

# **So You're Interested in Playing College Soccer**

**By**  
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## **Initial Thoughts**

There are many misconceptions surrounding intercollegiate sports of any kind though particularly those misconceptions permeate the world of the non-revenue producing sports like soccer. Many of these stem from how recruiting is done for the two sports that pay the bills at large Division I schools: football and men's basketball. Coaches at these schools have multimillion dollar operations, more assistant coaches than they can count, and enough graduate assistants to fill a classroom. They spend a lot of money finding the best prospects who will add the most value to their programs. However, if you look nation-wide at all colleges and all potential recruits for all sports, only about 2% of them have been actively recruited by college coaches and these are nearly 100% in football, men's basketball, and, to a very small degree, women's basketball. If you are an athlete in another sport and you want to continue playing your sport in college, you cannot sit around and wait for college coaches to come knocking on your door. It will not happen. If you want to play intercollegiate soccer, you are going to have to work at it. You will need to send e-mails and letters to coaches, make phone calls and then write follow-up e-mails and letters and make follow-up phone calls. You will have to market yourself to the coaches to get yourself on their radar or they will not look at you.

One of the greatest misconceptions about how players are recruited for intercollegiate soccer is that coaches watch high school games to identify and recruit potential players. Because of their limited recruiting budgets, college soccer coaches will seldom watch a high school match unless it's local to them; they're doing a favor for a high school coach they know; or they have already identified a player via other means. (Among other things, because of the general mediocre to low quality of the high school game, a player who shows well in a high school match and only plays at that level quite likely would not show well in an intercollegiate environment.) College soccer coaches do nearly 100% of their identification of prospects at high level camps and club tournaments where they can maximize their recruiting dollar by observing a large number of quality soccer players at one time and one location.

## **The Financial Aid Game**

One of the greatest misconceptions about intercollegiate athletes is that all of them have athletic scholarships. Of course, that's nowhere near the truth. Outside of Division 1A pointy football and DI men's and women's basketball, most athletes get very little athletic financial aid. Athletic scholarships are permitted only in DI and DII schools (but not all DI and DII schools will offer athletic scholarships). For only a very few sports, the so-called "head count", revenue producing sports like foot ball and men's and women's basketball, athletes in DI schools almost always have full or near full scholarships; few fractional scholarships are given out. For the other, non-revenue producing sports from archery to gymnastics to water polo to women's soccer, a coach

will so-called FTE (or full time equivalent) scholarships. The coach can split these up fractionally any way he or she wants. Only a few athletes on a team will likely have a full ride; most will have a fractional scholarship like a 1/4 or 1/3 ride. Freshmen get the smallest piece of the pie and only the best freshmen “blue chip” athletes get full rides.

Division I women’s soccer programs are allowed 12.9 FTE scholarships if they are fully funded. Only the largest of women’s soccer programs are fully funded (e.g., Penn State, UNC, Santa Clara, University of Portland, Florida State, etc.). The last estimate I saw of fully funded Division I programs was 25% nationwide. Other DI schools (the Ivy League, Villanova, etc.) offer only academic and need-based financial aid, not athletic aid. Even in a program as prestigious as UNC’s, only a minority of players will have full rides. It is likely that some of the starters have little or no athletic financial aid.

Division II women’s soccer program’s are allowed 9.9 FTE scholarships if they are fully funded. The Pennsylvania state schools like Kutztown, ESU, and Bloomsburg are all Division II.

Division III women’s soccer programs (like Moravian, Muhlenberg, DeSales, and Cedar Crest) do not offer any athletic aid. Financial aid at these schools is entirely academic and/or need based. Regardless of what you may have heard, Division III schools are not permitted to offer such aid. Recent reforms by the NCAA, including periodic audits of Division III schools, have reduced or eliminated a coach’s ability to influence the financial aid process.

Given what I've said about your real probability of getting much (or any) athletic financial aid, the importance of your high school academic record – GPA, class rank, and SAT/ACT scores – becomes paramount. These are far more important in determining the amount of financial aid you might receive for college. Beyond that, if you get hurt and can’t play or, for whatever reason, decide you don’t want to play, if you have athletic financial aid, you will lose it. If you have academic and/or need-based aid, you will keep it. The obvious lesson to be learned here is not to depend on an athletic scholarship to pay your way through college.

