



College Soccer:

Advice from College Soccer Perrone Ford

As a coach of both college and older age group youth teams, I am often asked by parents and player how to best get seen by college coaches and how to win scholarships. I thought I might share with the list a posting I wrote for them as it might help your players.

This past weekend, I had my first official college recruiting trip. I went to the CASL (Raleigh) Shootout. For those of you who have been, you know what kind of event this is, but for those of you who have never attended such an event, I will tell you that it is something that will change your life as a soccer player.

I thought I might offer some words of advice to those of you seeking wisdom on how to make yourself more presentable to college coaches, and how to help yourself get a college scholarship.

- **Be realistic.**
You need to have very realistic impressions of how good a player you are, and what your chances are of playing in college. Those of you who are playing on TOP soccer teams generally know you are. Here I am talking about Colorado Rush, San Diego Surf, Texas Challenge, Ohio Premier, Busch SC, etc. The opportunity for you to realize your dreams of playing at a very high college level are quite good, but certainly not guaranteed. Those playing for smaller or less strong clubs really are going to have to take a hard look at where you want to play.
- **Focus on your education.**
The number of soccer players who earn a living after college in the sport is incredibly small. This means that when you graduate, you will need to have a good education. Select a school where you can do well. If you go to a high school that is in a small town and has 15 people in a class, don't assume that if you go to a large school like Ohio State or Florida state, and you have 500 people in your freshman biology class, that you will do well. If you go to school in the northeast, is moving to the desert southwest REALLY a smart thing? Don't pick your school based on soccer alone.
- **Work at your grades and test scores.**
Believe it or not, college coaches will usually look at your GPA, class rank, and SAT/ACT scores before they watch you play. The better your grades, and the better your test scores, the more attractive you are to most college coaches. This doesn't mean you need to be on the Dean's list to get into your school (usually) but it means that the college coach will have to spend less money on your scholarship which greatly increases your chances of getting to play where you'd like to play.
- **Have a complete set of fundamentals before you ask a coach to come watch you.**
If you want to play striker at a large school, you need to be able to receive, turn and shoot under pressure and at match speed. With both feet. Your shots need to be on target and strong enough to beat a good goalkeeper. College coaches are not looking for players to

sit the bench. They are looking for players who can come right out of high school and start. This is how teams get better. So when you watch UNC or Stanford, and you decide that is where you want to play, you must ask yourself honestly if you could step on that field and be better than at least 5-7 of the girls starting. If not, you need to get better, or choose another school where you will have a better chance.

- **Contact schools early.**
When you are a junior, and you begin selecting schools, send emails to the coaches at the schools you are interested in. This is especially important if the school is some distance away. Most colleges have very tight budgets and coaches must decide quite early who they are going to go see. Quite often coaches will recruit at a few specific tournaments and that will be all. They will generally go to the largest tournament in their home state, and 2-3 national tournaments like WAGS, Raleigh Shootout, Orange Classic, Dallas Cup, USA Cup, Surf Cup, etc. If you want to get seen by larger schools, you need to get yourself to these tournaments.
- **When you make your college profile, include your intended major AND the size of school you are interested in.**
If you've decided that you don't want more than 20 kids in your classes with you, don't call up UF or Portland.
- **Don't be afraid of smaller schools.**
If you are a good player, don't ignore smaller schools. Very often small schools will make very generous offers to strong players. Many players who would only get small scholarships at large schools and limited playing time, would often be able to attend school for free, or very cheaply. If you are a senior and an ODP state player or Region player, call a few small schools in your state and see what they have to offer. Quite often you'll find they will bend over backwards to have you, and the team will appreciate having you. Many smaller schools play larger schools anyway so the level of competition is often quite similar.
- **Keep your parents involved at every step.**
The most important relationship in the life of scholarship athlete is the one between your parents and the coach. When your parents and the coach have a good relationship, it usually benefits everyone. Your parents can talk to college coaches on your behalf (during the legal time periods), and can smooth the way for you to be able to play at the schools of your choice.
- **Be polite.**
If you've written a school and you ask them to come see you play and they do, be thankful. Nothing turns off a college coach faster than having a player ignore or disregard them. You don't have to fawn all over the coach, but let them know you appreciate the effort they put into coming to see you. In my own case, I spent several hundred dollars (of my own money) to go watch 5 players. I left my home at 4am, worked 18 hours on Saturday, 8 hours Sunday, and got home at 11pm. Each player I spoke with was very polite and thankful. Those players may not come to my school, but I appreciated them listening to what I had to say and acting interested. Send thank you letters if a coach comes to see you. The coach will potentially spend tens of thousands of dollars on you. Let them know that you are willing to spend 35 cents on a letter to say thanks.
- **Be happy with what you get.**
If you do your research and find out that a school is the right place for you to play then go there and enjoy it to the best of your ability. Don't go and be angry that you maybe didn't get into your first choice school. If you are a good player your teammates may resent you

