

As players enter High School and start to make decisions about where to focus their time and energy, the possibility of playing college soccer may arise. While it is a goal of many players (and many parents of players), it is an ever-changing and complicated one, and like anything else, requires planning and a strategy to maximize the opportunities available. The following information is designed to help players and families ask themselves the necessary questions to make the decisions that are right for them.

What College Soccer Opportunities Exist?

The Opportunities to play soccer in college can really be divided into two categories. First, when the financial support from playing soccer enables a player to go to college. - mainly at the D1 level, where financial support is allowed. Secondly, where soccer is used at the margins, to aid a student-athlete gain entry to a slightly better school than would otherwise have been the case.

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D1 Soccer - The Facts

The maximum allowed scholarships per team are as follows:

Men	Women
Division I 9.9 scholarships	Division I 14 scholarships
Division II 9 scholarships	Division II 9 scholarships
NAIA 12 scholarships	NAIA 12 scholarships
NJCAA 18 scholarships	

Soccer is classified by the NSCAA as an "equivalency" sport, as opposed to a "head-count" sport. Briefly, in a "head count" sport, even \$1 of aid counts as using a full scholarship out of the maximum allowable in that sport (14), so there is a significant incentive to offer players a full, not just partial, athletic scholarship. By contrast, in an "equivalency" scholarship sport, the program is free to divide the value of the 14 full scholarships into as many fractional scholarship pieces as they wish, so e.g. only 6 players on the team may be on "full" athletic scholarship, and 14 more may be on partial scholarships whose aggregate value is equivalent to 6 full scholarships (with the parts not necessarily equally divided among players). Despite rumors and incorrect reporting to the contrary, there is no such thing as a four-year scholarship. All N.C.A.A. athletic scholarships are annual awards, are not guaranteed year to year, and need to be renewed. This is stated clearly on the NCAA website.

In addition, any scholarship can be canceled for virtually any reason at any time. Therefore, earning and receiving scholarship is far from the end of the story, but the beginning. While to some extent the hard work has paid off, it has also just begun. There are mandatory early morning weight-training sessions, regular travel and meetings, as well as practices and games throughout the whole year, not just the fall season. Indeed, the contrast in required spring commitment is one of the major differences between D1 and D3 college soccer experiences, with D1 athletes often back from Christmas break earlier than regular students to attend practices, then playing an extensive (15+) game schedule plus tournaments throughout the spring.

There is also a direct and significant impact for the student-athlete upon the overall academic experience. Sporting commitments often limit the courses students can take, study classes are usually

necessary to make up classes missed for travel commitments, and taking summer classes to regain credits lost throughout the year by student-athletes is the norm rather than the exception.

All this does not necessarily make the college experience worse, but it does make it different, and is worth considering in choosing what kind of experience a college-bound athlete wants to pursue.

D3 Soccer - The Facts

Division III Soccer is a very different product, mainly because:

- i) there is considerably less commitment required outside of the fall season, and
- ii) no scholarship money is given by D3 colleges.

In terms of the level of play, many extremely talented soccer players go to D3 schools because their focus is academics, or because they want a more "normal" college experience. Travel is generally more local, and the maximum amount of time that even the best programs can commit to athletics is strictly regulated by the NCAA. Therefore, there are many D3 schools who would be competitive with many D1 schools, although the best D1 schools are considerably better than the best D3 schools, and the level of D3 schools is extremely broad, all the way down to teams who might practice once per week, and have players who have never played before but are seeking looking for a social activity.

While decisions of financial aid are not made on the basis of athletic ability, that ability may be a contributing factor at the margins of college acceptance. In other words, if there are 10 people for one place, all with roughly similar grades and resumes, a word from the coach that a player will contribute significantly to the college through soccer can and often does make a difference. This is the case all the way up to top academic schools (who are technically Ivy League but are run much closer to D3 programs than D1) such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Brown and UPenn, although it is imperative to remember that *soccer ability will not replace the necessary grades*. The key phrase here is "at the margins", which is where soccer will help.

Where should I play - and am I good enough?

The decision of whether to aspire to D1 or D3 soccer - or not play at all - is clearly an individual one for every player, recognizing that the experience will be massively different. As identified previously, D3 soccer has a massive divergence of level, so if soccer is so important to you that it will be the basis of your choice, any kind of club player should be able to find somewhere to play.

D1, and the better level D3 schools are completely different, and are highly competitive. There are many youth soccer coaches will have experience working with players who have gone on to play in college, so there advice is worth something - although programs change and levels of play generally get better year to year. However, the best advice will come directly from coaches at the colleges you are considering. See the section on the Recruiting process for ways of finding out what they think.

So - How does that affect my youth soccer?

Based upon your long terms goals in soccer, and what you eventually want from it, you can choose a club and a program that will help you achieve those goals.