College coaches go out of their way to recruit players who are not only well qualified athletically in their sport but also well qualified academically for college level work. There are several reasons for this:

1. Playing an intercollegiate sport at the same time you’re also attending college is not easy. Nonetheless, it is both very possible (tens of thousands of college students do it every year) and very rewarding. While many thousands of young men and women have done it successfully, for coaches, athletes who are well qualified academically will succeed in both areas more often. Coaches want athletes who are well qualified academically because they have a reasonable assurance that those athletes will not develop academic problems that could result in ineligibility or, worse, dropping out of college altogether.
2. Athletes who are well qualified academically will have a better chance of getting academically based financial aid. In a DI or DII school, this will allow a coach to leverage his or her athletic scholarship budget much further. In a DIII situation, it means the coach has fewer things to worry about in terms of his or her players being able to pay their tuition and expenses.

A couple of years ago, out of curiosity, I checked out the academic requirements for women soccer players interested in attending the University of North Carolina. As I'm sure everyone knows, this is among the best women's soccer programs in the US. At that time, Anson Dorrance required a minimum combined SAT score of 1400 for freshmen applying to the program. (It is higher now with the inclusion of the writing component in the SAT.) This ensures that these players are eligible for large quantities of academic financial aid and allows Dorrance to spread his 12.9 FTE athletic scholarships more widely among his older players who have proven their worth to the program on the field. The only freshmen who are eligible for full rides at UNC are those who are on one of the US national teams.

While Anson Dorrance does not have much trouble finding players who are both athletically and academically qualified for his program, the requirements for the program should serve to emphasize the vital importance of your academic record in the financial aid game. Keep in mind that while soccer is your passion, there is an almost vanishingly small probability that you will make your living from soccer. When your rent or mortgage is due after you graduate, it will be your high school and college academic records that will pay the bills, not what you did on the soccer field.

## **Summary**

- If you want to play intercollegiate soccer, you must market yourself to coaches or they will not know you exist and will not evaluate you for their programs.
- College coaches do nearly all (99%+) of their evaluation and selection of potential candidates for their programs at high level club tournaments and soccer camps.
- College coaches seldom watch high school soccer matches to evaluate players.
- Athletic financial aid is limited to Division I and II schools. Division I women's college soccer programs have a maximum of 12.9 FTE athletic scholarships available; Division II women's programs have 9.9.
- Only fully funded programs have the maximum number of FTE athletic scholarships available; most have less; some have none.
- Your academic record is far more important than your athletic ability in determining the amount of financial aid you might receive.
- College soccer coaches actively seek out players who are both athletically well qualified for their programs and academically well qualified for the academic rigor of their institutions.
- It is highly unlikely that you will earn your living from soccer after you graduate from college.

## **Marketing Yourself**

The essence of the process to become a college soccer player is a successful marketing campaign. You **MUST** get yourself on the radar of the coaches at the schools in which you are interested or they will not know you exist. Even if you attend a dozen college showcase tournaments in a year, if you have not told the college coaches who are at the tournaments that you are interested in their schools, they will not know who you are and will not know to watch you play.

## **Be Brutally Honest About Your Skills but Don't Sell Yourself Short**

There is a tendency on the part of many female athletes to sell themselves short where the subtext is "I can't do this or that well and therefore I can't really expect to play at a Division I [or II or III] level." Simply because you can't do X or Y as good as some other player does not mean there isn't a place for you on an intercollegiate soccer team. Currently in the US there are 325 Division I women's programs. If you assume that most of them will carry an average minimum roster of 25 players (some will carry more, some less), then the total number of players is 8,125. Even if all of the U18 ODP programs (by definition this also includes all regional and national ODP pools) in any single year in all 50 states put all of their players into Division I schools and did so for 4 years, that would take up around 4,000 of the 8,125 slots. When you consider that some of these players will go to DII or DIII schools and some won't play at all, then there might just be room for you at that level even though you didn't make ODP. If you carry the calculation out across the far more numerous DII and DIII programs (656 total DII & DIII schools according to the NCAA website), then the number of slots available (assuming a roster size of 25) is nearly 25,000.

