

CONTROLLING THE RECRUITING PROCESS – THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL COACH

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The senior year in high school for a prospective student-athlete can be one of the worst or best years of the prospect's life. Regardless of whether the prospect is a "blue chipper" or only moderately recruited, problems can arise in the recruiting process. These problems could include potential NCAA violations, or, more likely, major disruptions in the prospect's life. Nearly all recruiting problems are preventable, and the best way to prevent problems from occurring is to eliminate opportunities for these problems to develop. This reduction of opportunities will deter risk-taking behavior or misunderstandings by the involved parties. The best deterrent to reduce the opportunities for problems to occur is the involvement of the high school coach in the prospect's recruiting process.

Besides the more visible recruiting problems that occasionally result in an athlete losing all or part of his or her NCAA eligibility, more prospects suffer through a poor recruiting process due to the general mishandling of routine interactions between the prospect and the college coaches. The vast majority of college coaches will abide by NCAA rules or other guidelines established by the prospect. As a result, it is important for a prospect to establish guidelines to control his or her recruitment.

It is the prospect's recruitment and not the college coach's recruitment. The prospect must dictate how he or she wishes to be recruited. This directive sets the tone the coaches will follow. (One prospect placed the NCAA Manual on the coffee table in the living room during all home visits by college coaches. That simple act set the tone for that prospect's recruitment.)

In order to prevent potential NCAA violations or the more common hassles of the recruiting process, three general steps should be taken by the high school coach.

1. Prepare the prospect academically – In order to be a NCAA qualifier and be eligible for athletics financial aid, practice and competition immediately upon enrollment, the prospect must graduate, successfully complete a core curriculum of at least 13 academic courses and, have a certain combination of a grade average (based on a maximum of 4.000) and a score on the ACT or SAT entrance examination. The coach needs to ensure that the prospect is taking these courses and obtaining these scores as early as possible. As high school graduation gets closer, panic often rises and increases the need for risk-taking behavior and the opportunities for problems increase. During the freshman and sophomore years, if the high school coach realizes that the athlete may have potential to compete on the collegiate level, the coach should begin ensuring that the prospect is enrolling in appropriate college preparatory courses. During the junior year, the prospect should register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. (Visit the NCAA website at www.ncaa.org for more information about the Clearinghouse).
2. Develop a specific set of recruiting guidelines – Most prospects, and many high school coaches and administrators, initially cherish the exposure of in-person and telephonic contacts from college coaches. However, the volume of these contacts often become cumbersome. As a result, the prospect should develop guidelines and the high school coach should be an integral part of establishing these guidelines. College coaches welcome guidelines because it simplifies the recruiting process. These guidelines should include: (i) the dates, times and expectations of telephone calls; (ii) the opportunities for coaches to attend practice or games; (iii) dates, times, duration and expectations of home visits; (iv) requested information to be provided during an official visit; (v) desirability of faxes, emails or general correspondence; and (vi) locations of mailings; etc. Unique circumstances involving each prospect may warrant additional guidelines. For example, the issue of contacts with the prospect's non-scholastic coach (if applicable) may also need to be addressed.

3. Monitor activities in the recruitment – Some high school coaches are reluctant to monitor the activities of a prospect, as they believe it is the prospect's personal business. However, some inducements by college coaches violate not only NCAA rules but also state high school association rules. If state high school association rules are violated, the high school itself may have some institutional responsibility and may be required to forfeit trophies or team standings. As a result, the coach should perform some monitoring not only as a service to the prospect but also as a display of due diligence for the high school. As part of this monitoring, it is important to not only look at what is occurring but who is involved. As the prospect gains notoriety each year, it is likely that more individuals will wish to be involved with the prospect's life. Look at "who is involved" and "why at this time." If necessary, conduct an inquiry utilizing established procedures previously developed by the high school.

As mentioned above, the majority of problems associated with a prospect's recruitment do not result from NCAA violations but from the hassles associated with having several college coaches routinely telephone, visit, send mail or invitations to the university's campus. Some high school coaches have better relationships with certain of their players than others. However, regardless of the relationship, a high school coach must play a role in helping the prospect control his or her recruitment. This assistance will not only help the prospect but it also will help reduce the possibility of the high school being affected by any of these problems.