

Cathy Aradi, a renowned recruiting expert shares some tips regarding the recruiting process. Information on obtaining her book, widely known as the recruiting bible, is in one of her responses below should you feel like getting more information. Also, her website is: <http://veenet.value.net/~cscsoftball/>

Her sites contains lots of valuable information and is well worth a look. Here is some Q & A from her site.

Subject: Must Go to a National Tournament?

I am asst. coach of a very local (but talented) travel team comprised of girls entering 10th and 11th grade. Our team plays 18u PAL and PONY 16u summer travel. In order to go to go to a recruiting camp, must a player have participated in a national event? Is this always the case, or can one apply to attend a camp and be admitted without this accomplishment?

Our team has lost a few core players who have chosen to try out for more high profile teams for recruiting purposes. We have decided to stay independent and enlarge our player recruiting efforts. We have enlisted our head coach (former college player) and our outside batting coach (nationally recognized) to help replenish our roster. In your opinion, have we set a course that will eliminate our players from any real chances at playing college ball via scholarship or walk-on?

Subject: Must Go to a National Tournament?

Where the recruiting camp is concerned, that will vary depending on who is sponsoring it. I usually advise kids to apply and see what happens anyway.

Where scouting and recruiting are concerned, it's pretty impossible to generalize an answer to this type of question because of all the variables that factor into recruiting. It is true that many coaches, particularly those at bigger programs (Div. I, top Div. II, etc.) will focus their recruiting efforts on players with a certain level of experience. It doesn't necessarily have to be an ASA national tournament, but it certainly helps when a coach can see an athlete competing against other top athletes. And most coaches who scout a lot during the summer will focus on the larger tourneys that attract players from all over the country or region. (Some coaches, particularly those at smaller schools, however, do not scout as much, and their travel may be limited by budgetary or other constraints.)

Another aspect of recruiting that may affect your girls is that most Div. I coaches, and many Div. II and NAIA coaches, won't recruit players they haven't seen in action in person. (All coaches prefer this, but coaches at very small schools, many Div. III schools, etc., who are limited in their travel options, may be more willing to recruit based on a skills video alone.) Because of this, most kids who think they are good enough to play at a Div. I program need to be sure the coach at a given school is going to have the chance to see them at a tournament. (Note: as of this time, D-I coaches cannot have kids on campus for a "tryout" or "workout" per se.)

So if your team won't be at any of the tournaments where coaches (they are writing) would be scouting, it's likely they would have to consider walking on at that D-I college as opposed to being actively recruited. The advantage that NAIA and NCAA Div. II coaches have is that they ARE allowed to have prospects visit and work out with their teams. So if a coach at an NAIA or D-II school gets a video from a player and is really impressed, he/she might invite her to visit and use that opportunity to see the player in action. So kids on travel teams that do not get out to top tourneys may want to focus a lot of their college search in this direction.

The bottom line is recruiting isn't fair and never will be. Coaches tend to follow certain patterns when recruiting, out of habit, convenience, experience, etc. And there are just too many good players these days for coaches to consider all of them. So the smart player looks at her college search realistically, and then she focuses her efforts on the types of schools most likely to consider her an impact player, and/or who are more likely to recruit her because they can see her in action one way or another. And remember, whether you go to a big tournament or not, if a coach doesn't know to look at or for a player, there's a good chance she'll be missed completely.

Hope this helps!

Subject: Contacting Colleges Via Email?

Does your book include e-mail addresses? Is it appropriate to e-mail coaches about your interest in their program?

Subject: Contacting Colleges Via Email?

My book includes email addresses where the coaches have sent them to me and indicated they wanted them included. While it's totally fine to email coaches about your interest, not all coaches treat email equally. Some read it regularly; some read it occasionally; some rarely read theirs. Some coaches use it to gather player information; others do not. And email addresses can easily change or be incorrect (even when posted on a college web page!) However, some college web pages also have contact forms built into them so that a player can contact a coach about her interest in the school directly from the web page.

I still believe in most cases, a written introductory packet is more personal, harder to lose, and more likely to get a response from more coaches. (It's also difficult to include a video in an email--at this time any way!) Letters (email or written) alone will usually only generate a form response that asks for a video, unless a coach is already in contact with you, has seen you play, etc.

Subject: 16U vs. 18U As a Junior?

My daughter will be starting her junior year soon and she will still be eligible to play 16U travel ball next summer prior to her senior year of high school. She has an opportunity to play on an 18U team next year instead of 16U. She would be the number 1 pitcher on the 16U team and would probably be the number 3 pitcher on the 18U team. From a recruiting perspective, how can I help her make the decision between these two teams?

I'm afraid that another summer of 16U will not give her the exposure that she could get at 18U. Her overall playing time would probably be the same on either team. Do you think that going 16U again would be a big disadvantage?

Subject: 16U vs. 18U As a Junior?

I get asked this question all the time, and with very few exceptions, my answer is an unqualified, "Play 18/U!!!!!!" The qualifications--e.g., reasons to play 16/U--would include:

- She's not strong enough to play on the only good 18/U teams in the area.
- There are emotional, financial or other significant personal reasons that make playing on the 18/U team difficult.
- The only good team in the area/region is a 16/U team, and it's one of the top 16/U teams in the entire state or part of the country.
- There's no other choice.
- She's already scoped out the college situation and plans to play locally, not play in college, go to a JC, go to a specific school whether or not she plays ball, etc.

That said, it's extremely difficult getting enough exposure to college coaches playing on *any* 18 U or Gold team (except for the top teams in any given area and even then sometimes it's tough to be seen.) And these days, D-I coaches will almost never recruit a player they've not seen in person. D-II and NAIA coaches tend to be the same way, BUT, they have the advantage of being allowed to have players on campus for tryouts. So if they can't see a player at a tournament, it doesn't necessarily eliminate her as a prospect for that school. D-III coaches also like to see kids, but tend to travel less, and so are more likely to factor in a well-made video if they cannot get to see a prospect.

Sometimes the choice is out of your hands. Sometimes you have to work around this obstacle. And you can certainly do that. But if at all possible, have her play 18/U. Coaches want to see kids competing UP, rather than DOWN. Hope this helps!

Subject: Fully-Funded Programs?

Can you tell people how many D-I schools (particularly in the northeast) are fully funded and what that means.

Subject: Fully-Funded Programs?

I can tell you what fully-funded means, but I can't say with authority how many Northeast schools are fully funded. For Div. I, fully funded means the coach have a TOTAL of 12 scholarships. How many or what percentages are available in a given year will depend on who graduates, what amount of money they're getting, etc. Fully funded at a Div. II school means the coach has a total of just over 7 scholarships. Again, how much is available in a given year will depend on who's graduating.

It's important to understand what these numbers mean because even a fully-funded program (for example Michigan and Florida State are probably fully-funded), can't give every player a full ride. If the coach carries 18-20 kids, you can do the math. If all 18 kids got the same amount, everyone would be getting 60-70 percent. But in all likelihood, there are a few major impact players--pitchers, perhaps catchers and shortstops, maybe the big home run hitter or the base-stealing outfielder--who are getting close to full rides. That means on the other end of the spectrum are kids who aren't getting anything, or who are only getting a few thousand dollars. It's also a pretty safe bet that many, if not most of the smaller Div. I programs in the Northeast are NOT fully funded.

At the Div. II level, even a fully-funded program would only have 7 or so scholarships. With 18-20 kids on the team, you won't see many full rides there. And you'll see even more kids who are getting just small amounts. Also, there are many Div. I and II programs where the coach only has 2 or 4 or 6 scholarships to share among all the players. So parents expecting to get off scot-free are generally in for a rude awakening unless their athlete is among the tops in the region and has great travel ball visibility.

NOW, on the flip side, academic money is more plentiful, so many coaches--particularly at private schools--will try to package offers for players. Where a lot of parents get confused and make recruiting mistakes is when they hear some guy telling another guy that his kid got a full ride to--you name it: St. Peter's or Holy Cross or La Salle. What the dad isn't telling you--or spelling out--most of the time is that she got \$8000 in need-based money, \$10000 in academic money (because she's a 4.0/1380 student), she got some work-study, some loan money, and \$7500 in softball money (and she's an impact player for them!). Inexperienced parents hear this and think, "Well, my kid is better than his kid, so my kid will get a full ride offer from them too." Then they have a hissy fit when the coach says, "We can offer you \$7500 in softball money and whatever else you might qualify for." The parent knows he won't get more than a few thousand in need-base money, and his kid is a 3.0 student with 990 SAT's, so she's not getting a lot of academic money. Now he's fried because he thinks the coach is trying to put one over on him, when in reality, the coach offered his kid the same amount of athletic money as the other girl received. It's just that she doesn't qualify for the other types of money, thus less money is available to her.