The point of this is that you do not have to be an ODP player to play college soccer. Coaches are looking for players with solid skills and, if yours are (they are or you wouldn't be on the teams you're on), you can play college soccer. Of the last two teams that I coached through graduation from high school, 30 of the players went on to play intercollegiate soccer (all of them could have, 6 chose not to). Only 3 of those players were on ODP teams. (They were, in fact, the only 3 who tried out; there were quite a few others who, had they tried out, would have had a decent shot at making it.) The rest had solid soccer skills, worked hard on the field and off, and had good academic records.

## **Competitive Level: Divisions I, II, and III**

There is general acceptance of the idea that among those looking at college soccer (or any college sport) from the outside, that Division I programs offer the highest competitive level, Division II programs a medium competitive level and Division III programs the lowest competitive level. A corollary to this is that Division I programs get all the best athletes, the "blue chippers" if you will, while those in Division II and III programs are correspondingly less skilled. Unfortunately, this is quite a misconception. For example, the top 25 women's soccer programs in Division III would be competitive at any level they chose to play and would consistently beat the bottom 40-50% of Division I teams. For example, Messiah College in Grantham, PA (south central PA) is perennially among the "elite 8" and "final 4" for the NCAA Division III soccer championships for both men and women. Likewise, the women's soccer program Trenton State College (in West Windsor, NJ near where we played in JAGS the last two summers) is a Division III program that often competes against Messiah in the NCAA playoffs and championships.

Players choose the colleges they attend for all sorts of reasons and you will find state, regional and national ODP pool players at every level. These players do not always go to Division I schools. In fact, enough of them attend Division II and III schools to make those schools competitive across levels. The point is that you do not need to attend a Division I school to find

very high level soccer. The decision on competitive level should be among the last decisions you make in the process of selecting a college or colleges you want to attend after deciding what size, where, what academic program, etc.

## **Getting on the Radar**

Getting yourself on a coach's radar is fairly easy but keeping yourself there requires some persistence on your part. You can't be content with one or two e-mails. You have to keep it up over time. It used to be that college coaches did not begin recruiting prospects more than two years in advance of their actual attendance at the coaches' schools; you could start the "on the radar" process in your junior year. More and more now coaches begin identifying potential recruits up to three years (or more) out from their actual attendance dates. Thus you need to begin thinking seriously about the recruiting process in your sophomore year in high school.

The first thing you need to do is to spend some time deciding on the colleges you might want to attend. The process to use to accomplish that is not the subject of this guide. Your high school guidance counselor has excellent resources to help you sort out the decisions you will have to make. The bottom line, though, is that you will need to narrow down the range of eventual possible choices to no more than 5 or 6 by your senior year. If you can narrow the field down to that number or fewer prior to your senior year, so much the better. In making the final selection of the college you want to attend, the one where you will accept the offer of admission and play soccer, consider the following: Is this a school where you'd want to spend four years if, on the first day of pre-season soccer practice, you sustained a serious injury that would prevent you from ever playing soccer again?

Once you have an idea of the colleges you think you might want to attend, go to the websites of each college's women's soccer program to find out the coach's e-mail address. Send each coach an e-mail telling him/her who you are, what high school you attend, the club team you play for, and that you're interested in attending his/her college and playing soccer there when you graduate from high school. It is important that this e-mail be from you to the coach, NOT from your parents to the coach. Many colleges now also have an online interest form that you can fill out that is automatically forwarded to the coach of the sport in which you are interested. If both methods of contacting the coach are available, use both.

Prior to July 1 in the summer before your senior year, the number of times and the means by which a college coach can contact you directly are strictly limited by NCAA rules. There are limits during your senior year too but these are quite a bit more open than for previous years in high school. Generally, prior to your senior year, they can contact you directly ONLY after you have contacted them. For example, they can reply to an e-mail you send but the number of unsolicited contacts they make, i.e., without you first having contacted them, is limited. Prior to your senior year, a college coach CANNOT respond to a phone call from you and cannot contact you directly by phone.

The NCAA website lays out the rules of contact very specifically. Note that the rules differ by division (i.e., I, II, or III) and sport. Check out the NCAA page on recruiting at <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=271>. Also check out the coaches recruiting guides at

<http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=506>. These lay out the specifics of the rules of contact by division and by sport. It is important that you are familiar with them. While most coaches are very straight forward and honest about adhering to the rules, violations of them, even if you did not know a coach was violating them, can have long term implications for your eligibility to play and to receive athletic financial aid.

