

As gender equity has become more of a factor, there have been some shifts in when college coaches appreciate receiving letters of interest. As a rule, men's coaches have many more student-athletes interested in competing for a spot on their college roster than do women's coaches. It is not unusual for men's sports program to place their emphasis on evaluation and letter writing after January 1 of the junior year. On the other hand, the sudden explosion of women's college sports programs has created a shortage of female athletes willing to commit to the demands of a college sports career. This shortage of female athletes seems to have motivated women's college coaches to start their scouting and evaluation process earlier. It is not uncommon for identification of female athletes to begin during the latter part of their sophomore year.

Whenever a student-athlete decides to write to a college coach, there are some simple rules of recruiting etiquette that should be followed. Always make sure that you have the correct name of the coach you are writing. Coaches change jobs regularly and do not appreciate getting mail addressed to a coach who has been gone for three years. An easy way to verify the name of the current college coach is to get on the Internet and check the college web site. Most colleges have their athletic programs profiled on the web. If you need web site addresses for colleges, pick up a copy of the *U.S. News and World Report: America's Best Colleges* which, for a modest price, gives information about 1400 schools plus their web addresses.

Do your research on each college's academic and athletic programs. For example, do not write a coach saying you are interested in their engineering program without first making sure that the school offers engineering. While you are on the college web site, check out the academic requirements and the athletic statistics for your sport. Check out the current team roster to get some idea of how you might fit.

Avoid impersonal mass mailings. The experienced college coach can spot a mass mailing and is not impressed. Do whatever you can, in your letter, to show the coach that you have a genuine interest in both the academic and athletic programs at his/her college. Always include your e-mail address with your return address.

Do not write to a college whose athletic and/or academic requirements you cannot possibly meet. If you are involved in a timed sport, such as swimming or cross country, make sure that your times fall within reason when compared to the current athletes in the program. Do not report times that you "think you will probably make." If you participate in a team sport like soccer or volleyball, be sure to send a schedule of where you can be evaluated and continue to send schedule updates as you receive them.

When coaches send player profile forms or questionnaires, fill them out as quickly as possible and return them. Forms that are not returned in a timely manner leave the impression that a student-athlete is not really interested. If you don't have all the information to complete the form, for example SAT/ACT scores, send back the form as completely as you can and make a note of what information is missing. When the missing information becomes available, update the coach. Above all, NEVER send coach false or misleading information.

Remember—when it comes to writing college coaches—nothing ventured, nothing gained. Take the initiative and write those coaches! No top athlete ever got anywhere by just waiting for something to happen.