Subject: What Do Scouts Look At?

I have played softball for 9 years, and we moved to travel ball 6 years ago because we thought that that is what scouts and recruiters would look at. But recently a parent has told us that scouts look at your high school ball more. So which one do scouts concentrate on when it comes to recruiting?

Subject: What Do Scouts Look At?

Your resource really isn't correct in saying college coach's look at HS ball more. While it's impossible to generalize, most coaches, particularly at Div. I, top D-II programs will tell you that they look at your travel ball experience first and foremost. They scout more at travel tournaments, and they generally consider that the more consistent experience for players. This is not to say coaches never look at high school teams or players, because they will occasionally go to state championship tournaments for high school or watch players on high school teams that are considered among the best in the state or region. But as a rule, if a player wants to focus on college ball, she should try to be picked up by the

very best travel team she can--one that attends large regional or national tournaments where college coaches are likely to scout. If you have any doubts about this, ask some Div. I or top Div. II coaches in your area where they scout. And visit web pages like those for ASA Nationals or the Radisson Colorado Fireworks and you'll see there are several hundred coaches that attend. Hope this helps. Good luck!

Subject: Academics and Recruiting

Love this Q & A and love your book! Very insightful. Here's the question: Will coaches look harder/search out a player who is National Merit Scholar - Top 10% of class ranking, etc.? Do they look at these potential players as a "free" type of player where they will definitely be receiving academic dollars and therefore, coaches will not have to reach into their athletic funds? Should we be pushing/marketing her academic excellence as hard as we can? And if these type players are on the border line between being D I and D II, will D I look twice because/due to academic strengths?

Subject: Academics and Recruiting

Coaches will definitely take into account a student's academic record, and at many schools, coaches do look for kids with top grades and test scores. These players are more likely to be eligible for academic money, for fee waivers, for special scholarships, etc. Coaches at private schools really appreciate students who help them make the college more affordable! And coaches at schools like the Ivy Leagues have to put grades/test scores first even before athletic experience and ability. I always encourage parents of strong students to investigate all options for scholarships and aid because there is more academic money available than there ever will be athletic money.

Good grades alone won't be enough for all schools, of course. And you can't generalize along the divisional lines because there are top D-II programs that are stronger than small D-I programs. So a player who might not necessarily be a scholarship candidate at a strong D-II, but who has excellent grades/scores might be recruited by a smaller D-I program with limited athletic money available. Being a top student might get you admitted to a UCLA or a Stanford, but it at top athletic programs; it won't guarantee you'll make the team. Still, when push comes to shove, if a coach is having to choose between two players who are similar athletically, but one is significantly stronger academically, most of the time the coach will lean towards choosing the player who is the better student.

Subject: College Summer Camps

How important (if at all) are the Summer Softball Camps offered by colleges?? My daughter plays Travel Ball around the same time these camps are held and I am not sure which is a better investment in her time. I see this as a possible opportunity to get exposure within a small group?

Subject: College Summer Camps

Camps can be a lot of fun and worthwhile IF the player and her family understand that this is an experience that is only guaranteed to provide--at best--good skills work. Yes occasionally, there are players who go to a camp and are "discovered". But it's not common. I suspect there are lots of kids --probably some of them very good--who go to Arizona or UCLA or similar camps thinking the coach will see them and really pay attention. But from my experience, it's not particularly common.

Most of the kids who are ultimately going to be recruited by a top 20 D-I college will be playing travel ball for top Gold teams during the summer and won't be attending these camps.

So it's probably a long shot in terms of recruitment. However, if a player has a particular college that she really wants to attend--even if she can't play softball there--then going to a camp at that school might not be a bad idea. She could show enough to the coach to get some sort of idea whether or not she might have a shot at walking on or something like that.

The tough thing is that to be recruited by a top D-I college, your player generally needs to be showcasing her skills against top Gold pitchers, hitters, etc., and in game situations. She's not likely to find that at a college camp, so even if the coach is impressed with her athleticism, talent, etc., he/she is probably going to want to see her at a tournament in all likelihood before making any commitment to recruiting her.

Subject: When Is It Time?

My daughter is a soph. in HS. she will grad in 2006. She plays great ball, and has begun asking about colleges. (She wants to play for ARIZONA STATE, and I support her, I think anyone can do anything if they try hard enough) This past summer I have looked over the rules for NCAA and Recruiting, and I have looked into recruiting companies.

1) I would like to hear from anyone who has benefited from sending out early portfolios of their child's athletic and academic highlights.. (NCAA cannot reach out to you until July of kids' junior year)... so I guess I'm asking is it worth sending out portfolios before junior year?

2) Are recruiting companies good?... And of what benefit are these companies, can't parents do just as well?

Subject: When Is It Time?

To answer your questions, my personal feeling (based on 15 years of working as a recruiting consultant) is that the very best "window of opportunity" for starting the college search begins during the junior year. This means SAT/ACT tests in the winter-spring, video shot, edited and copied in the early spring, and letters/resumes and tapes/CD's sent out to coaches with a summer travel schedule by May. If a player wants to do anything earlier than this--say at the end of the sophomore year or start of the junior year, postcards to a coach conveying basic information and upcoming travel ball schedule will be just fine. As you are aware, active recruiting really can't begin much before the junior year and contact recruiting--as in personal home visits, meetings at tournaments, phone calls, etc.--can't start until after the junior year.

While it's true that if your player is TRULY going to be the next Lisa Fernandez coaches would want to know this early--say when she's a sophomore--in reality, doing too much very early may work against some kids. Many players aren't nearly as strong physically, experientially, etc., at the start of their sophomore year as they will be at the end of their junior summer. So making videos, expecting answers or decisions from coaches on recruiting early on can be discouraging because most coaches won't even be looking seriously at sophomores. They may be gently encouraging because they know nothing is serious that early (for them). But 95-98% of all college coaches will have to see a player at the end of her junior year--playing competitive travel ball--before they'll go any further.

If your player is hoping to make the team at a highly competitive college such as a Pac-10 school, her best bet is to follow a good conditioning program, get top grades and play on the most competitive travel team she can--playing "up" even at the Gold level if possible as a sophomore. Unfortunately, recruiting -- like life -- isn't fair, and many coaches tend to follow certain patterns when recruiting. Players who don't fit into those patterns will probably have a harder time getting noticed and therefore actively recruited.

Also by starting too early, kids often get burnt out or tired of the recruiting process. Many, if not most kids are still pursuing colleges, making phone calls, sending out tapes, etc., well into their senior year. Starting early won't necessarily change that, and continuing a high-intensity college search for two years can be very tiring. You'll likely get the same or better results by waiting until the mid-junior year to start!

As for recruiting companies, yes, parents can do it themselves and be just as effective at a much lower price. Follow the guidelines in my book religiously and be very dedicated--remember, when the time comes, *she* has to make the phone calls because coaches aren't recruiting you, her mom or any recruiting service!

And, beware of expensive companies that want your money when she's a sophomore and promise to mass-market her to 1000 schools. She'll get some feedback, but it's very unlikely to be from the schools you think she can play at. And

again, when she's a senior and it really counts--when coaches are actually likely to be recruiting her--most of these companies have done their part and are nowhere to be seen. Before spending any money be sure to talk to people who've used a service for softball and who felt they got their money's worth.

Subject: Late Start on Recruiting

I'm a senior in high school and have been giving collegiate softball some thought. I had planned on having schools come watch me during my junior year. I was out most of the season with a shoulder injury and was unable to have college coaches come watch. Because of this injury I was also unable to play on a summer ball team to get noticed that way. I really don't want to give up on my chances of playing but I'm at a loss as to what to do. I've heard many people tell me its too late, others say it's almost impossible now... Is this true? I really don't want to give up on my dream. Is there any advice or guidance you could give me as to what to do?

Subject: Late Start on Recruiting

It IS very late to be getting started, but, it's not an impossible task. You need to learn all about the college search and then begin to market your skills and experience to college coaches around the country. It's much like finding a job. You CANNOT wait for them to come to you--you have to go out and find them. Your best bet is to get a copy of my book, *Preparing to Play Softball at the Collegiate Level*. It is published by the Natl Fastpitch Coaches Assoc. (the college coaches' organization). You can call them at 573-875-3033 or email www.nfca.org to order the book. I will also be glad to mail you a brochure (if you send me a snail mail address).

The book will take you and your family step by step through the college search process and tell you everything you need to know and to do to find the college and team that are right for you. Recruiting is extremely competitive and there is no "magic bullet" for most kids. Hard work, dedication, a determination to play in college and the willingness to look at lots of different kinds of college teams is the best way to ensure you find a school that wants you. This process includes playing very competitive travel ball, writing lots of letters, sending out skills videos, making follow up phone calls and showing coaches how serious you are about playing at the college level.