## **How to Get a Coach to Watch YOU at a Tournament**

1. Your first step is the one outlined above, namely select the colleges in which you are interested. Contact the coaches and express your interest in their programs. Begin doing this your sophomore year. Continue doing it until you've been accepted at the college(s) of your choice and know that you will be playing soccer there.
2. Once you know your club team's tournament schedule, e-mail the schedule to the coaches. If you know this when you're making your first contact with them, include your tournament schedule in the initial e-mail.
3. Two weeks before each tournament, e-mail the coach to remind him/her that you are playing in Tournament X at Location Y on Dates Z. Tell him your club team's name, the division in which you will be playing, your team's colors, and your shirt number. If you know the specifics of your schedule, i.e., dates, times, locations, field numbers, and opponents, include that as well.
4. As soon as you know the specifics of your schedule - the match dates, times, locations, field numbers, and opponents (typically the week prior to the tournament), e-mail that information to the coach along with you club team's name, colors, and your shirt #.
5. Do not expect that you will be swamped by coaches after a tournament or a tournament match. Indeed, prior to your senior year, they cannot contact you at all in that situation. College coaches, if they have questions, might contact me, as your coach, directly, sometimes right after a match or, more typically, in the days and weeks following a tournament. This has happened many times and I am always more than pleased to talk to any college coach about my players.
6. After a tournament, send a follow-up e-mail to the coach thanking him/her for coming to watch you at Tournament X.
7. This whole process is rather like the lather-rinse-repeat of washing your hair. You need to do it for every tournament you attend, even if the tournament is not specifically billed as a college showcase.

## **A Note about Tournaments, College Showcase or Otherwise**

The fact that a tournament your club team is attending does not specifically bill itself as a "college showcase" does not remove it from being a valuable venue at which a college coach can watch you play. Tournaments, like the Kirkwood Girls Premier (or Frederick Cup) over Columbus Day weekend, does not bill itself as a showcase. Nonetheless, for the older teams that attend (U17/U18/U19), it does attract quite a few coaches. Columbus Day weekend is a big tournament weekend with major club tournaments taking place nation-wide, some billed as showcase and some not. In our area, for example, coaches will attend one of the Washington DC area tournaments (e.g., WAGS) one day and make a stop at Kirkwood the next. The point here is that, as mentioned above, you must market

yourself to the coaches of the schools in which you are interested and you must let them know when and where you're playing whether it's an "official" showcase or not. They might not come if you do tell them but they certainly will NOT come if you don't.

Showcase tournaments, as well as tournaments that do not bill themselves as such yet attract college coaches, will often put a list on their websites of the various college coaches and schools who register for their tournaments. For some tournaments, this could be 150 to 200 or more coaches and colleges. It is worthwhile to note that typically, somewhere between 20% and 30% of the college coaches who attend showcase tournament do not register. Thus, even though a college and coach in which you are interested does not appear on the list of those who have registered for it does not mean that he or she will not attend.

### **How to Play at a Tournament When You Know a Coach is Watching YOU**

There is a tendency in any tryout situation (which is what a showcase tournament is, writ large) to be very nervous, to try to be everywhere on the field all the time, and to try to do everything with super high intensity. The problem is that this approach almost always leads to making quite a few more mistakes than you'd make in the course of a regular match. There's nothing you can do about being nervous. Accept the fact that you WILL be nervous but learn to deal with it. Positive self-talk and visualization are ways to do that. Don't get down on yourself for what you can't do as well as some other player or players. Keep a positive image in your mind of the things you know you do well. Visualize scenarios in your mind's eye that emphasize the things you know you do well. Even if you make mistakes in a match, and you will – every player does – do not give up on yourself. Once it's done, it's done and you can't go back. Accept the frustration but let it go. The next time the situation presents itself, resolve to do it better.

Here is a laundry list of important things to think about, do, or not do in a showcase situation:

- You will be nervous. Calm your nerves by positive self-talk and visualization. If you need a quiet moment by yourself in warmup to get your head together, tell your coach.
- Play your game. Do not try to be everywhere at once on the field. You will make mistakes that you would not ordinarily make and you will wear yourself out for other matches later in the day.
- Stay positive with your teammates all the time. This does not mean that you shouldn't be talking to your teammates about where they should be or who they should be marking; that's part of the game too and college coaches will notice players who communicate more than one who never opens her mouth. The one thing you DO NOT want to do is to get into on the field arguments with your teammates.
- DO NOT jaw with the referees. Given some of the experiences we've had lately with the yellow-shirts, that can be a tall order. Nonetheless, keep your wits about

you regardless of the call. How you react to adversity, like a bad officiating call, is also something which will attract college coaches attention.

