



ARE YOU GOOD ENOUGH TO PLAY COLLEGE SPORTS?

It's easy for high school athletes to picture themselves at their dream school, competing at a prestigious university and playing against the best of the best. But it's harder to grasp some of the gritty details, such as rigorous training programs, winter breaks spent on campus and little-to-no free time.

ARE YOU READY FOR THE COMMITMENT?

Before we even dive into which schools you can compete at, we always ask first: Do you want to commit to playing college sports? Your experience as a college-athlete will differ significantly compared to your high school or club team. Practice and training is much more intense (you're no longer the best one on the team), most of your time is spent with your teammates, including the off-season and holidays, and your academic performance is closely watched.

You'll be better equipped on your recruiting journey and more prepared for the future if you know what to expect and fully understand the time commitments required of college-athletes. What is the role of academics in full ride scholarships?

HOW TO GUAGE YOUR TALENT LEVEL

Next, you'll want to have a third-party evaluate you to see how you really stack up against recruits across the nation. Knowing where you stand will help you target the right programs and maximize your opportunities.

There are a couple of ways you can go about this. First, you can ask your high school or club coach for feedback. College coaches often reach out to high school and club coaches for input, so there's a good chance yours is already in the loop. Or you can turn to an online service. Many coaches use recruiting services.

Of course, you can always attend a showcase or camp where college coaches check out talent in person. However, most coaches arrive knowing which athletes they want to evaluate, so you should make sure you're in contact with coaches ahead of time.

WHAT COACHES LOOK FOR IN ATHLETIC ABILITY

When a college coach starts evaluating prospective recruits, athletic ability is often the first thing they look at. Athletic abilities are the specific skills that are required to play a sport. This can include things like strength, power, endurance and speed. Other physical abilities that may be needed for the sport in question include agility, stamina, balance or flexibility. As coaches assess possible recruits, they ask themselves if the athlete can make their team better, if they can compete in their program and if their skills are at the same level or above the players they already have.

In the video below, recruiting expert and former D1 college coach share information on how to target the right schools to fit your athletic ability. Creating a list of colleges including your safety schools, middle

schools and dream schools can increase your chances of being recruited and can offer the opportunity to grow into the division you want to compete at.

Coaches also evaluate whether or not the student-athlete is coachable. A coachable athlete is one who is always looking for ways to improve, willing to apply feedback and has a passion for their sport.

Academic eligibility is also a crucial aspect of the recruitment process. If you want to be an NCAA Division I or Division II athlete, you need to start thinking about your academic eligibility as early as your freshman year of high school. Learn more about the eligibility standards for NCAA, NAIA, and JUCO colleges and universities.

WHAT IS A STAR RATING?

Some sports—mostly team sports—use star ratings to rank recruits. Star ratings are a quick and easy way to convey a recruit's level of talent to college coaches. Most commonly, student-athletes are ranked from no stars, meaning their talent is unknown, to 5 stars or elite athletes.

5-STAR RECRUITS

These are the best players in the country, generally among the nation's top prospects. They have outstanding athleticism and ability far beyond their peers.

4-STAR RECRUITS

These prospects have excellent knowledge of the game and ability. They will most likely start their freshman year in college and are the best player on their club or high school team.

3-STAR RECRUITS

These student-athletes show dominance on the field and will be an impact player. They have a few areas of development and might not always be consistent, especially when competing against top-tier players.

1- AND 2-STAR RECRUITS

Sometimes overmatched against their peers, these recruits have several areas of development. But the potential to compete at the college level is there and they could become reliable starters.

WHAT STAR LEVEL RECRUIT ARE YOU?

There are a couple of ways you can identify where you stand: you can research college rosters, or be evaluated by a third-party.

If you're interested in a college's program, go to the school's athletic website and take a look at the roster. Do your key stats fall in line with the other players in your position? Do you have similar achievements as everyone on the team? If you have comparable measurements, then you probably qualify for that level of competition. If you aren't quite there yet, take a look at a lower division level until you find a good fit where your skills fall in line with the rest of the team.

College coaches evaluate more than just your athleticism and academics. They also pay attention to your character and coach ability, too. Demonstrating your coachability to college coaches can help set yourself apart from other recruits.

HIGH SCHOOL VS. COLLEGE SPORTS

The transition from high school to college is already a major adjustment for any student, but the differences between high school vs college sports can make the change even more monumental.

But just how much harder is college than high school when it comes to athletics? Here are six key differences between high school and college sports:

- **Training is more intense.** As a freshman in college, you'll train with—and compete against—older athletes that are likely bigger, faster, stronger and more skilled than you're used to. It's extremely rare for a freshman to be the best player on the team.
- **Everyone is talented.** Every athlete on the team is there because they've invested time and energy into their sport. Not only is there little room for mistakes and lack of concentration, but you need to earn your spot on the team. Think about it from the coach's point of view—this is a business for them and if you're not performing, they'll replace you.
- **Time management is a must.** Between practice, games, traveling and academics, being a college athlete means your free time is limited. **In-season D1 athletes often devote up to 80 hours per week (or more!) to their athletics and academics.** Even though D2, D3 and NAIA schools tend to offer more of a sports-life balance, athletes at all division levels need to learn how to manage the time commitment of their sport with their studies and social life.
- **Your college team is everything.** In college, your teammates are more than just your friends—they're also your family and support system, even outside of practices and competitions. You'll live, eat, travel, train and study together, have classes with them and spend most of your holiday breaks with them, taking team bonding to a whole new level!
- **Your coach is more involved in your academics.** Beyond making sure your class schedule doesn't interfere with practices or games, coaches may also keep tabs on academic requirements like mandatory study hours and a minimum GPA so you can continue to play. Some coaches even receive bonuses based on how their team performs academically.
- **There can be some major perks.** There are some great benefits of being a college athlete beyond the potential of landing an athletic scholarship or NCAA financial aid. Athletes are usually allowed to register for classes early, have access to state-of-the-art facilities like gyms and nutrition centers, train with top coaches, travel to colleges nationwide and get what often seems like an unlimited amount of free sports gear and apparel.

TALK TO CURRENT COLLEGE ATHLETES

Don't be afraid to go directly to the source. During official and unofficial visits, you typically get an opportunity to meet with current athletes and ask them about their experience. But in the meantime, you shouldn't hesitate to network with college athletes to learn more about a program. You can start by reaching out to former teammates from your high school or club team who are on a college team. Set up a quick chat, prepare meaningful questions and don't be nervous! You'll discover that athletes who've gone through the recruiting process are open to helping out a fellow recruit.

DEVELOP AND IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

If you feel like you're not quite ready to play at the college level, you can always work on expanding your skillset and improving your athletic ability and the best part is that training programs are offered year-round.