However, since most coaches won't offer money to kids they can't see in person, I would suggest that you consider focusing on either local colleges that might see you play fall ball OR on Div. II and NAIA schools. You should rush to get a good video shot, edited and copied and then put together packets with the video, an intro letter and a resume. (You may also want to mention your injury and that you are completely recovered.) Then send these out ASAP and follow up with phone calls within two weeks after mailing the packet.

The benefit of focusing on D-II and NAIA schools is that THEY are allowed to have you come on campus and work out or tryout with their teams in the fall--and for NAIA's all year. So a coach who likes your video won't necessarily ignore you just because he/she can't see you play in person. If they like the tape--and get it soon enough--they can invite you on campus for a tryout. That's why these schools are great for kids who may not have had the exposure they need over the junior to senior summer.

My book will enable you to do all these things--if you are willing to go for it, you should be able to find a team. Best of luck!

Subject: Early Signing

What percentage of Div I & Div II softball players sign letters of intent during the early signing period (Nov.)...75%,50%, 25%???. I have a tentative offer at a Div I school which I will be visiting during the week of early signing. I feel pressure to sign early, but I'm concerned that I have not visited any other schools. The coach has indicated that if I don't sign

early the offer will go to someone else. I do have offers to visit schools in January, but those schools are D-II and can't match the academics of the school that wants me to sign early. Any advice, and what's the percentage that sign early??

Subject: Early Signing

I wouldn't want to guess at the exact percentage of kids who sign early, *but*, I'm fairly comfortable saying that the majority of kids who do eventually commit to or sign at a school (and that includes D-I, II, III and NAIA as well as JC programs) will make those commitments in the spring. It's possible that half of the kids who will sign at a Div. I program sign early because D-II and NAIA schools as well as JC's often tend to sign kids later. But many D-I schools will also still be looking at kids after the early signing.

What's difficult is to get new coaches to look at you or pursue you as winter progresses. Since they won't have really any opportunities to see you in person (except local coaches who might see some HS ball), it can be tough for a coach to make a decision to recruit you. Videos are crucial to this process, but some coaches still will want to see you in person.

My advice, however, to all players is this. If you've visited a few schools in the fall, and you've found one you love, don't *NOT* sign because you (or mom and dad) want to know if bigger, better offers/schools might come along. On the other hand, if you've visited a couple of schools--or a lot--and really don't feel you've found a good college match, definitely don't sign just because you're afraid there won't be any other offers. When kids are hesitant to sign--money aside--I've found there's usually a good reason. Hope this helps. Good luck!

Subject: Small-town Players

My daughter is in her Grade 11 year in a small town in British Columbia. She has been playing competitive ball for the last 5 years and would like to pursue college ball in the U.S. In our small town we aren't sure if there will be enough girls to carry an 18u travel team. The girls don't get the exposure the bigger centers get. My question is does this have great bearing on college recruiting? We keep stats on my daughter who is a pitcher. We are in the process of compiling a resume and video. I would appreciate any advice.

Subject: Small-town Players

Basically most recruiting decisions college coaches make are based on (grades and work ethic aside) a player's performance when the coach is watching. This may be through a skills video. But more often that's a starting place and coaches prefer to recruit a player based on seeing her in person. Since Div. I and Div. III coaches cannot have players try out for them or work out with their teams, most coaches will prefer to see a player with her travel ball team. It's not just whether you have a small travel ball club, but even what tournaments they attend. It's not fair, but it just is the way it is.

If an athlete is unlikely to be able to attend many tournaments where college coaches will be scouting, I usually encourage her to send her skills tape to a lot of Div. II and NAIA programs because these coaches are allowed to have players try out on campus (under certain conditions for D-II.) This makes them more likely to pursue a player whose tape they really like even though they know they won't be able to see her at any tournaments.

Realistically, statistics only matter in a school media guide. Stats may look impressive on the page, but in softball they are very subjective and relative to the caliber of competition. So not a lot of recruiting is done based on statistics alone. Hope this helps.

Subject: Scholarship Funding Amounts?

I'm new to the recruiting process. What percentage of the cost of college is covered under a typical softball scholarship? 100%, 50%, 25%, etc.?

Subject: Scholarship Funding Amounts?

This is an excellent question, but one that's impossible to answer--at least I can't give one general answer to it. A true "softball" scholarship--e.g., factoring in only athletic-based aid--could be any amount of money. A top Div. I program might offer a player a full ride scholarship that covers books/tuition/room/board. (These aren't very common, by the way, despite what you may hear at the ball park!)

Far more common are "partial" scholarships, and they will vary from player to player and school to school--even year to year. Two schools might offer tuition--at a state school, this might be \$3800 and represent 30% of the cost of attendance. At a private school, this might be \$17,000 and represent 60% of the cost. Because D-I's are limited to 12 full rides (total, not annually)--and most D-I's don't have the full 12--and D-II's are limited to around 7 total, realistically, almost all players receiving only softball-based aid are getting partial scholarships.

What's important to keep in mind, however, is that there are many other sources of funding. There is a lot more academic money available than softball money, and there's also need-base and ethnicity-based money as well as other grants and loans. So investigate all options when your athlete is looking into college funding. Hope this helps!

Subject: Statistics for a Pitcher?

What pitching statistics will college coaches be expecting to see? What will they likely ask for in an informational profile? Should statistics be broken out for high school and travel ball, or should they be combined? Should we present statistics for only the current year (or most current year), or should they include all four years of high school? Do you have a good example we might follow?

Subject: Statistics for a Pitcher?

College coaches will look for basic pitching stats such as innings pitched, walks, strikeouts, hits/extra base hits, earned runs and ERA. They may also be interested in the teams she's pitched against in summer ball. Stats should be recent...don't go back to freshman year in HS...doesn't mean anything...and definitely separate high school and travel ball

I have a sample resume and letter of introduction in my book, but always keep in mind, coaches recruit players based on their performance when the coaches see them, in person or on video. Other things like grades, attitudes, experience, etc. also factor in. Stats look nice in a college's media guide, but don't mean much in the final accounting when it comes to recruiting. Hope this helps!

Subject: Specific Skills for a College Catcher?

My daughter's best friend would like to pursue a college softball scholarship. What specific softball skills do college coaches look for in a catcher who is seeking an athletic scholarship? In addition to their defensive skills, what are coaches looking for with regards to batting average and base running? This girl is a sophomore and wants to know what specific skills she needs to become proficient in.

Subject: Specific Skills for a College Catcher?

The tough part about your question is that all coaches have "ideals" about what they want in a catcher or any position player. But what each coach will settle for and what each coach gives highest priority to will differ from coach to coach.

The things coaches tend to look for are: 1) top grades; 2) good size (being a 5'1" catcher is hard at the college level); 3) quick feet behind the plate; 4) a strong arm with a quick release!!!! (usually they should be able to make the throw to

2nd base certainly in under 3 seconds from hand to glove. That's where the quick release comes in because a player can have a strong arm, but take 5 seconds from the time the ball hits the glove until the throw leaves her hand. She won't throw many runners out.) 5) Excellent blocking skills, particularly on low throws and drop ball pitches; 6) The ability to relate well to and communicate with pitchers; 7) PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, a strong knowledge of the game and excellent leadership skills. (Being able to guide the team and understand strategy and situations will often make an average athlete into an outstanding catcher. And a big strong catcher who doesn't know the game and is tentative and quiet behind the plate won't inspire confidence in her team.)

As for offensive skills, you can't generalize about averages because it really depends on the caliber of competition a player faces. Coaches do want to see that the player has the most competitive travel ball experience possible, and usually a coach looks for a catcher who is a power hitter. Coaches look to see if a batter has proper hitting mechanics, good discipline at the plate and the ability to hit the ball hard against really good pitching. Catchers aren't usually the fastest runners on the team, so coaches don't worry as much about speed, but baserunning "smarts" always help.

My advice to your friend is to develop her skills to the best of her potential, and then when it's time to look for a college team, look for a coach who feels she can really contribute. Don't worry about whether or not it's the best team in the country. Tell her to work to become the best player she can, and someone will think she's a good prospect!

Subject: Home Schooled Student Athletes

[See Note Below.] My daughter who was home schooled, received a full-ride athletic scholarship to [a Division I university.] And yes it's discriminatory, however as Cathi indicated you have to fill out forms and a board of the college reviews it. The Athletic Director at the university was very helpful for us. My son also played on [a full football scholarship at a Div. I college]. He first went to a small college, then transferred. The Div. I college was great with him as well. Guess the Lord blessed us. But it is a lot of work and well worth it. My wife has all the needed info and would be happy to answer any questions.