- If your team is down, if you've just been scored on or you're losing, DO NOT get down on yourself or your teammates. Stay positive and be encouraging. More important in a college coach's eyes than your reaction to the adversity created by bad officiating will be your reaction to the adversity created by a game that's not going your way.

## **The Use of Videos in Recruiting**

A video can be useful in getting a coach's attention. In particular, if this is the only way a coach will be able to see you, it might be something to consider if you're serious about the school. For example, you live on the east coast, the school in which you're interested is on the west coast, and the coach of the school can't get to any of the showcase tournaments your team is attending.

I've talked to a number of college coaches about videos; some like them and will use them in their recruiting. Others seem to just file them in the circular file. If you are considering having a video done, you need to find out if the coach to whom you are sending it will even look at it.

Some considerations for any video:

- Make sure the player is clearly identified at the start of the video with shirt color and number. This might be the only instance in which a close-up of the player is warranted (see below) so that the coach will know at whom he is looking on the video.
- No close-ups. From a coaching standpoint, for example, a close-up of Susie Soccerplayer executing a perfect Cruyff turn so that I can see the ear to ear smile after having pulled it off, tells me very little about the player. A coach needs to be able to see the context in which an event occurred to understand why a player did what she did. The video should show as much of the field and the players on it as possible so that the coach can get a good feel for what's actually happening in the match.
- No highlight films. As much as you might want to show off the best things your daughter does, a coach will not make a recruiting decision based on a video that only shows a player in her best light. A coach must be able to evaluate a player, warts and all. Since highlight videos by definition contain no warts, a coach will find it useless in making his decision.
- Make sure the video is taken from enough height to be able to show as much of the field and the players on it as possible. Videos taken from the touchline at field level are worse than useless.
- There are services that exist to create player videos. These can be quite costly so make sure the situation warrants it before making the decision to go ahead. Also make sure that the service guarantees that it will abide by the bulleted items noted above.

## **Your Goal – Pre-season Camp and Showing Up Fit**

If you are serious about it, your goal in all of this, sending e-mails to coaches, getting yourself on their radar, making sure they watch you at showcase tournaments, following up, sending them your profile, etc., must be to be invited to attend pre-season camp prior to the beginning of your freshman year in college. The actual date is set by the NCAA but it generally begins sometime around mid-August. This is really the time when you actually tryout for the team. It is your final hurdle. Once you have been invited to pre-season camp, the coach will give you a summer fitness program. No one will be around to twist your arm to do it. You can ignore it and lay about eating bon-bons while watching MTV or go to the beach but ignoring it and showing up not fit for pre-season is a near guarantee that you will not make the team and that all the effort (yours and your parents) and money (your parents) that has gone into getting you this far, will have gone down the drain. While showing up fit is not, in itself, a guarantee that you'll make the team, it removes your greatest single obstacle in accomplishing that.

## **Some Timelines**

In addition to the steps identified above geared toward getting yourself on a college coach's radar, there are a number of other practical and required steps you will need to do if you want to play college soccer.

### **Sophomore (10th grade) Timeline**

- Begin serious consideration of the schools you'd like to attend. Be realistic with yourself about your athletic and academic abilities. If you can narrow the field down to 5 or 6 by the end of your sophomore year, you're in good shape.
- Take the PSATs. While not the same as the SAT or ACT tests, the PSAT will give you an idea of what to expect when you do take them.
- When you go to a tournament, any tournament, make sure you e-mail the coaches of the schools in which you're interested.
- Double your emphasis on school work. DO NOT let anything slide.

### **Junior (11th Grade) Timeline**

- Create a "college profile" that documents who you are, the teams you've played for, the tournaments you've played in, what your academic interests are, and what your academic record is. Keep this profile up to date with additions to your academic and soccer record.
- If you will be considering a DI or DII school, you should register with the NCAA Eligibility Center at the beginning of your junior year. Go to the Eligibility Center's website at <https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/> for specific information on registering and the documents you will need to supply for the Center to determine your eligibility. See also the NCAA FAQ on determining eligibility and the NCAA Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete on the NCAA's eligibility page at <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=273>.

