



Real Talk About Recruiting

July 22, 2014



Photo: Sports On Film



Confession. It's 6am this morning and I've already deleted a dozen emails from recruits without reading more than one sentence. It has become a daily morning routine just like having my coffee.

Most of the emails I receive are direct from student-athletes and some are from recruiting services, but they all get deleted within five seconds of opening and I can tell you this morning routine is commonplace across the country either at the homes or offices of most college coaches.

I actually love recruiting. I really enjoy going out and searching for and evaluating not only talent but also the intangibles, looking for things like attitude and effort. Searching for diamonds in the rough that have heart and hustle to go along with skill.

I've done recruiting at every collegiate level. And I mean every. I was an Associate Head Coach at the NAIA level. We had a ton of money to give and it was easier to get kids into school than I could imagine. The NAIA's eligibility rules are not as stringent as the NCAA. I've been a Head Coach at the Division III level with no scholarship money. Where parents didn't know the name of the school and would run for the hills when they found out I didn't have any athletic scholarships to give. I've been at a Division I school that had more resources than probably any other school in the country. I've coached at the Division II level where scholarships aren't fully funded, yet other schools in our conference were.

So back to those emails. You keep sending them. I keep deleting them. Let's help each other out.

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What Can You Stop Doing?

Stop sending me mass emails that you sent to a hundred schools (maybe more). Most likely, if I'm a Division I coach (which I am now) it got deleted before I even finished reading your name, not because I'm coaching at an elite program that is committed for the next 5 years, but instead because I don't have the time to go through the 25 emails a day that are exactly the same from 25 different student-athletes. Depending on the Division II/III and NAIA school it got deleted before reading as well. That line in your email that says something like "I'm really interested specifically in your school" seems a little fishy when I look up in the To: column of the email and can tell it was sent to another 100 schools with the same line. I basically have now added you to my blacklist like a restaurant that posts the names of the people whose checks bounced.

There are a small percentage of coaches that do read the email and watch the video that you sent. And then they show interest. But when push comes to shove and they reach out to you, you realize that you're a California girl and playing at a Division II school in Minnesota wasn't what you were hoping for when you sent the email out.

What Can You Do?

Let's talk more about this email thing and the best way to use it. First, it needs to be a very specific and very personal email if it comes directly from you (the student-athlete). I am "email savvy" enough to know when it's a mass email to every coach on the planet.

Secondly, your best chance of getting me to read the email is to have someone that I have a relationship with send it. If I get a personal email from Tony Rico or from another reputable travel ball coach, I'm going to open it and read it. Yesterday I got a text from a friend who was a former college coach about a girl that he recommends. Do you think she's on my recruiting list now? Yes.

Maybe your high school coach or travel ball coach isn't very well connected and no one you know has relationships with the colleges that you want to attend. This does make it more difficult for you in regards to email and contact, which means that personal email you send out better grab my attention.

A friend of mine who is a Head Coach at a Division III school this year got a card in the mail from a prospective student-athlete. It was a card inviting her to a macaroni party with the words "macaroni party" crossed out and the "Colorado Sparkler" written above it. Do you think that caught her attention? Strangely, yes.

Two years ago, my youngest brother (I have four) was getting close to graduating. He was a small school All-State football player here in California and also an All-League baseball player. He didn't go to any combines or exposure camps and because of his smaller (5-10,160) frame he was one of the only non-committed all state players. I spoke with him about what he wanted and he was willing to go to any college in the country that helped pay for school. I sat down and wrote an email to every college football coach in the country. I began by saying who I was and my experience in collegiate coaching. I received over 50 emails from schools all over the country showing interest. I helped him narrow down a few of them and he went on recruiting trips. He ended up going to a Division III school in Minnesota that he loves and although they don't offer athletic scholarships, he was able to get 60% paid for with need based and academic aid. He's going into his junior year now and has loved his experience and is the starting 3B for the baseball team.