Subject: Home Schooled Student Athletes and Eligibility

Note: This post is in response to a post on home schooling from late 1999. (See original post at the bottom of the page.) It might be helpful to families in similar a situation.

Subject: How to Get College Exposure?

My daughter is a junior in High School. She has been pitching for 8 years, taking private lessons for the last four. Currently she is stuck behind an All-State pitcher and is getting very little game time during her high school season. This has been very discouraging for her as well as me. She has played summer travel ball for the last 3 yrs and will be again this year. Besides summer tournaments, talking with the college coaches where she wants to go to school, and making a video, is there anything else we can do to get exposure? How important are overall high school stats for pitchers? Her pitching instructor (A D-1 college coach) has indicated she is D-II/III or NAIA level pitcher. How late do colleges "recruit" seniors? Perhaps she is better trying to be a walk-on as a college scholarships may not be needed? Unfortunately, do to her high school experience, she may decide not to play in college.

Subject: How to Get College Exposure?

Well, the first thing you and your daughter should do is read my book! The reason is that it will open her eyes to the world of recruiting, and it should hopefully help motivate her to keep going as well as provide the tools you/she need to find a college and team that are a great match for her.

The second thing you need to do is understand that while high school softball is important for continuing skill development, extra work-out and playing time, and socialization, most college coaches these days look first and foremost at a player's travel ball experience. High school ball varies too much from region to region, even county to county, in terms of consistency of competition, coaching, etc. Your daughter can view HS ball as her time to get ready

for summer ball while contributing whatever she's asked to her team and school.

HS stats are minimally important, because unless a college coach knows the level of HS competition, they really don't say much about the player. A pitcher with a 1.9 ERA who's in a really tough HS league with lots of top travel ball hitters might be good Div. I prospect, while a pitcher with 0.02 ERA who's playing in an essentially "slow pitch" type of league might turn out to be someone who just throws a 54 mph fastball and nothing else.

It's very important to remember that when it comes to playing in college, the athlete's motivation has to be very strong, and things like sitting the bench can't deter her from doing it. She may well sit in college, at least as a freshman, so she has to want to be there for the love of the game. As for her college search, you can follow the guidelines in my book for contacting coaches, sending out tapes, making follow up schools, etc. But the most helpful information may be on how to find her best "target zone" colleges.

If she has her heart set on going to specific schools only, she may have to give up college ball--if she wants to go to a big D-I school, for example, and she's a good D-III or NAIA prospect, then she probably won't be playing ball there. But there are so many schools looking for good pitching, that she has lots of choices. The key is marketing her skills to the right schools for her!

She *can* try out as a walk-on at a big program, but since 80% of ALL college teams are Div. II, Div. III or NAIA, if she's going to help that kind of team, she has lots more schools to choose from. If you are fortunate enough to be able to help with the cost of her education, which opens even more doors, as Div. III schools--and many smaller D-I, D-II or NAIA schools--don't have athletic scholarships. This factor combined with solid pitching skills may make her a terrific prospect for a lot of coaches!!!!

If she loves the game and really wants to play, don't be deterred by an unfortunate HS situation. Send out 40 or 50 packets with a letter (see my book), resume (see my book) and video (ditto!!!) and then start following up in the fall with phone calls. Smaller programs are often still looking over the winter and into the spring of the player's senior year! Hope this helps. Best of luck!

Subject: Committing Without A Letter of Intent?

If you are being recruited by a Div. I school without an athletic scholarship is there a formal signing process? Without a letter of intent, how do you know you are more than a walk on?

Subject: Committing Without A Letter of Intent?

Basically you have only the coach's word on this. There ARE no guarantees, and you do not sign any kind of letter--or at least anything you sign would be meaningless. However, if the coach has treated you like a "recruited" walk-on as opposed to just any walk-on--e.g., if you've gone for an official visit, if the coach has assured you have a spot on the team (assuming you "do the work" when you get there), you're probably okay. It would be a good idea to do an informal "poll" of current team members and ask them whether the coach is as good as his or her word. Ask them how many walk-on's make the team, how many were recruited ahead of time versus those who just showed up. Answering these kinds of questions can help provide some sense of security. HOWEVER, be aware that it's really up to you--e.g., how hard you work and so on. And there is definitely an element of risk. But every coach needs good, committed walk-on's! Just be sure you're going to the college because that's where you want to be. Don't go there just because it's Div. I or has a "name."

Hope this helps.

College Recruiters, Scouts or Coaches?



What do they look like?
Can you talk to them?
What do you say.
Notice the stopwatch on her hand.
Are you working on your speed?

Cathi Aradi writes...

1) First learn the NCAA rules about "contacts." Parents/players shouldn't be talking to coaches/scouts at tournaments unless the coach/scout has specifically asked the parent/player to find him/her. (And that's only when it's allowed--e.g., after July 1 following the junior year. Players can't talk to the coaches even then at tournaments until their team has been eliminated.)

2) See point 1! Parents should leave coaches alone for a number of reasons unless asked ahead of time to talk to them. 1) It may jeopardize their player's eligibility; 2) It may use up one of only three off-campus contacts per school; 3) It may turn the coach off, particularly if they feel the parent is too aggressive. Some coaches don't like to talk to kids/parents at tournaments, preferring to wait until later. My rule of thumb is this. Leave them alone unless asked to find them. If they want to get a hold of you, they will, trust me!

3) If a coach has asked to talk to the player and her parents at a tournament (assuming she'll be or is a senior), I suggest keeping it short and simple. Unless it's a home visit or you're going out for dinner or something, tell the coach you're glad to meet him/her, that you'd appreciate getting info on the school, and that you'd like to have time to think about his/her interest--whether the coach is asking the kid to visit, to consider his/her school, etc. Don't feel intimidated or rushed into anything.

4) Cathi Aradi's book has three pages of questions kids can ask coaches at different times. Keep the book handy when talking to coaches. Make the most of any contacts, but don't feel you have to answer every question at once.

As for "why" the rules? The purpose is to help provide coaches with a level playing ground when it comes to recruiting and to help prevent them from overwhelming kids. Personally, I think too many coaches "push" the edge of the envelope--e.g., skirt right along the edge of what is legal and what isn't. Some coaches try to sell a kid on their schools and get them to practically commit based on one fifteen minute conversation. Parents should never be afraid to step in--putting their egos and wallets aside for the time--and tell coaches the player will definitely look into that school and would like to hear more but perhaps by phone or on a visit when they can really concentrate on what's going on.

Foreword by Cathi Aradi

Making Sure You Have the Competitive Edge!

Youth softball has become incredibly popular with more kids taking up the game every year. Awareness of college softball has grown as well, and increasing numbers of high school players are dreaming of wearing a college team's uniform.

Although the West is still a "hotbed" of softball, fast-pitch is developing quickly all over the country, and many states are beginning to produce top quality players. Recruiting is more competitive than it's ever been before. Just being from California is no longer a guarantee you'll be offered a scholarship. Playing on a well-known travel team helps, but again, it's not a guarantee college coaches will notice or recruit you.

The best way to ensure you're that lucky "1 out of every 15" who gets to put on a new college jersey your freshman year is to take charge of your own college search. Make sure coaches come looking for you at the tournaments your travel team attends. Make sure you stand out in crowd of other talented players.

Learn about recruiting, how it works, key aspects you need to know, and then just as you prepare to win on the ball field, you can prepare to win in the recruiting race as well. Be pro-active and take charge. From your freshman year on, be sure you're taking the right classes and getting the very best grades you can. Make sure you and your parents understand the many NCAA recruiting and contact rules.

Take the PSAT as a sophomore or junior so you have some idea what to expect when it's time for the real thing. Be sure you take your SAT and ACT at least once in the winter or spring of your junior year. That's when you'll also want to begin sending out your letters, resumes and videos.

Work hard at your game. Put extra time in at the batting cages and in the field. Make sure you're running regularly and, if possible, follow a good conditioning program. (This will put you miles ahead of other ball players).

When you're a senior, take your SAT or ACT again. Be sure to follow up those tapes and letters with phone calls. Keep in mind that 90% of all colleges that play softball are located east of Colorado, and that over 75% of all college teams compete under Div. II, Div. III or NAIA rules. Remember scholarship money is limited, but academic money is very plentiful. Take advantage of those good grades!

Understand that recruiting is not now, and never will be, FAIR! Much like life, recruiting is what you make of it. Don't take your recruitment for granted, no matter how many letters you get, and don't be afraid to let college coaches know you're the player they should be pursuing for their teams!

There are many resources available to you if you really want to succeed, including my book, *Preparing to Play Softball at the Collegiate Level*. Just as you make sure you touch every base when you hit a home run, cover every base when it comes to recruiting, and you'll be one of the lucky few who realizes her dream of having the college softball experience!

