

# College Recruiting 101



## What is the NCAA?

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes. The United States has about 3,700 degree-granting institutions and more than 1,100 are members of the NCAA.

## Three divisions = three different sets of governing standards

Among these institutions, the NCAA breaks them out into [three divisions](#) that have different governing rules. There are more than 350 Division I schools, 300 Division II schools, and 440 Division III schools. A separate organization called The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has more than 250 schools. There is also a junior college level of athletics. While there are many similarities between divisions and conferences, you will find each college option is unique. For example, DI and DII athletes must meet certain eligibility requirements set by the NCAA, while DIII eligibility requirements are set by the school.

## The truth about recruiting

The truth is that only around [6% of high school athletes will go on to play college sports at an NCAA DI, DII or DIII school](#), with that number being even lower for sports like volleyball or basketball. The NCAA's breakdown of participation among major sports shows that only 5.9% of men and 6% women go on to play at an NCAA college. This means only the best of the best in each recruiting class gets to sit back and watch college coaches come to them. The saying, "If you are good enough, they will find you" is a MYTH. Many qualified student-athletes succumb to this misunderstanding each year and watch their college opportunity pass them by. There are simply too many high school athletes who are trying to get recruited for you to be recognized—unless you put in the extra work of advocating for yourself.

## Division I life

[Division I athletics](#) provide the thrill of competing in front of large crowds against some of the best athletes in your sport and the opportunity to become a household name. It's important to know, however, that competition for your roster spot is fierce and your time is not your own—that includes weekends and the offseason. After practice, training, travel and homework, you will be tired! You can say goodbye to internships, spring break getaways, summer vacation, even part-time jobs. A DI athlete is truly dedicated to their sport for the next four years and has a sun-up to sun-down schedule. For some, this level of discipline can be overwhelming and exhausting. But most of these athletes say they wouldn't trade their DI experience for anything.

## The DI Ivy League difference

The Ivy League consists of some of the oldest and most prestigious schools in the country. Ivy League schools (Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth University, Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, and Yale University) require ultra-high competition in academics and athletics. Because their undergraduate population has a high concentration of athletes, oftentimes these institutions structure events in a student-athlete friendly manner. Be advised that these eight schools do not award academic or athletic scholarships. However, need-based financial aid is offered by each school, and many students can attend for little to no cost because these schools can offer a considerable amount of financial aid.

## Division II life

You will find much of the athletic talent at the [Division II level](#) to be slightly more balanced between athletics, academics and social life. Many athletes choose these schools for a more balanced schedule and the higher likelihood to see the field all four years. Demands at these schools are still rigorous, but not like the year-round commitment of a DI athlete.

## Division III life

[Division III programs](#) offer a more well-rounded college experience where academics will take more of the lead. The time commitment for DIII athletes is not nearly as intense, which allows them more of an opportunity to explore life outside of the classroom. It allows for more involvement in academic clubs, internships, and even study abroad opportunities. DIII athletes often feel they are more included within the general college community, as opposed to DI or DII athletes who are slightly more separated from the rest of the undergraduate body.

## Why NAIA schools might be your best bet

[The NAIA](#) has actually been around longer than the NCAA. The NAIA is made up of about 250 smaller, private schools. The NAIA has more than 60,000 athletes that compete annually at one of its schools. Many consider NAIA to be on par with NCAA DIII schools when it comes to life and sport balance and on par with NCAA DII schools in regard to the level of competition. However, unlike NCAA DIII schools, the NAIA awards \$500 million in athletic scholarships every year. NAIA schools are gaining popularity for these reasons.

## Don't overlook junior colleges

[Junior colleges](#) offer cost-effective tuition, as well as athletic scholarships. Often times junior colleges are utilized by high school student-athletes who aren't quite ready for NCAA college academics or athletics but may be better equipped in a few years. Junior colleges allow many high school athletes to bloom physically as they develop their technique for a high level of competition. Junior colleges can also be a way to increase your academic admission requirements to be on par with a four-year university. For some, junior colleges are a great way to stay close to home while earning college credit and continuing their athletic career.

## How to narrow down your target list of colleges

To find the right college that offers the right academic, athletic, financial and social fit, you'll need to cast a wide net and do your research. Here's how you should organize your [target list of schools](#):

- **5 safety schools:** These are schools you know you'll be able to play at and for which you qualify academically. Get in touch with these coaches early on so the coach knows you're genuinely interested. Many athletes find that programs they never considered originally ended up being their best college fit.
- **10 target schools:** This is where you'll put the schools that are your best match athletically, academically and socially—the ones you really want to focus on in your recruiting.
- **5 reach schools:** These schools might be out of your price range or very competitive academically or athletically. Add them to your list as a great goal to strive for.

## Contacting college coaches

[Contacting college coaches](#) is one of the most important steps of the college recruiting process. First of all, you should fill out a [recruiting questionnaire](#) for any college that is on your radar. You should also research contact info for coaches by either looking at team websites individually or using [NCSA](#) to get contact info for all programs. Once you have contact info, there are four main steps that you should take:

1. [Send an introductory email](#)
2. [Follow-up with a phone call](#)
3. [Respond to any recruiting letters](#)
4. [Keep in touch with coaches](#)

## The importance of camps, combines, and tournaments

[Attending camps, combines, and tournaments](#) is crucial for getting recruited. There are a couple main reasons this is the case. College coaches do not have the time or resources to travel all over the country and see every interesting prospect. When coaches do have the opportunity to visit high schools, they tend to stick to the powerhouse programs with whom they have already developed relationships. So, camps, combines, and tournaments are often the best way that college coaches can watch multiple recruits compete in person at the same time. They are much more convenient from a recruiting standpoint.

