end their senior year ineligible to compete at the college level. This leaves both the athlete and the coach in a tough spot.

The coach will need to go back to their list of top prospects and see if the athlete who ranked number two in that spot is still available, interested and academically eligible. The former recruit will likely need to compete for a year or two at a junior college to gain academic eligibility.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

While it's easy to get caught up in the rush of athletic recruiting and signing with a school, you still need to make sure that you stay academically eligible.

If you're concerned at all that you may not be able to meet the requirements, meet with your guidance counselor to go over what grades you need to meet in your core courses and strategize a way to get there.

WHEN DOES THE RECRUITING PROCESS BEGIN?

The recruiting process varies depending on the sport and the level of competition, but it generally begins early in an athlete's high school career. Most Division 1 coaches can only start proactively reaching out to recruits June 15 after their sophomore year or September 1 of their junior year. But student-athletes can reach out to college coaches with emails, video, transcripts, etc. as early as they're ready to —college coaches just can't respond until the rules say they can.

Even though some sports recruit earlier than others, and there are [recruiting rules](#) that restrict activity, it's never too early for student-athletes to research colleges, maintain their grades, update their recruiting video and prepare themselves to hit the ground running when they're allowed to freely communicate with college coaches.

Student-athletes should be ready to get recruited whenever an opportunity presents itself and not scramble to catch up with the rest of their class when recruiting activity is already happening.

WHAT DO COLLEGE COACHES LOOK FOR WHEN RECRUITING?

College coaches have different needs for their rosters depending on the level of competition, open positions, academic requirements and more. Some may put more emphasis on certain categories than others, but these are usually what's being considered:

ATHLETIC ABILITY

This is usually the most important factor, even when college coaches won't admit it. Their job is dependent on the team securing wins and finding success, so college coaches are absolutely looking for the best athletes that they can sign. But this is not the only factor they consider.

ACADEMICS

Academics are very important, too. Oftentimes, a college coach will have several recruits to choose from to fill a roster spot and when that happens, they are more likely to pick the one with stronger grades and test scores because they are less likely to experience academic problems in the future and lose their eligibility. At academically rigorous colleges, it can also be difficult for recruits to get admitted.

CHARACTER

Character is more important than most athletes and families think. When coaches are out scouting talent, they like to observe how athletes interact with their teammates, opponents, coaching staff and even parents to get an idea of how the athlete carries themselves.

LOCATION

This can also play a role in recruiting. Successful programs with big budgets may recruit all over the country and even internationally, but smaller programs may only have the resources to recruit from certain regions where they have relationships with high school coaches and can also cut down on travel expenses. In this case, recruits from a certain region can have a leg up in recruiting.

COLLEGE RECRUITING TIMELINE FOR FRESHMEN (9th grade)

Freshman year is mainly about **building your foundation** (academics, athletic development, and a simple recruiting “system”) so you’re ready when recruiting rules open up for real in your sport.

- **Research different division levels** and learn the differences in competition (NCAA D1/D2/D3, NAIA, JUCO).
- **Gain an understanding of NCAA recruiting rules**, especially what counts as contact, how calendars work, and what coaches can/can’t do by grade level.
- **Learn (and track) the key measurables for your sport**, like the 40-yard dash, vertical jump, shuttle/3-cone, sport-specific times/velos, and position metrics, so you can show progress over time.

COLLEGE RECRUITING TIMELINE FOR SOPHOMORES (10th grade)

Sophomore year is about **building your athletic resume and recruiting assets** so coaches can evaluate you more easily:

- **Build your athletic resume and recruiting profile** with updated stats, schedule, and academics.
- **Compile a highlight video** (plus some full-game/full-match clips when possible).
- **Start contacting college coaches** at levels that can typically recruit earlier (D3, NAIA, junior college), and begin learning what each program wants from your position/event.

By sophomore year of high school, recruits should be spending a few hours a week on their recruiting.