**DO NOT LET THIS SLIDE. You cannot make an “official” visit to a campus unless you have been cleared by the Eligibility Center.**

- Contact the coaches of the schools in which you’re interested. If you’ve established a “college profile”, send it to them. Make absolutely sure that you let them know your team’s tournament schedule, if you know it.
- Two weeks and then again a week prior to every tournament, e-mail the coach about the tournament: your team’s name, shirt color, your shirt #, match schedule, field locations.
- Follow-up with another e-mail to the coach after every tournament.
- Take the SATs/ACTs during the spring of your junior year. While you might not do as well then as you will later, you can use the results as benchmarks of your academic progress. Consider taking an SAT prep course if you think your results are not where you want them to be.
- Re-double your emphasis on your schoolwork. DO NOT let anything slide.

**Senior (12th grade) Timeline**

- If you have not already registered with the NCAA Eligibility Center and you are considering a DI or DII school, you must do so in the summer between your junior and senior years. See the NCAA Eligibility Center website at <https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/> for specific information. **DO NOT LET THIS SLIDE. You cannot make an “official” visit to a campus unless you have been cleared by the Eligibility Center.**
- In the summer between your junior and senior years, make arrangements to visit the schools that are on your list. Call or e-mail the coach to let him know when you will be there. Try to arrange to visit her/him (or an assistant coach if the head coach isn’t in or can’t talk with you). If you can do this, talk with the coach based on the questions outlined below under “Things to DO When You Visit a School and Talk to the Coach”.
- Find out if any of the coaches of the schools on your list run soccer camps in the summer for older players. Most of the bigger DI and DII schools run summer camps; some of the DIII school do as well. For the one or two school(s) in which you are most interested, sign up for the soccer camp. Try to arrange to have lunch with the coach sometime during the week. (If the coach of the school in which you are most interested does not run his or her own camp, it’s likely that he/she will be a staff coach at other soccer camps. Find out which ones and sign-up for that camp.) Since the cost to attend such camps is typically \$500 to \$600 and up plus travel expenses, you should consider doing this only for the top one or two schools on your list or if it is the only way that the coach of the school(s) in which you are most interested would be able to see you play.
- Continue the routine of e-mailing coaches regarding your interest, your profile, and your tournament schedule.
- You can take the SATs/ACTs as many times as you want. Most students take them once late in their junior year and again late in the Fall of their senior year. If the results you’re getting do not square with what you want or what you need for the schools on your list, seriously consider an SAT prep course, especially if

you're "on the bubble" of good results for a particular school regarding academic financial aid. (Many schools have a "threshold" SAT/ACT score that qualifies a student for academic financial aid. Sometimes the threshold is combined with your GPA and/or your class rank. If your SAT/ACT scores are close but not quite there, a prep course could get you over the hump.) If you are considering a DI or DII school, make sure that you are also sending your test results to the NCAA Eligibility Center <https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/>.

- Begin completing and sending the applications to the schools on your list as early as you can. Pay close attention to the application calendars of these schools. Make sure that you have the application and whatever other documentation the school requires submitted on time. Some programs at some schools may have additional requirements (e.g., interview, auditions, tests, portfolios, etc.) beyond those of the general application itself. Make sure you know what they are if any of them apply to you. If you are looking for an early admissions decision, you will have to pay very close attention to the requirements for it.
- Wait for the good news! Some schools having rolling admissions so you might hear about your acceptance soon after you apply. More selective schools generally don't send out their acceptances until mid-April.
- Continue to maintain contact with the coaches. E-mail them to let them know that you have submitted your application. They can help you track down the status of your application.