## Recruiting myths

There are many rules and regulations about the college recruiting process, which itself can be long and complicated. That's why it's important to always do your research and keep an open line of communication with college coaches, who are often best equipped to answer your questions. Read up more about [common recruiting myths](#).

## When to start the work of getting recruited

The recruiting process actually begins before a student-athlete has had any recruiting interaction with a college coach. Student-athletes can partake in [early recruiting](#) by reaching out to college coaches with emails, video, transcripts, etc.—college coaches just can't respond until the rules say they can. Even though there are recruiting rules that restrict activity, student-athletes should still be researching colleges, maintaining their grades, updating their recruiting video and preparing 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.

## Important dates: College application deadlines

- **Regular decision**
  - January 1st – January 15th of senior year
  - Some schools will have their own deadlines
- **Early action** (non-binding)
  - November 1st – November 15th (school specific)
- **Early decision** (binding)
  - November 1st – November 15th (school specific)
- **Rolling admission**
  - If your desired school has rolling admissions, this provides a window of time in which to submit your application. This period of time typically ranges from the fall to the spring. For example, there's no specific Penn State deadline. Penn State makes its application available on September 1 and reviews submissions on a rolling basis.
- **SAT and ACT**
  - In the United States, the SAT is offered seven times a year: March, May, June, August, October, November, and December. Although you may take the SAT at any time starting your freshman year, most students take it for the first time in the spring of their junior year and possibly retake it in the fall of their senior year.
  - Students often improve their scores when they retake the SAT or ACT. To give yourself opportunities to retake the SAT or ACT, you want to take it for the first time well in advance of your college deadline.
- **Recommendation letters**
  - Another component that requires advance planning are your letters of recommendation. You should ask your teachers at least one month before your deadline. It can also be a good idea to request these letters from your high school teachers at the end of your junior year when they remember you best.

## Recruiting periods

- **Dead period vs. quiet period**

- A [dead period](#) is a time when coaches cannot have any contact other than phone contact with players they are recruiting. A [quiet period](#) is a time when coaches simply cannot scout off-campus. During quiet periods, coaches can still bring recruits in for visits, talk to them, and so on, but they cannot attend games, tournaments, or practices where they might scout or evaluate talent.

- **Evaluation period**

- During an [evaluation period](#), a college coach may watch college-bound student-athletes compete, visit their high schools, and write or call student-athletes or their parents. However, a college coach may not have face-to-face contact with college-bound student-athletes or their parents off the college's campus during an evaluation period.

- **Contact period**

- During a [contact period](#), contact occurs any time a college coach says more than hello during a face-to-face contact with a college-bound student-athlete or their parents off the college's campus.

## NCAA Eligibility Center

The [NCAA Eligibility Center](#) is responsible for determining the academic eligibility and amateurism status for all student-athletes who are trying to compete at the Division 1 and Division 2 levels. It's the student-athlete's responsibility to understand the NCAA academic requirements—including the [NCAA GPA requirements](#)—as well as the amateurism requirements to make sure they are on track to meet and maintain their eligibility.

In order to stay on top of important dates and requirements, you'll want to save and reference the [NCAA Eligibility Center Checklist](#).

## FAFSA: Important things to know

There is a lot of [financial aid terminology](#) to keep track of in the college recruiting process, which can make things confusing. However, the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is one of the most important. The FAFSA is a form that determines your eligibility for federal grants, loans and work-study funds administered by the U.S. Department of Education, and they're more borrower-friendly than private loans.

Simply put, if you fill it out and submit it as soon as you can, you have a higher chance of securing free money for college. About half of college students are eligible for a Pell Grant. By not completing the FAFSA in 2018, each Pell-eligible graduate missed out on an average of \$3,908 for college. The filing deadline for the 2020–21 academic year is on June 30, 2021. Reference the [NCSA guide to the FAFSA](#) to learn more about student aid.

## Sources

- [NCAA recruiting calendars](#)
- [NCSA recruiting dead period](#)

## Eligibility

- [NCAA Eligibility Center](#)
- [NAIA Eligibility Center](#)
- [DI Academic Eligibility](#)

## Helpful online systems

- [Naviance](#)
- [Common Application](#)



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As a high school football player, I was recognized as the Gatorade Player of the Year in Georgia, named to the Sports Illustrated and Rivals top 100 in addition to being a 1st Team All-American. Realizing the importance of my education, I maximized my recruiting potential by attending the right collegiate fit, academically and athletically. I ultimately decided on Stanford University, where I was a three-year starter, two-year captain, and All Pac-Ten honoree. Drafted in the 5th Round into the NFL by Tampa Bay, I played for the Bucs and Denver Broncos before finishing my professional career in the CFL as a Grey Cup Champion with the Calgary Stampeders.

With a passionate message that emphasizes the importance of education, I look forward to helping families across the country achieve success in the college sports recruiting process.