Do you honestly believe that you can play professional soccer? If so, then pick the club who will ensure that you travel all over the country playing in every major showcase, and in national academy leagues. There will be a trade off for this: both in the time and money involved in paying for extensive training and coaching, local, regional and national tournaments which usually cost around a thousand dollars a time, without considering travel and accommodation expenses. In addition, three training sessions at ninety minutes each, plus travel and couple of games on the weekend with the travel to them is going be in the region of 14-18 hours per week. Travel to academy leagues and major

tournaments will also necessitate taking days off school (typically travel days on Friday and Mondays) and parents taking days off work to accompany you - which have their own cost. All this is a lot of time to devote to anything during the academic year, so there is a trade-off. However, if you have a realistic shot at making soccer your career, it is a justified choice. In the same way, if you need soccer to pay for college, you may want to make similar choices. The academic, time and financial costs are effectively an investment that may pay off.

Are you going to college for an education - and soccer is something you want to help you at the margins? If so, your club soccer choices should reflect that. Expect a slightly less training schedule. Expect less travel and fewer tournaments. Expect to play a little closer to home, and recognize that national academy leagues are probably not an option for teams training less than three times per week, as that is where the bar has been set. Will this have an effect on your soccer choices? Possibly. Top showcase tournaments will have 250+ coaches there, so the more tournaments you are at, the more chances there are to be seen. The further you travel to tournaments, the more different colleges will be represented - east coast colleges generally attend east coast tournaments, so events like the Surf Cup (San Diego) would be worth attending if you are thinking of going to college in California. That said, - how many times do you need to be seen by a coach who likes you and wants you? If they do like you and if they do want you- they will come to you. Also, to what extent do you want to be "recruited" by a school that wasn't already on your radar? Certainly not if academics are your priority, and you will have carefully chosen your target schools by subjects offered, teaching expertise, size, geography etc. a school interested in you as a player will come and watch you play, but if you play badly once or twice, you may blow it to a greater extent than if you are at all the major tournaments, they are there and they have more chances to see you play.

Finally - is soccer an option that you may or may not take up in college? If so, think carefully about whether to follow the financially and time intensive paths laid out here. Unless you have a passion for soccer, that 14-18 hrs per week plus thousands of dollars (tens of thousands when travel, hotels and fees are taken into account) would be better spent on extra tuition and improving academic achievement. That may seem like a strange thing to find on a soccer website, but it is undoubtedly true. Intra-mural soccer will exist at your college, and at many places involves good competition and always a lot of fun. If you're not sure before you've even lived the early morning training and pre-season, then D1 definitely isn't for you, and D3 probably isn't the best option either. Focus on your academics, and save your time and money.

Other things to take into account:

- Do your club team / coaches have a record of developing players into college players? By developing, look for working with players for 3+ years, not recruiting players at U17 / U18 then claiming the credit for their ability and early development. The work is all done by U18, so ask how many U13 or U14 players they have retained and helped get to college soccer over the past 5 years.
- Is the coach someone you trust to go out of their way to make a phone call on your behalf, to complete a college questionnaire, someone with the intelligence to make an argument on your behalf to a coach on the fence about whether or not to take you?
- Does the club produce a profile book for its players? Ask to see examples.
- Does the team play in tournaments previously attended by coaches at institutions you want to attend (see "Maximizing the Showcase Experience").
- Does the club have any other links -collegiate players involved with older teams, former college coaches involved in the coaches, any particular relationships with colleges that you are interested in?
- And last but not least - are you going to enjoy your soccer? Getting the chance to play in college means nothing if you have fallen out of love with the game by the time you get there.

Recruiting Process – The Rules

The rules below are taken from <http://www.collegesportsscholarships.com/ncaa-recruiting-rules-contact-visits.htm>

High School Freshman and Sophomore year. These rules also apply until September 1 of your Junior year.

Coaches are allowed to:

- Send you athletic or sports camp brochures, NCAA Educational Information and Questionnaires. A coach can also accept phone calls from you as long as they are at your expense but remember that if you leave a message on an answering service the coach is NOT ALLOWED TO CALL YOU BACK.

Coaches are not allowed to:

- To call you on the phone. A coach cannot send you any written recruiting information.

Unofficial Visits:

- You can make unofficial visits to a college campus. It is also permissible for you to receive a maximum of three complimentary tickets to a college sporting event. You can talk with college coaches but this must be on campus.

Junior year from September 1

- College coaches are allowed to send you information about their athletic program and about their school. this can include: media guides, schedule cards, personalized letters, photocopies of newspaper clippings and official university admissions and academic publications.
- The college coach is now allowed to answer your emails and send emails to you as well.

Junior year from July 1

- A college coach is only permitted to contact you in person off the college campus only on or after July 1st when you have completed your junior year of high school. If the coach meets with you or your parents and says anything to you or them then this is considered a contact. Anything more than a very basic hello is a contact
- College coaches are permitted to make one telephone call each week to you or your parents. You can call the coach as often as you wish.