COLLEGE RECRUITING TIMELINE FOR JUNIORS (11th grade)

Junior year is when you **turn recruiting into consistent outreach and real conversations**:

- **Contact college coaches regularly** with your schedule, updates, and video.
- **Write emails/letters and make calls** (and follow up consistently).
- **Build and refine a target list of schools** based on fit (level, academics, cost, location, roster needs).

While freshman and sophomore years were spent getting familiar with the recruiting process and laying the groundwork, junior year is go-time for recruiting.

COLLEGE RECRUITING TIMELINE FOR SENIORS (12th grade)

Senior year is about **closing the loop and staying flexible**:

- **Many D1 offers are made during junior year**, so if you don't have one yet, keep your options open.
- **Continue contacting coaches** and sharing new film, results, and academic updates.
- **Be ready to expand your target list** to additional programs and lower division levels if needed to find the right fit.

Senior year is the final leg of the college recruiting process.

REASONS TO START THE RECRUITING PROCESS NOW

No athlete's recruiting process looks the same. While some athletes verbally commit as young as 7th grade, others wait until their seniors to find last-minute opportunities.

Because there's no true start to the recruiting process, we've broken down the reasons why your student-athlete might want to start the recruiting process now, based on their graduation year.

WHY STAR FRESHMAN YEAR?

It's no secret that top programs recruit early, so if a student-athlete can and wants to compete at a Division 1 school, they need to start the recruiting process early.

If an athlete falls into one of these categories as a freshman, they will likely gain recruiting interest earlier than most recruits:

- Have varsity or elite club video
- Were ranked as a top-tier recruit at a tournament or showcase or received prestigious awards.

Once an athlete begins receiving general recruiting materials, they should begin filling out questionnaires, looping in their high school or club coach and emailing college coaches at schools they are interested in attending.

WHY START SOPHOMORE YEAR?

Athletes who spent their freshman year researching colleges are well positioned to take the next step and talk to coaches.

While many Division 1 programs have solidified their recruiting classes by this point, it's possible to find a few D1 programs with roster openings.

Athletes should consider their options at the Division 2 level, which recruits heavily during sophomore year, or start building relationships with Division 3 and NAIA coaches.

This is also a great time to plan unofficial visits as a way to meet coaches and see campuses in person.

WHY START JUNIOR YEAR?

If an athlete hasn't started the recruiting process by this point, they're losing out on roster spot opportunities.

Junior year is when college coaches across all division levels can begin contacting recruits. Coaches can begin sending and responding to emails, texts and social media messages, as they build a relationship with recruits and their families.

Plus, this is the year most student-athletes are ready to play in front of college coaches and get ranked nationally at showcases and camps.

As athletes begin to fine-tune their list of top college, junior year is a good time to plan unofficial visits and official visits.

WHY START SENIOR YEAR?

Despite what you may think, senior year isn't too late to start the recruiting process, but athletes will need to be proactive. This means bypassing the introductory email process and going straight to calling college coaches directly to get on their radar.

At this point, you should focus on Division 3 schools along with NAIA, and NCCAA programs that will likely still have scholarship opportunities available.

Another strategy athletes can use is following their favorite programs on X to look out for any recruits who de-commit from a program.

HOW THE NCAA RECRUITING RULES, CALENDAR AND PERIODS IMPACT THIS TIMELINE

The NCAA recruiting calendar and related recruiting rules are meant to mandate the types of communication that athletes and college coaches can have, outline dates for specific communication and protect elite athletes from receiving an overwhelming amount of communication from college coaches.

When these rules and periods are laid out for each sport, they create a recruiting calendar during which different periods allow certain types of recruiting activity.

WHEN DO COLLEGE COACHES STOP RECRUITING?

The obvious answer is that college coaches stop recruiting when they have filled their roster. But this depends on when they started recruiting and how long that takes.

In general, because top athletes go to D1 programs, those schools start recruiting earlier and finish recruiting earlier than D2, D3, NAIA, NCCAA, and junior college programs.

Colleges at lower levels tend to recruit athletes that have been passed over by colleges at higher levels, so oftentimes colleges at the D3 level will be recruiting later than those at the D1 level.

Is it too late to get recruited senior year? For some sports and division levels the answer will be yes, but for others it will be no.