Updated by Cathi on 01/26/04

About the author:

Cathi Aradi, is a recruiting consultant, writer and president of Collegiate Softball Connection, a recruiting consulting service. She is an active member of the National Fast-pitch Coaches Association, and works with athletes and colleges all over the U.S. She also conducts clinics on the college search process for softball players. Cathi has been involved with softball for many years, and she is considered the top resource on collegiate recruiting by both players and college coaches.

Cathi's website is [Collegiate Softball Connection](http://www.collegiatesoftballconnection.com)

Some very good recruiting tips from the Austin Storm website:

<http://www.austinstorm.org/RecruitingChecklist.html>

How to Win at Recruiting

With each passing recruiting year, we've all see proof of softball's growth at the youth level. More high school and travel teams are becoming competitive, and there's a definite increase in the number of student-athletes who are dreaming of playing softball in college. Softball talent, just like softball teams--college and youth ball - - tends to fall into a pyramid shape; and don't expect this to change. Just as there will always be more average players than there will be Lisa Fernandez or Michelle Smith types, there will always be fewer college teams at the top and a lot more in the middle and at the bottom of this pyramid.

The overall level of college team competitiveness is rising every year. This is due to better coaching, better equipment and technology, better experience and a bigger and better pool of talent to draw from. Players who five or six years ago might have walked onto many Div. I teams and been guaranteed a spot are now scrambling to get themselves recruited. Proactive marketing, contacting coaches, sending out videos, and never stopping does produce results. But because of the pyramid structure of college softball, there will be far fewer spots open at top schools and far more players wanting to go to those schools. And the bigger the talent pool, the more coaches can pick and choose which kids they want to recruit.

It has become more important than ever to identify your athlete's "target zone" early in the recruiting process. In the "old" days, players could write five or ten schools, and if those schools weren't interested, they could then write another five or ten, gradually working their way down the list until they found schools where they would be "impact" players. (The key to being recruited as a player is to find the school where you will make a difference.) Now, many families take way too long to do this. Where players think they can play and would like to play may not be where they are most likely to make a strong contribution to the program and therefore be a "hot prospect." Not to discourage players by telling them they are unlikely to be recruited by Fresno State or Washington or Oklahoma or UCLA. It's fine to contact your "dream" schools. Just do it early in your college search, and at the same time also write twenty or thirty other schools covering a broad spectrum from small and mid-level Div. I schools to good Div. III programs. It's a lot easier to hear that a Top 20 Div. I team doesn't want to recruit you, if at the same time, you are hearing that a smaller D-I or good D-II/NAIA school has a spot just for you. Yet, many kids (or their parents) would rather risk giving up softball than approach schools that aren't "big name" programs.

As you're sitting around waiting for a coach to call you, think of these numbers. Every fall, roughly 3,500 to 4,000 young women will enter four-year colleges as new recruits destined for the softball team. Of this total number, 80% will go to play for Div. II, Div. III and NAIA college teams, and 90% will be going to schools that are located east of the state of Colorado! Of this total number, only about 50% will get any softball-based aid. (Players may get lots of other kinds of financial aid, but a lot of students will not be signing a National Letter of Intent.) And, finally, of the above total number only about 75 to 100 athletes will go to Top 20 Div. I teams. (This means three or four kids a year will go to an Arizona or a Michigan.)

Too many parents waste time insisting that their player is in the elite "blue chip" pool of recruits, when in reality she's in the much, much larger pool of "very good" athletes. Because of this, these families take too long to realize that their player may have to accept a Div. II scholarship or an NAIA talent award or a Div. III financial aid package if she really wants to play softball in college. Never recommend that a player go to a college she hates just to play softball. This is always a big mistake. But athletes should expand their horizons and consider colleges they might not have heard about or colleges that are farther away from home than they originally wanted. College coaches do want the best talent they can get. But almost all coaches will take a long hard look at the player who most wants to play and who really wants to be part of their program. So the more open an athlete is and the more willing she is to take a look at lots of different types of colleges and college teams, the greater are her chances of being some coach's "dream" recruit. The recruiting game is like the game of musical chairs. There are way too many players competing for too few seats. If the music starts to slow down, you had better grab the first open chair. If you don't you may find you are out of the game all together!

Softball "Windows of Opportunity"

A family's approach to the college search process is based on a lot of research and their athlete's commitment to finding the team and school that are right for her. Some families are very "gung ho," wanting to write colleges when the player is a freshman or sophomore. Others are more laid back or perhaps take a lot for granted--e.g., they are pretty sure their athlete will just be "discovered," recruited and signed. In any case, they often wait until the start or middle of her senior year before panicking and rushing to send out letters and tapes. Is there a right answer to the question of when to start the college search? Technically, there isn't. You can get lots of different input depending on whom you talk to.

While it's true that a few college programs may spot young players they want to watch, there's a catch there. They want to identify the next phenom. If they can find that player when she's young and begin to interest her in their school, they will. But most athletes will not be the "greatest athlete of their generation." And, we all know of players who as sophomores are solid (but nothing special), but who become outstanding recruits by their senior year. It's key for parents to remember that NCAA college coaches are supposed to follow NCAA recruiting guidelines. They are not supposed to write players for recruiting purposes until the start of the junior year, and they cannot talk to players in person about recruiting until July 1 following the junior year! Yes, they can send out a basic questionnaire to sophomores. But that's it. They're not supposed to be telling freshmen and sophomores that they want to recruit them! Another key factor is that not all college coaches are created equal when it comes to recruiting. Some have great support staffs who can be churning out letters on a weekly basis to players. Others lumber along like dinosaurs struggling to respond to letters and tapes that came in six months ago! Some schools have identified their rising senior prospects by early summer, called them and set up visits by early September and have the players signed by November. But, other colleges may aim to sign one player in the fall and the rest in the spring; and some sign none in the fall, waiting until after the early signing to get serious. And, even those coaches who want to be done by in the fall often find themselves in March, April, May or June still looking for recruits.

END OF THE SOPHOMORE YEAR: If your athlete is playing on an 18U team that goes to Colorado, ASA Nationals or other major tournaments, you have the option of sending out post-cards to coaches with her name/home address; team name; jersey number; grad year; position; and which tournament she'll be at.

START OF THE JUNIOR YEAR: If your player is on an 18U team or Gold team that goes to a major fall tournament that coaches attend, you again have the option of sending out the letters. Look at starting your skills video tape.

MIDDLE OF THE JUNIOR YEAR: Have her schedule the SAT and ACT and begin to identify schools she'd like to write to, encouraging her to focus on a broad range of college programs. She can also begin setting her resume up on the computer and working on a letter of introduction. Again, look at starting your skills video tape.

END OF THE JUNIOR YEAR: Late March to late May is possibly the best "recruiting window of opportunity." Encourage players to make their skills video; the tape made at this time should work for them all the way through the recruiting process. This is also when they should begin putting together packets to send to coaches. They can include the video or wait until it's requested, and they can let coaches know where they'll be playing over the summer. As soon as school ends, they should start the NCAA Clearinghouse process, having the school send the IEC a 6th semester transcript.

START OF THE SENIOR YEAR: Families need to ensure their player is on track, and they keep the process moving forward. If they haven't heard back from the schools initially contacted, follow-up phone calls may be in order--particularly if they have sent a video. Seniors need to remember that no coach will give them any realistic feedback on their chances of making a college team without either having seen the tape or seen the player compete in person. Seniors need to sort colleges into three categories: The "Thanks, but no thanks" category; the "We don't know yet" category; and the "Yes, we're definitely interested and would like to talk to you, bring you in for a visit, have you apply to the school, etc." category.

As the senior year progresses, the player's goal should be to constantly empty the "No" category, to move the schools in the "Maybe" category into either the "No" or "Yes" category, and to find out which schools in the "Yes" category may be a good match for her. If families take advantage of this "window of opportunity," they are more likely to be on track throughout the process, while at the same time avoiding having to write schools three or four times to get a response. The college search tends to be more like a marathon than a sprint for most kids. The key to winning is stamina, persistence and the ability to pace yourself. Starting at the most optimum time

makes this a lot easier. Start too early and you may have repeat and repeat and repeat your efforts. Start too late, and you may miss the boat completely at a lot of schools!

Work from the Correct Recruiting "Premise!"

When it comes to recruiting, many families (and players) often make the mistake of assuming certain things are true. Then when their college search gets stalled or derailed, they are confused and upset. People assume or take for granted that because they think something should be a certain way, it will be. Unfortunately, that's all too often not the case. You might be lucky and find this out early enough to change your perspective. Or you might not accept it until it's too late. One of our goals as a select fastpitch organization is to help families approach the college search from the perspective that is most likely to get them the results they want. And that means accepting right from the beginning that this process is very likely to be unfair.