feeling that way because maybe that was their first choice. If your school doesn't have a shoe contract, or only buys uniforms every other year instead of every year like your club might, don't get angry. Be thankful and remember that there are over 20,000 girls every year who never even get selected by ANY college and never get to realize their dream of playing at the next level. If you find that you don't like the coach or you can't stand your teammates, don't blame the coach. It's up to you to do the research on the school, spend time with the coach, meet some players, and ask the right questions before you accept the school offer.

- **FINISH SCHOOL.**

Even if you don't play soccer, you are there to get a degree. Do that much. If you have to transfer to another school to finish school, then do so, but make sure you finish school.

Note:

On the Soccer-Coach-L e-mail list another coach added the following:

Any one of the four factors below will make the athlete's financial package "Free" to the athletic department so that (in effect) the athlete won't count against the magic 9.9 scholarship equivalents and really boost the player's odds of getting a college scholarship.

- Top 10% of class
- Cumulative NCAA ACT of 105
- SAT of 1200
- 3.5 in the NCAA "core courses"

Dear player,

It's not that unusual for a Division I school to only have 2.1 scholarships for 25 players on the men's team. In fact, it's pretty standard that the men's program at a D1 school has a lot fewer scholarships than the girls' soccer teams because men's football uses up most of the boy's scholarships (85) and there is no girl's sport that requires anywhere near as many scholarships. Because of Title IX they have to have about the same number of scholarships for boys' as well as girls' sports. For that same reason there are more scholarships for boys' soccer at smaller schools where there is no football program. Many smaller D2 programs have more soccer money available for boys. And although Division III programs (usually private schools) don't offer athletic scholarships, they can usually provide enough academic money to pay for the higher tuition costs to good student athletes who have a 3.0 GPA or better.

If the player is a reasonably good student, most schools can provide scholastic scholarships to make up the difference AND those scholarships are available for four years if the student keeps

up his grade average (usually require maintaining a B average) whereas athletic scholarships are renewable from year to year at the coach's discretion. If after a year, the college coach doesn't like a player or doesn't think he will help the team he can pull his athletic scholarship. For that reason academic scholarships and grades are very important. In my mind they're more important than the athletic scholarship.

Here's an example. Let's say that a player decides he wants to go to a school. If he contacts the coach early enough and expresses interest in the school and soccer program and the coach thinks he's worth it he will ask about the player's grades. The earlier that he gets to this point the better, because there is a limited amount of academic scholarship money available very early for "B" average high school students with a decent ACT score of say 27. Later in the year as the scholarship money is used up, the admissions office may have higher standards and only have money left for "A" or A+ average students with ACT scores of 31 or higher.

So the coach may only offer 1/4 or 1/3 of a full athletic scholarship - but he can offer academic scholarship money to make up the difference. The key is getting it early, before the academic money is gone. And as I said, academic money is usually good for as long as the student keeps up his grades. So if after a year at the school, the player realizes that he really doesn't want to play college soccer (or has a career ending injury or has a new coach) he can give up his athletic scholarship - BUT - he can keep his academic scholarships and continue his education at the school. That's the reason it's more important for boy athletes to have good grades than girl athletes. And that's also the reason that a player should pick out a school that he wants to attend even if he doesn't play soccer.

As far as recruiting goes - that varies widely from school to school. Coaches from Division I schools will attend only the very top tournaments. Other NAIA, Division II, and Division III teams don't have big recruiting budgets so they rely on foreign players, word-of-mouth, local players and players who contact them for their teams. Coaches hate wasting time on players who have no real intention on attending their school. So it's important that the player decide what kind of school he wants to attend (liberal arts, state university, engineering, pre-med, etc.) and then visit the school and the coach to let him know of his interest. College soccer camps are also great places to have the coach scout him, because it represents no cost to the school.

For his senior year I would recommend that the player join a Division I U18 or U19 team or guest play with one that plays in the better tournaments if he wants to attend a D1 college. BUT, I also think it's much more important for him to contact the schools he wants to play and send the coach video highlights of his games and letters. You have to remember that he can have a great season, but a coach may only scout one of his tournament games. He could have an "off" game or a nagging injury or his teammates could play poorly and not get him the ball. It's a "crapshoot" to have a coach see only one or two games and form an opinion of his ability from those games. It's better to show the coach video and to also attend a camp at his school so he can see him in person and within the NCAA recruiting rules.