Senior Year

- You can make up to five Official - expense paid visits to college campuses. the visit to the campus cannot be longer than forty eight hours in duration. you are not allowed to have an official visit until after your first day of classes of your senior year.
- College coaches need to have an official ACT or SAT score and a copy of your official high school transcript before you can make a visit.
- Coaches can make telephone calls and send written correspondence as per the rules for your junior year.

Recruiting at Tournaments

- If you are at a tournament and the coach does not talk to you don't take it personally. The National Collegiate Athletic Association has specific recruiting rules that put limits on communication at tournaments.
- A college coach can sit down with a guardian or parent at a competition site. This is counted as one of the three in-person off-campus recruiting contacts a coach is permitted.
- College coaches cannot have any personal contact with student-athletes during tournaments. As stated above a simple hello is fine but anything more is not allowed anything more is considered a contact.

Campus Visits

As a student-athlete, you must actively pursue the colleges that you're interested in attending. Visiting these colleges should be on the top of your priority list. A campus visit allows you to get a feel for the campus and determine if you think the college will be a good fit for you.

If you're considering attending a school that participates in the NCAA, you should become familiar with the NCAA Official visit rules.

Before you visit the college, you should read as much about the college and learn as much about the coaches in your sport as you can. During your visit, you'll want to schedule an interview with the coaches. Here are some questions you may want to ask during your interview:

- What is the graduation rate of all athletes?
- Is there an academic counseling staff available to help with course selection and academic difficulties?
- Are tutors available?
- Where do athletes live, and do they live together?

Please note that these rules are likely to change, so be up to date by checking the NCAA website directly, which provides detailed information for both players and coaches.

http://www2.ncaa.org/portal/legislation_and_governance/eligibility_and_recruiting/recruiting.html

Maximizing the Showcase and Combine Experience

Top showcase events will often have over 200 coaches present, and will identify which coaches are attending. The next tier of tournament will typically identify a list of colleges who have sent representatives over recent years - the vagueness. They should identify boys coaches and girls coaches separately. If they do not, it is for the reason that there is an imbalance and they want to hide it. The lowest tier of "showcase" tournaments will identify colleges who have been invited, as opposed to those attending. Recognize that the length of the list of coaches attending should not be as important to you as which ones will be there. If there are only four coaches attending a tournament - and they are four schools you want to play at - then that is the place for you to play.

Most importantly, be aware that for a showcase to be useful, the hard work should take place before you get there. A showcase simply provides an environment where college coaches and potential recruits can be around each other, and players can put themselves on display. However, the fact that coaches are in attendance does not mean that they will be watching your game. Indeed, most showcases will have many, many games going on simultaneously, so statistically, the odds are that any given coach will not be at your game.

However, it is not a random process - coaches don't float around fields, admiring players who are strangers to them, hoping they are interested in their institutions and have the right grades and STA scores, then offering them opportunities to attend. First and foremost, coaches are watching:

- i. Potential recruits they already know about
- ii. Recruits who have the necessary GPA / SAT to get into the institution
- iii. Recruits whose resume is attractive to them

What these three things have in common is the fact that you can control them, and can get the most out of the event by following these steps:

1. Find colleges that are of interest to you. Obviously this will be a long process, so start well in advance. Narrow the list to 4-5 contenders, based on realistic grade expectation, quality of program vs. your ability, and all the other factors that go into such a major decision.
2. Contact the coach. This information is available by looking on the college website. Let them know that you are interested in attending that school. Include your GPA, SAT scores if you have them, your reasons for wanting to attend, include a soccer resume, with both a club and a High School soccer reference (often the club reference will detail soccer expertise, but the HS soccer experience is closer to the collegiate in terms of intensity and day to day involvement, and coaches will be looking at "will this person be a good part of my team," rather than just "are they a good player").
3. Find out if the coaches at the schools you are interested are attending tournaments you are playing at. Hopefully, this was part of the process of you picking your club (see above), so this is positive. Coaches are also more likely to event where there is a player (or players) interested in playing for them, so let them know in plenty of time where you will be playing, and they may make the effort for a promising prospect.
4. E-mail them your schedule, jersey #, position you will be playing at the event they are attending. E-mail makes it easy to update this information, while demonstrating an ongoing dialogue with an institution to show your commitment to them.
5. Make sure someone from your team (a parent or coach) is responsible for handing out profile books to all watching coaches at the events. Make life easy for the coaches.

If you are doing all this, and other potential recruits are doing this, you can see why coaches are primarily watching them, not looking aimlessly at all the players at these events. Their first priority will be watching and evaluating players who are pro-actively showing an interest and making themselves available to be watched. That comes from communication, more communication, and over-communication. Showing an interest and making life easy for the coaches will dramatically increase your chances of being watched, evaluated, and ultimately recruited.

Good luck!!!