While it may be true that their athlete is very talented, has terrific competitive experience, is a good student and a wonderful human being, none of those things guarantees recruitment. The above qualities may factor into her recruitment, but unfortunately, they don't guarantee that things will work out fairly or logically. The simple truth is that there are some important factors in the recruiting equation that parents can control... and some that they can't. If you understand this and work your tail off to stay on top of the things you can control, then you may be able to lessen the effect of those things you can't control. For example, your athlete can control her grades (at least to the extent that she gets the best grades she's capable of getting.) The athlete can determine how hard she works to make the most of her athletic ability--she can choose to go hang out with her friends rather than putting in extra time at the batting cages or on the mound. She can choose to play the toughest competitive schedule, and she can decide how much she hustles. To some extent, the athlete may be able to control how she performs under pressure; parents or coaches may be able to help by encouraging the practice and drills that build confidence and help her succeed. But if she's only successful when no one is watching or when she's playing against weaker competition, and can't produce when it counts--e.g., when coaches are there to watch her--fair or not, she may have trouble convincing those coaches that she can play for them. Families can control how well they market their player, and they can focus on the types of programs where she's most likely to be successful because these are the teams that are most likely to recruit her.

But parents can moan and groan until they're blue in the face and it's not going to change the mind of a coach who just doesn't see what they see when looking at this athlete. Parents can't control whether or not college coaches make recruiting mistakes. But they can help their college-bound player avoid making college search mistakes if they work from the correct premise. Assume that this process may not be fair, that it may be confusing and that you're not going to change the process. All you can change is your approach to it. But changing your attitude may give your athlete an edge that players who are more experienced or even more talented may lack!

A Winning Attitude is Key to Being Recruited!

Many athletes and their parents will use the player's performance in game situations as an indicator of her recruitability. If she goes three for four and makes a great diving play on a ball, they're convinced all college coaches will want to recruit her. If she goes "0" for the day, and boots a couple of balls, they're sure no coach will even look at her. The player's (and her parents') attitude towards the game is often tied to her performance. If she's hitting, fielding or pitching really well, she smiles, she's happy and her parents are ecstatic. If she has an off day, reactions can range from simply "getting down on herself" to "rage and tantrums". We have also seen where a player is doing very well in a game, but other team members are struggling and not "showing" as well as they would like. In this situation, parents (and occasionally the player herself) may get upset, talk about finding another team... complain about the other players or coaches... and create a very unhealthy environment. If you asked the parents why they were acting this way, they would tell you that the team's performance was hurting their player's chances for success. Performance is important... no one would argue that a player who can't hit or field will probably not make it at the college level. And it's equally true that college coaches look for a 'clutch performance' when scouting a prospect, but just as there are many different levels of collegiate competition and many different types of college coaches, there are many levels of success among players and their attitudes.

The "blue-chip" player, the girl in the top 1% of all players, will probably--even on a bad day--look better than a very average player does on a good day. But college coaches know that even top athletes have "off" days now and then. When scouting, how much attention a coach pays to any given athlete may also depend a lot on whether or not the coach has a context for that player. In other words, when a coach just randomly stops at a field for five minutes to watch a team he or she doesn't know, if your player is having a really bad game, the coach will probably move on and not pay her any more attention. However, if the coach had gotten a letter from her, seen her video and liked it, and knew your player was very interested in his or her college, that coach might still take the time to watch more than one inning. He or she might even come back for another game to see if this poor performance was the result of an 'off day.' It's also good to remember that college coaches don't just look at mechanics or skill level when recruiting athletes. Although these things are very important, most coaches also look closely at a player's attitude, work ethic, sportsmanship, and other qualities that can't be measured by 'statistics.' It's completely normal for young adults to get discouraged, depressed or frustrated when they don't perform up to someone's expectations--whether it be their own, their parents' or their coaches'.

Learning to deal with frustration is as much a part of being a successful competitor as is learning to hit a change-up or throw a curve. Softball is a team sport and failure is just sometimes part of the game. When recruiting, many college coaches will specifically try to look at an athlete's performance in challenging situations; and they will definitely be interested in how she copes with adversity.

When the umpire has an inconsistent strike zone, or the team isn't playing up to its potential, coaches want to know how the individual reacts. Does she throw her bat and helmet, stomp around angrily, sit and sulk on the bench, or in other ways fail to adjust to the situation? Or does she rise to the occasion, try to keep her teammate spirits up, try to perform to her best? Loving the game and being competitive enough to hustle even when it's ninety degrees and you're losing will tell a college coach a lot about how you will cope with the demands of college softball. In between innings if you drag out to your position at shortstop and just lob balls to the first baseman, laughing when you miss a ball, this may give a college coach the impression you lack intensity or that you can't stay focused. If you sit in the dugout and sulk when the coach pulls you for a pinch hitter or when the coach asks you to bunt, you pop up because you really want to hit away, this may tell a college coach you're not a team player and you're only interested in your own performance. Remember, you never know when a college coach or a scout is watching you.

From the time you show up at a tournament or game, you should be performing--in every sense of the word--to the best of your abilities. Whether you're just hitting soft-toss during pre-game warm-ups or making a leaping catch to save the game, coaches may be watching. When you're carrying gear after the game or sitting on the bench keeping stats for your coach, someone may be watching. And a decision to recruit or not recruit you could be based on how you handle yourself in these situations.

Finally, parents should keep in mind that the same cautions apply to you. While coaches are scouting your player, they may also be scouting you. Although it seems farfetched, there have been situations where coaches have decided not to recruit a good athlete simply because they watched her parents "act out" in the stands. The coaches saw the parents and realized the athlete would probably not fit in with their team--or at least her parents wouldn't! It may be difficult for some parents to understand, but the reality is when your athlete joins that college team, you have to say good-bye. Even if you've coached her for ten years, you will not have any input once she's in college. Where she plays, when she plays, what pitches she throws, whether she hits--these are all decisions the college coach will make without your help. And whether or not you like what the coach is doing probably won't matter a bit.

As a family, it's a good idea to talk about the emotional aspects of softball. Look at how you all handle pressure and try to gain some perspective. The more positive you can be during the tough games, the more likely you are to leave a positive impression on a coach!

Summer Scouting

June and July for the select ball player is on the road, often at major exposure tournaments like the Colorado Fireworks. This can be an exhilarating (and scary) time for players, particularly those players who will start their senior year in the fall. We'd like to mention or remind you of some of these things that might help keep you focused, motivated and on the right track during your college search.

Observations from/about College Coaches

They all go to big tournaments with lists. If you're not on that list, it will be very hard to get noticed unless you're hitting the ball to the fence on a regular basis--when the coaches are watching. (Sorry, but that's just the way it is.) Coaches prefer that parents not approach or talk to them unless they (the coaches) have specifically requested a contact. (Parents: read the NCAA rule book and memorize the rules on contact. I see parents breaking these rules right and left--sometimes coaches too--but you may not realize your daughter's eligibility to play could be jeopardized by what you consider a harmless conversation about a college's football team.)

Coaches really need to know accurate grade point averages - NCAA "core and cumulative" - and SAT or ACT scores. Almost all coaches are looking for strong, consistent hitters. Most will tell you they'd rather work to develop a player's fielding skills than have to teach her how to hit. Unless you're incredibly lucky or amazingly athletic, becoming a good hitter is a matter of learning the right mechanics (teaching your muscles what to do), developing a keen eye and teaching yourself very good discipline at the plate...and then practicing to get even better! Again, it may not be fair, but clutch hitting is what gets coaches' attention (if you're not a pitcher)!

When coaches are scouting, it's virtually impossible to differentiate between the travel ball player who sees college softball as a beginning--e.g., when she gets there, she'll work even harder, become an even better player, etc.--and the travel ball player who sees college ball as an ending--e.g., she's been doing this summer ball stuff to get a college scholarship or to get into college. As far as she's concerned, once she's there, she gets to level out and have a good time. She doesn't have to get any better. But if you ask coaches, they will all tell you it's the first type of player they really want. There's way too many kids out there for coaches to see all of you. Don't assume because they're watching your game that they're there to see you. You need to show them you're motivated enough to put some effort into your college search!

By the end of a big exposure tournament, coaches are bleary-eyed and exhausted. And we can guarantee you they won't remember everyone they've seen. If you want them to remember you, follow up after the tournaments with a call or email to find out if they even saw you play...and to ask where they are with recruiting.

