

Selecting the Colleges to Pursue

An important part of the recruitment process is selecting the colleges and softball programs that are best suited for the player. This involves many factors ranging from academics to the athletic ability of the player. Finding the best fits in these and other areas will make for a more efficient and successful recruiting experience.

Getting Started

Make a list of colleges you want to attend and play softball. This list should include colleges of all classifications (Div I thru JUCO). This list should have at least 30 colleges and will be narrowed down after taking the steps discussed later. Don't limit your self to just in-state colleges. For a listing of colleges by classification you can go the NCAA.org website.

- Div I colleges (include Div I-A and Div I-AA)
- Div II colleges
- Div III colleges (academic money only...no athletic scholarship offered)
- NAIA colleges
- JUCO (junior and community colleges)

Academics

Determine the player's academic category. Past and current performance and test scores will show what institutions will be the best fit for the player. You don't want to waste time and effort pursuing colleges that the player will have difficulty, or have no chance of getting accepted.

- Research the college's minimum entrance acceptance criteria
- What is the player's intended major of study and does the college offer it
- Player's overall GPA and class rank
- Type of classes and level of courses taking in high school (advanced)
- SAT and ACT test scores

Athletic Ability

The toughest thing for a player and/or parent to do is come to terms with the player's limits regarding athletic ability. Try your best to be truthful to yourself in determining the level you can play at in college. It helps to have an experienced, unrelated third party, not associated with the player or her team, to evaluate the player and give their opinion.

- Where does the player rank among her HS team mates (ability & statistically)
- Where does the player rank among her Travel/Select team mates (ability & statistically)
- How successful is the player against opponents at her current level of play
- Is the player proficient at more than one position
- Is her primary position a "skills" position (pitcher or catcher)
- Compare findings with known players who are currently competing at different college levels and/or had once competed in college...How does she measure up
- Determine the highest level the player can "easily" compete
- Determine the level the player has the potential to compete

Roster Openings

The next step is to determine which colleges will be searching for the type and position of player you are, by the year you will be joining their college program. This is determined by researching the college websites and reviewing their current player roster. Based on what class you are presently in, compare that with the class the players on the college roster are in, and carry it forward to where you are both in the senior year...these are the positions that the college coach will be needing to replace for the upcoming season.

Example: If you are a sophomore in HS, locate and count the number of college sophomores on the roster. These are the minimum number of players the college coach will need to replace for the season you plan to enter college.

The higher the number, and the more players of the same position as you play, improves the chance of being recruited by that particular coach. This is not an exact science and provides no guarantees, but it is a good rule of thumb to use in determining the "best" opportunities.

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Narrowing the List

We now have the following factors determined to narrow our list of prospective colleges:

- Academics
How does my academic background and level of ability match that of the colleges I want to attend, and will I meet the minimum acceptance criteria (GPA and test scores)
Remove the colleges that don't apply
- Athleticism
What is my level of athletic ability and how does it compare to current team mates, opponents at my current level and players I know currently competing, or did compete, at the college level
Remove the colleges that don't apply
- Most Roster Openings
How many roster openings will the college of my choice have for the year I plan to enroll and play for and of those openings, how many are in my position
Remove the colleges that don't apply

With the list of colleges you now have, using the steps described so far, the main focus of your recruiting effort should be placed on these choices. Expand your original list by adding other colleges that compete at these levels, have comparable roster openings, and have similar academic requirements. Rank this list from top to bottom starting with the college you would most like to attend and play for.

From the list of colleges eliminated by one or more of the steps described, develop a short list (no more than 10) of ones you still dream of playing for. These will be the “longshots” you will maintain contact with to keep the “door open” in case an opportunity presents itself.

Prospective Colleges

It's time to get the word out and make yourself known to the coaches. Send emails, letters and skills videos to the colleges on your list and maintain that contact throughout the year. Keep coaches updated on team and personal schedules and accomplishments. It is also recommended to make phone calls and unofficial visits to college campuses.

Keep in mind that the majority of Div I programs, and most of the Div II programs, complete their recruitment classes 2 years in advance of their current season. This means they typically finalize their recruiting class no later than the player's junior year in high school. If you have not received promising information by this time from these schools, it is unlikely to be recruited by them. It's not a question of whether or not you have the ability to play for them, but more of question of timing. If they first see you play during your senior year it's too late since they are normally looking at junior and sophomore players at that time.

The Div III, NAIA and JUCO colleges continue to recruit well into the player's senior year, and in some cases, into the summer following the player's senior year. A lot of these programs are very well funded and have competitive teams each year. Even if most, or all of their scholarship money is spoken for (NAIA and JUCO), they can still offer an opportunity to play. Remember that Div III does not offer athletic scholarships.

In the course of all the correspondence you make with the colleges on your list you will occasionally get the news that they are not interested. This is not entirely a bad thing since now you can eliminate them and replace them with a new school to focus your efforts on. The important thing is to stay positive.