### **Things to Do When You Visit a School and Talk to the Coach**

1. Do your homework about the school. Know something about the programs it offers and the academic environment. Make sure the school offers the programs in which you're interested.
2. Do your homework about the soccer program. Go to the team's website and read the bios of the coaches, descriptions of the program, schedule/past results, and team roster. You can get an idea of how widely a coach recruits by looking at the hometowns of the players. However, simply because the coach recruits all or most of his players from Connecticut doesn't mean he won't be interested in you from Pennsylvania if you're interested in his school. You can also get an idea of the quality of players recruited by looking at the player bios. Not all schools have this kind of data about their athletes on their website but many do.
3. When you talk to the coach, make sure the conversation is not a one way street from the coach to you. Be prepared with some questions. Remember, as much as he is interviewing you, you are interviewing him. Coaches appreciate candidates who are trying to get as much information as possible to make the best decisions about their futures. Coaches want players who come into a situation fully informed and with their eyes wide open. They want to make sure that a player is coming to their school for the right reasons. Recruiting you costs the coach precious money from his budget; he does not want to make a mistake about recruiting you into his program.

Some things you might want to ask:

- Will the coach waive the college's application fee for you? Some coaches will do this. If you're applying to a lot of colleges, this can save your parents a fair piece of change. It doesn't hurt to ask.
- When does pre-season start? (Generally the date is set by the NCAA but you might have to show up anywhere from one to 3 or 4 days early for in processing.)
- Describe the summer conditioning program.
- What is the team's style of play?
- How many players does he/she generally carry on the roster? How many players does he/she usually try to bring into a freshman class? How many does he/she project might be in your class should you elect to go there?
- When is practice? What happens if there's an unavoidable academic conflict between practice and classes? Between a weekday game and classes? You need to get a real good idea about how strict a coach is going to be about missed practices. In almost all instances, you will be required to make up the missed event in some way. Many programs will require a player to engage in extra fitness activities either before or after the next practice she attends. In some instances when there are both men's and women's teams, especially if the coach for both is the same, if you miss a practice with your team, you can make that up by practicing with the men's team.
- What kind of activities does the team engage in off-season? Most teams, especially DI schools, will at least have required off-season conditioning activities. They might also have required indoor play that's run by team captains, not coaches.
- Describe the team's spring practice/play activities.
- Do all team members live in a specific dorm on campus?
- Do athletes get preferential course scheduling? This happens at nearly all DI and DII schools and many DIII schools. The preferential scheduling will help you schedule your classes around practices but probably not games. Assume that you WILL miss some classes for away games.
- Do team members have a required nightly "study hall"? Most DI/DII programs and some DIII programs have this kind of academic support for their athletes, particularly for freshmen. It will seem like a pain to you to always have to go to the study hall every night but it's worth it. NCAA statistics that compare colleges with such programs with those that don't show a much higher success rate for their athletes, especially freshmen.
- Do team members have access to mentoring/tutoring support for specific classes/disciplines?
- Does the coach track players' academic performance during the semester? How often do they get reports?

- How many FTE athletic scholarships does the women's soccer program have? NCAA DI schools are authorized 12.9 FTE scholarships IF they are fully funded. Not all are. And some DI school offer no athletic scholarships at all (e.g., Ivy League schools don't). The coach is free to split up these scholarships any way he/she pleases. Thus, some players might be getting a full ride tho they will be in the minority and there might not be any at all. Most players will have a fractional scholarship, e.g., ¼ ride. As a freshman, unless you're a real "blue chipper", do not expect a full ride or even close to one. As you mature in a program and prove your worth, you would likely see an increase in your athletic scholarship. That's why it's important to do well academically in high school and to get as high a score on the SATs as possible.
- If you are considering a DI or DII school, freshmen are typically at the end of the line for athletic financial aid and get the smallest piece of the pie if they get any at all. Ask the coach how you go about "earning" more scholarship money. Is getting additional athletic financial aid based on whether or not you start, the number of minutes you play, something else? What are the criteria?
- If you are considering a DI or DII school, ask what types of aid, other than athletic financial aid, might affect the amount of athletic aid you get? Some types of aid will affect the amount and some won't. If the coach does not have the answer (he should but might not), either ask him to get the answer from the school's Financial Aid Office or you get the answer from that office.

4. Be prepared to answer some questions from the coach about yourself:

- Why are you interested in this school?
- What do you think you want to major in?
- What kind of a student are you?
- How are you doing academically?
- Why do you think you want to play soccer in college? Why here?
- Positions you've played/like to play.
- Level of play of your club and high school teams.
- Systems of play you've experienced (e.g., 4-4-2 flatback 4; 3-5-2, etc.)
- Strengths/weaknesses.
- What can you bring to the women's soccer program at this school.
- What other schools are you considering?