Observations for/about Players

You may just be having a bad day. But a rotten attitude turns coaches off faster than anything else. If you don't want to be playing softball, don't play. (Mom and Dad will get over it - eventually.) Occasional frustration is natural and understandable. But coaches want to see if you deal with adversity in a positive or negative way. If you're struggling, don't throw your bat or helmet. Go ask for help and figure out what to do to fix the problem. If you're not performing well at the moment, focus externally and support your teammates instead of sulking and feeling sorry for yourself.

Weight training and running will be part of your college experience if you play softball. Don't wait until you get to college to figure this out. Start now. You'll feel better, look better, perform better and have more stamina. And you'll be way ahead of the other freshmen starting school with you!

College coaches really prefer to hear from you. They're not recruiting your mom or your dad or your pitching coach. No matter how scary it is, if you're not motivated enough to call coaches, talk to them, etc., they may figure you're really not that interested in playing college softball for them.

Don't ever just take the SAT or ACT once--unless you score a 1600 or 36 out of the gate. No matter how unpleasant it is, work to raise your score. There's a lot more academic money than athletic money available and coaches look for kids with high test scores.

Coaches will be recruiting your daughter or your player. If she doesn't want it, you can't make it appear that she does. Ask her on a regular basis if she's sure that playing in college is what she's wants. If it is, help her learn how to reach that goal. If it's not, let her do something she enjoys--and you can go get a life!

Learn the recruiting rules. Don't approach coaches to chat about their teams or about your player. Don't jeopardize your player's eligibility and then use the excuse, 'Well, I didn't know.'

Find out what your daughter or player's grades really are. Learn the difference between an NCAA "core GPA", a "semester GPA" and a "cumulative GPA". This is critical information for many college coaches.

Always support your player in a positive way. No matter how frustrating it is for you, it's ten times more frustrating for her. Do you think she wants to be striking out???? Don't you think she'd prefer to be hitting line drives to the fence or throwing an incredible rise ball??? Your negative comments simply make things worse. They never make things better. If your player is struggling, be helpful, not hurtful. Help her determine whether her problems are mechanical or mental. If they're mechanical, then get some expert advice on how to fix them; and remember, it takes a lot of repetitions to change muscle memory. If she's in a mental slump, help her discover ways to build self-confidence, to develop discipline. Ten years from now, chances are the quality of your relationship with your daughter will be greatly improved if you leave your ego out of it and help your player learn the positive lessons softball has to teach... not the negative ones.

The College Checklist

Whether you are a freshman or a senior, start thinking about college NOW. The preparation you do today, will make your decision-making process easier when you being recruited. Research, research, research... discover what your interests are, and what schools will best help you achieve your goals for the future. Below are some standard questions and checklists which will help you prepare for your recruiting opportunities:

Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse

1. Why do I need to register and be certified?? If you intend to participate in Division I or II athletics as a freshman in college, you must be registered with and be certified as eligible by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. Please note that initial-eligibility certification pertains only to whether you meet the NCAA requirements for participation in Division I athletics and has no bearing on your admission to a particular Division I or II institution.

2. When should I register?? You should register with the clearinghouse whenever you decide you would like to participate in athletics as a college freshman. It's generally best to register anytime before participation. If you register late you may face delays that will prevent you from practicing and competing.

3. How do I register?? You will need to obtain registration materials from your high-school guidance counselor. These materials include a student-release form and a red brochure titled, "Making Sure You Are Eligible to Participate in College Sports". Fill out the student-release form completely and mail the top (white) copy of the form to the clearinghouse along with \$18 fee. Give the pink and yellow copies of the student-release form to your high school to forward your transcript to the clearinghouse. The high school will keep the pink copy of the form for its files.

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4. What if I have attended more than one high school?? If you have attended multiple high schools since ninth grade, each school will need to send your official transcripts to the clearinghouse. You should give the pink and yellow copies of the student-release form to the counselor at the high school from which you will be graduating. You also will need to make copies of this form and send them to the counselors at the other schools that you have attended.

5. Are standardized test scores required?? Qualifying test scores are required for participation at both Division I & II colleges. If you intend to participate at either a Division I or II school, the test scores may be taken from your official high-school transcript.

General Tips on Recruiting

1. Develop a resume just as you would if you were looking for a job. Although it's never too late, the ideal time to start putting this together is the summer before your junior year. Begin with the basics - name, address, telephone number, social security number and school. Then list your athletic and scholastic accomplishments, plus any honors you've received to date. Add any extracurricular activities in which you've participated at this point.

2. Do your research! Check the libraries for college reference books, then look to see which schools offer a softball program and curriculum that best suits your needs.

3. Write interest letters to coaches To find the coaches names, call the schools' athletic departments. If you can't get a particular name, address the coach by title:

Head Softball Coach
Athletic Department
University Name
City Name,
State and Zip

Note in each letter that you're interested in the schools athletic and academic program and fill the coach in on your background. Enclose your resume and, if possible, a letter of recommendation from a high school or summer team coach. You'll most likely get a letter back with a questionnaire to fill out.

4. Make a skills tape. Have a parent or coach videotape you in action. It does not have to be fancy, or done by a professional

Videotaping Your Softball Skills

College Coaches, just like the Storm, want to see everything you are capable of doing. If you play several positions, show footage of different skills. Please keep in mind, though that these schools receive hundreds of videotapes each season and simply don't have time to view excess and unneeded footage. We have some suggestions as to what they will want to see and how many repetitions.

In what order you perform the skills makes no difference. The entire tape should only be approximately 10 to 12 minutes.

HITTING: View from beyond opposite batters box, facing the batter as they are in their stance, close view. Full swings in this segment, if you have full swings from both right and left side, please show both.

BUNTING: Sac Bunts: View from pitching circle, left and right sides, if applicable. Bunt for Hit: View from pitching circle, left and right sides, if applicable. Drag Bunt: View from pitching circle, left and right sides, if applicable. Slap Bunt: View from beyond opposite batters box, left and right side, if applicable.

THROWING AND CATCHING: (All Positions) Fielding ground balls, some directly at you, some to your right and left. Balls to your right and left should be approximately 15 to 20 feet each way. Show the throw to a base. (Note) Always have an angle to show the throw. DO NOT follow the ball with the camera.

CATCHERS: (Full Equipment) Block ball in dirt, some right at you, some to show lateral movement. Field bunts and throw to all bases. Pickoff, show throws to 1st and 3rd base. Steals, show throw to 2nd and 3rd base, with the fielder on the move to cover the base.

CORNERS: Field bunts, throw to 1st, 2nd and 3rd bases. At 1st base, taking throws in the dirt. At 3rd base, taking throws from the outfield, making a tag.

MIDDLE INFELDERS: Double play, pivot and footwork. Double play, feeds. Shortstop, covering second on a steal. Second, covering first on a bunt. Fly balls overhead, Texas Leaguer.

OUTFIELDERS: Fielding fly balls, some directly at you, some to your right, left and forward. Show the throw to 2B, 3B and home.

PITCHERS: Two Angles: From behind pitcher. From side of the catcher. Show 5 to 6 of each pitch you have from each angle. Fielding grounders and bunts, throwing to all bases.

BASE RUNNING: Home to first, after you swing. Home to home, after you swing.

SLIDING: Stealing 2nd or 3rd: Show different slides you are capable of doing. Figure four, slide by and head first.

The Ending Sophomore, Beginning Junior Year Checklist:

1. Involve your parents in your decision-making process.
2. Decide how close you want to be to your home and parents.
3. Decide on what level (Division I, II, III) you can compete in college.
4. Ask your high school and summer league coaches for an evaluation of your ability.
5. Write introductory letters to college softball coaches.
6. Personalize each letter. (College coaches are turned off by form letters)
7. Return all softball questionnaires sent by college coaches as soon as possible. Delay indicates lack of interest.
8. Make a softball skills videotape. (Many college coaches will request a videotape of your softball skills)
9. Send high school and summer softball schedules to college coaches.
10. Be conscious of your high school grades, the level of courses you take, the correct number of courses and your rank in your class.
11. Schedule yourself to take the SAT's. Have your PSAT scores available.
12. Decide on which colleges have your areas of study or interest.
13. Be aware of "college nights" in your area.
14. Start your initial-eligibility clearinghouse.

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The Ending Junior, Beginning Senior Year Checklist:

1. Follow up on your clearinghouse eligibility.

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2. Take or retake your SAT's.
3. Start collecting college applications. Be aware of deadlines. Complete and mail applications early.
4. Let coaches know you have applied. Follow up your contact with college coaches with a phone call or note.
5. Narrow your choice of colleges to five or six. Decide on what colleges to visit (remember - you may only make five official (paid) visits)
6. Do not make a decision unless you have visited the campus and met the coach.

