

10. The Next Level: Playing in College? Your daughter shows potential to play beyond high school. She has been approached by the local community college coach and also has received mail from several Division I and II programs. She is flattered by this attention but doesn't know how to manage the choices she faces. As a Second-Goal Parent, how can you help her?

Decisions about college are more complex than they used to be. Add in the potential for an athletic scholarship and it can boggle the mind of a teen athlete and her family. You can help your athlete deal with this complexity and turn it into a great preparation for other complex decisions in her life.

First, recognize that an athletic scholarship is a means to a bigger end – getting a great education that will serve your daughter the rest of her life. Having college coaches interested in their child can be a big high for parents who love basking in their child's reflected glory, so try to keep your feet on the ground so you can look out for your daughter's best interests.

Start the conversation by asking what your daughter thinks she might like to study in college. Suggest that the ideal college might be one that combines the kind of academic environment she wants with an athletic experience she'll enjoy. You might ask, "Would you be happy at this college if they dropped your sport or if you decided not to play?"

The recruiting process can be stressful for high school athletes because it seems so overwhelming. Breaking it down can help restore a sense that it is manageable. Together develop an initial list of no more than ten to fifteen colleges that seem to provide both the academic and athletic experience that your daughter would benefit from.

Have her call and e-mail the coaches of the programs she is interested in. After talking with them, if there is mutual interest, have her put together a recruiting package, including a photo, resume, and highlight DVD. Mail it to the coach with a personalized cover letter.

When coaches from schools not on your list contact your daughter, do them a favor. Let them know she is isn't interested in considering them so they can turn their attention to other recruits.

Athletes can be star struck at the possibility of playing at a Division I school when the best combination of academics and sports may be at a Division II or III school (which only offers academic or need-based scholarships). Too many college athletes transfer or quit because they choose a college at a level above where they would be happy.

There is also some blocking and tackling that needs to be done. Become familiar with NCAA clearinghouse rules at www.ncaa.org. See a school counselor to make sure your athlete is taking the classes needed for the schools she is considering. Enlist the help of the coach, who may have experience with scholarship athletes. And, consider talking to college athletes who have graduated from your teen's high school.

Finally, recognize that turning down athletic scholarships is an option. As we saw in Chapter 4, college athletics is a big commitment. Athletes sometimes feel like they have a full-time job on top of their academic schedule. Make sure your daughter understands how much work it is and that she is committed to it. If not, she may be much happier and better off by attending college without playing sports.

THE HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS PARENT

Developing Triple-Impact Competitors



By Jim Thompson



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