Now you're probably thinking to yourself, he broke his own rule about the mass email. Yes and No. I knew that my college email address coupled with my introduction about my own experience would help get a few more email opens. It helped a lot that my brother was actually sincere when saying that he was willing to travel anywhere and I was forthright about that in the email. If you want to ignore my advice on the mass email that is OK...I just wouldn't put all my eggs in the email basket.

Email can work. It just has to be done right. 99% of you aren't doing it right and its

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making 99% of the college coaches out there swipe left on their iPhone's too many times a day.

Exposure

Everyone wants more exposure. This is why there are multiple recruiting services and travel ball tournaments every weekend of the year. (Don't get me started on that) In a lot of ways the recruiting services like NCSA and NSR are great for student-athletes. They have helped thousands of student-athletes receive scholarships and helped place them at colleges. I recommend them for "certain" student-athletes that feel like they missed the exposure boat or have the resources to afford it. It's not a good fit for everyone.

How can you get more exposure? If at all possible, you want to get in front of as many college coaches as possible. Playing on the right team for the right coaches helps. I admit that. At some of these showcase tournaments you'll have 50 coaches at a Firecrackers vs. Glory game. (Or insert any other big name travel ball team).

Even if you don't play for a big name travel ball team anytime you can get in front of a large number of college coaches this will "help" with exposure. And I know that may be difficult in many pockets of the country especially outside of places like California.

For most parents, exposure means expensive. The cost of traveling to showcases and tournaments has gotten astronomical. I think there are some parents out there who end up spending more on exposure and camps than they would have just paying for college. Be very selective in where you spend your money in the exposure department #realtalk

Skills Video

Making a skills video is a great idea and helpful for coaches that actually do read your email and want to keep a file on you. Having said that, please don't have a long intro with schnazzy (is that a word?) effects and music. Just go straight into the skills. College coaches don't care about the background music. We want to see your swing, your arm, your fielding, etc.

My Best Advice

If you really want to play at the college level my best advice is to figure out which schools you really want to go and start building a relationship with those coaches as soon as possible. The best way to do that is with the schools camps. Attending a schools camp gives you so much more face time with the coaching staff and allows you to get to know them and the campus and school. Maybe that coaching staff and school isn't as great a fit for you as you had hoped.

Every school has youth camps and prospect camps where they can really get to know and evaluate student-athletes up close. Now let me make this very clear. If your Top 5 schools are in the Pac-12 or SEC and your skill set is better served at a Division II school, there is going to be a problem with this route. Make sure you are attending school camps of schools that you might actually get a chance to play at. Which leads me into...

Be Realistic

Parents and students must have clear expectations and be extremely realistic with their child's athletic ability. There were almost 400,000 high school softball players last year. 30,000 (almost 8%) will play in college. Out of those 30,000 there are about 180 in the Pac-12, which means 0.045% of high school softball players will end up playing in the Pac-12.

Recruiting = Ridiculous

I won't get into my thoughts on the recruiting process from the colleges end (that will be for a different article). It's a failing system in a lot of ways when we have 8th

graders being verballed and 5th graders at showcases. (Yes, I saw this last week).

I know that this process is incredibly daunting for parents and student-athletes and will continue to be overwhelming until some big changes happen.

Lastly, be honest and open if you are being recruited and talking to coaches. There is nothing worse for a coach to spend quality time reading your email, watching your skills video, reaching out to you and getting their hopes up of your interest and then finding out you haven't even heard of the university they're from (happened to be several times at the D2, D3 and NAIA level).

Recap

What not to do

- Mass email
- Burn through your savings and credit cards trying to get exposure

What to do

- Attend schools camps. Build relationships
- Make a video of skills with no frills
- If you're going to use email have a coach or someone that has relationship with college coaches send email and make sure that it's personal. Not mass.
- If you feel like you need a bump in exposure, sign up with a recruiting service but be VERY selective about who and the cost. It's a huge red flag if the cost is absurd.
- Attend as many showcases/tournaments as your pocket book allows and when you are there show the intangibles: Heart. Hustle. Attitude. Effort.



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