NCAA Division I & Division II Rules to Follow:

- 1.Coaches may not contact prospective recruits before Sept. 1st of the players' junior year in high school. You can call or write but they cannot call you or send any promotional softball material about their program.
- 2.Coaches may not contact you by phone or in person before July 1st after your junior year.
- 3.Coaches may not talk to senior players at tournaments until their team has been eliminated. They can talk to a family member, which will constitute an official contact.
- 4.Coaches may only call prospective student athletes once a week. (You may call them as often as you like.)
- 5.Coaches can only have 3 in person official contacts with a player. (Parents talking to a coach is a contact.)
- 6.A player can only have 5 official visits. (You must be in your senior year to take an official visit.)
- 7.Early signing period is during the 2nd & 3rd week of November of your senior year; the next signing period is in April of your senior year.

Please remember it's great to receive letters from schools and coaches, but most schools send out hundreds of letters to athletes. This is only the first step in the recruiting process. So don't slow down on marketing yourself because you are receiving some letters, no matter how interested the coach seems. They are sending the same letter out to a lot of other athletes. There are some athletes that will receive 50 to 100+ letters from different colleges, and some schools do heavy recruiting knowing they don't have enough scholarship money to go around. Most programs will only be recruiting 3 to 4 players a year.

REMEMBER, MARKETING YOURSELF AND FOLLOW-UP IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS A COACH RECRUITING YOU.

What To Ask During Recruitment Visits

Playing Softball for your College:

- 1.What positions will I play on your team?? It's not always obvious. Most coaches want to be flexible so that you are not disappointed.
- 2.Describe the other players competing at the same position. If there is a former high-school all-American at that position, you may want to take that into consideration. This will give you clues as to what year you might be a starter.
- 3.Can I "redshirt" my first year?? Find out how common it is to redshirt and how that will affect graduation. Does the school redshirt you if you are injured?

4.What are the physical requirements each year?? Philosophies of strength and conditioning vary by institution. You may be required to maintain a certain weight.

5.How would you best describe your coaching style?? Every coach has a particular style that involves different motivational techniques and discipline. You need to know if a coach's teaching style does not match your learning style.

6.What is the game plan? For team sports, find out what kind of offense and defense is employed.

7.When does the head coach's contract end?? Don't make any assumptions about how long a coach will be at a school. If the coach is losing and the contract ends in two years, you may have a new coach.

8.Describe the preferred, invited and uninvited walk-on situation. How many make it, compete and earn a scholarship?? Different teams treat walk-ons differently.

Academics:

1.How good is the department in my major?? Smaller colleges can have very highly rated departments. A team's reputation is only one variable to consider.

2.What percentage of players on scholarship graduate in 4 years?? This will tell you about the quality of their commitment to academics. The team's grade-point average also is a good indicator of the coach's commitment to academics.

3.Describe the typical class sizes. At larger schools, classes are likely to be larger and taught by teaching assistants. Average class size is important to the amount of attention you receive.

4.Describe in detail your academic support program. For example: Studyhall requirements, tutor availability, staff, class load, faculty cooperation. This is imperative for marginal students. Find a college that will take the 3.000 students and help them get a 3.500 GPA.

5.Describe the typical day for a student-athlete. This will give you a good indication of how much time is spend in class, practice, studying and traveling. It also will give you a good indication of what coaches expect.

6.What are the residence halls like?? Make sure you would feel comfortable in study areas, community bathrooms and laundry facilities. Number of students in a room and coed dorms are other variable to consider.

7.Will I be required to live on campus for all five years?? If the answer is yes, ask whether there are exceptions. Apartment living may be better than dorm living.

Financial Aid:

1.How much financial aid is available for summer school?? There is no guarantee. Get a firm commitment. You may need to lighten your normal load and go to summer school in order to graduate in four years. You can take graduate courses and maintain your eligibility.

2.What are the details of financial aid at your institution?? What does my scholarship cover?? What can I receive in addition to the Scholarship and how do I get more aid??

3.How long does my scholarship last?? Most people think a "full ride" is good for four years. Financial aid is available on a one-year renewable basis.

4.If I'm injured, what happens to my financial aid?? A grant-in-aid is not guaranteed past a one-year period even for injuries. It is important to know if a school has a commitment to assist student-athletes for more than a year after they have been injured.

5.What are my opportunities for employment while I'm a student?? Find out if you can be employed in-season,

out-of-season or during vacation periods: NCAA rules prohibit you from earning more than the value of a full scholarship during the academic year.

In Conclusion...

I wish there was some way I could 'plug in' to parents' and players' heads and transfer my recruiting experience and knowledge directly to that part of the brain that is responsible for decision-making. Because no matter how much I talk, many kids and parents still don't quite 'get it.' (And that's understandable given all the misinformation that floats around the ball park!) It is true that there are a few travel teams who garner so much attention from college coaches that their top players really don't have to do much other than play well to get recruiting offers. But these kids represent a small percentage of the total number of prospects. The vast majority of kids will probably have to work very hard if they want to find a college and a team. They and their parents simply cannot make the mistake of assuming they/their daughter will be 'snapped' up by college coaches just because she was All-League in high school or because she hit two home runs last summer. They simply cannot sit back and wait for the phone to ring.

When talking to coaches about the college search process and recruiting, it has become increasingly evident to me that many college coaches are simply overwhelmed. They not only cannot see--let alone discover--every player out there, but many of them can't even get through the mail on their desk! A coach who has 40 videos sitting in front of her may look at fifteen of them and find three players she likes enough to call, go see play, etc. Because of that, she may discover, recruit and sign a player long before she ever gets to tape number 37--which happens to be your daughter's tape. Several coaches told me recently that while the video is critical in getting them to consider a player (particularly if they can't see her in person), follow-up was equally important. One coach told me she had sent out about 50 requests for videos to kids. Of the 30 or 35 players who actually sent tapes back only four or five called to follow-up--e.g., to ask if she'd gotten the tape and to find out where she stood with recruiting. This coach said she paid a lot more attention to those four or five kids because of their phone calls. It definitely made a difference in her response to a player if she knew that player was so interested that she would make the effort to call--no matter how scary that phone call might be!

Most coaches don't mind if parents call unless they sense the parent is doing a 'hard sell.' But almost all coaches like it when a player is brave or confident enough to call them herself. It tells them a lot about her desire to play in college.

I will acknowledge that some college coaches are too busy (or too disorganized) to return a phone call or, in lieu of a call, to send a letter saying, 'Thanks, but we're not interested.' So as disappointing as it may be, I usually tell an athlete if she calls a coach three times over a couple of weeks and the coach just ignores those calls, it's time to move on to other schools. It's also good to keep in mind that at many of the 'big name' programs, they have secretarial staffs to write nice letters and handle PR for them. I often hear that a player has gotten a gracious letter from the #1 or #2 or #4 school in the nation saying, 'You're a fine athlete. If you decide you want to attend our college, please let us know. We'd be happy to have you try out as a walk-on....etc., etc.' Yet I may also know the odds on this player making the team--forget starting--at that school are very slim. I know the coach at that school. He or she has signed four seniors from nationally-known travel teams, and he or she will have twenty kids trying out as walk-ons, including several more players from those same big name travel teams. He or she will keep two or three, and the rest of the kids will get cut. It's a business and that's how it's run. But the school's or team's image is important too, and no one wants to deliberately hurt a player's feelings. Hence the nice letters welcoming you to walk on.

I've had many parents complain about some coach who wrote their daughter a blunt 'rejection' letter. And they'll often contrast that with the 'big name' school coach who sent a lovely letter saying she was welcome to try out as a walk-on. Personally, if I was the parent of a player who passionately loved the game and who really wanted to play, I would much rather a coach tell me the kid wouldn't make the team than lead me on. Sure, she's welcome to try out. But at that point, she's already chosen the college, enrolled, moved to the school and turned down other colleges where she could really play.

Now if playing softball isn't that important, but attending Oklahoma State or Michigan State or Arizona State is, that's fine. Go to school there, have a great college life, and if you have to give up softball, so be it. But if your athlete really, really wants to play, you can find a team that will give her that opportunity even if it's not the #1

team in the nation. Believe me, there are lots of coaches at smaller programs out there who love to hear from a player who's interested in their school.

Five or ten years ago, if you just wrote a coach and maybe sent a video, you had a good chance that the coach would try to see you play or would respond to your letter at the very least. That's not enough any more. There's just too many kids in the mix. You almost have to do something that makes you stand out. Obviously, it's terrific if you can do this on the field during a game when a coach is watching you. But it also helps if you are willing to try to sell your love of softball to a coach. That's where the phone calls come in. Coaches know how hard this is for you, but they are more likely to take you seriously because it is so hard. So is college softball!

Make that effort, take the chance. You may get turned down; that's part of life. But you may also steal a spot on a team away from another player who couldn't or wouldn't make pick up the phone!