

## **Playing College Soccer and the Recruiting Process**

### **Introduction**

To develop this guide, we surveyed experienced parents and players, AC Sandhills staff and coaches from NCAA Division I, II and III programs. Their responses have been incorporated into each section.

As you review the information there are three things to keep in mind:

1. The process is very similar to looking for a job.
2. The process operates on two parallel tracks: soccer and academic.
3. Approach the process with a team mentality: player, parents, coach and school guidance counselor. Everyone has certain responsibilities, but, the player, your child needs to lead the team.

A positive attitude and persistence will go a long way during your child's journey to play collegiate soccer.

Good Luck!

## **Section I: Soccer**

### When to get started?

To understand when to get started, you need to work backwards. Coaches build their annual recruiting process around the official signing date, February 1<sup>st</sup>. By February, many coaches have identified and talked with the players they want to be a part of their program. Because college soccer is a fall sport, most, but not all, recruiting takes place over the spring and summer months. However, there also is a flurry of recruiting that does take place after the fall collegiate soccer season is over between November and December.

With the above in mind, it is recommended that your child begin the process during the summer between his sophomore and junior years of high school. He should develop a list of schools that interest him both academically and athletically.

Note: NCAA regulations permit coaches to *respond* to prospective student-athlete inquiries, but the coaches cannot *initiate* contact until July 1 of the summer leading to your child's senior year.

The following is a sample timeline:

Summer before the start of junior year:

- develop list of schools
- meet with coach to discuss viability of playing college soccer, appropriate level, list of schools
- thoroughly research schools and soccer programs
- draft letter of introduction
- draft resume
- finalize letter and resume
- send letters and resume

## How to get started

- Meet with AC Sandhills

Once you and your child have developed a list of schools, your child needs to set-up a time to meet with Mike Reilly or Todd Abbey. At the meeting they will review the list of schools and discuss appropriate division of play for the player. The coach's role at this point is to help guide your child to realistically achieve his goal to play soccer in college. The college coaches count on the club to be realistic about the division where a player can have the biggest impact for a team be it DI, DII or DIII.

NCAA Division I Coach: "How can coaches' best help players?"

*"Know the level of the program. Do not oversell a prospect if they can't play at this level. Being a 'great kid' and 'hardworking' are not distinguishing enough to be recruited. I consider those minimal attributes. To be honest with the player...if the coach doesn't think they can play at the D1 level, he needs to tell the player and his parents before they begin the process. To this degree, the player must sit down with his club and ask the question 'what is an appropriate level for me to pursue' I will certainly ask the coach 'how many kids have you sent to D1, where have they gone, how have they done and how would you compare this player to them?' "*

- Developing your target list (research)

Coaches expect players to have done their research on both the school and the soccer program. Coaches do not want to be in discussions with a player only to find out, for example, that the school doesn't offer what the player wants to study.

*"When they do their homework and know a great deal about the program I appreciate it. ... When they have a good idea of what they are looking for in a college, academically, socially and geographically."* NCAA coach.

When developing the target list, the player will find it helpful to include the following minimum information:

- School name
- School Web site
- Athletic Web site
- Coaches names, mailing address, phone numbers, email addresses

- Introduction letter

Once the target list is complete and the player has met with his club, he/she is ready to develop his letter of introduction. The letter should be sent before the fall college soccer season begins. When surveyed, the coaches overwhelmingly preferred to receive the letter via email. Some noted that it doesn't hurt to email and send a hard copy.

*"Either is fine, email is more efficient, avoid massive attachments, always appreciate when the letter is brief and profile is embedded into email."*

As for the content of the letter, coaches indicated they are looking for a fairly simple, straightforward letter. Players also are encouraged to personalize each letter with the coach's name, e.g., "Dear Coach Reilly" versus "Dear Coach" and incorporate the name of the school into the body of the letter, e.g., "I am interested in attending XYZ to study accounting."

Coaches are looking for letters to include the following:

- Player's name
- Name of club team
- Name of high school
- GPA
- Graduation date
- Projected major
- Upcoming schedule (tournaments, academy games, etc.)
- Coach references with contact information
- Resume (separate document)

*"We are looking for academic info, contact info, Graduation year, Club, uniform number, position, general soccer experience and most importantly where the team will be playing."* NCAA coach

- Resume

The resume should include:

- Personal information – height, weight, birth date
- Contact information – address, email, phone (home and mobile), IM
- Academic – GPA, class rank, PSAT or SAT/ACT scores, clubs, community service, awards/honors
- Athletics – soccer info for club/academy (include uniform colors, jersey number, position), high school, ODP (if applicable), awards
- Other sports experience
- References – include name, phone (home and mobile), email, mailing address

Note: Photos are not necessary and you want to make sure that the resume can be easily emailed.

*“Don't like it when the 2,000+KB bog down my email account.” NCAA coach*

- Team schedule (league play and especially tournaments)

The player will want to develop a separate team schedule document which can be constantly updated and easily emailed. An updated schedule is a good way to stay in contact with coaches.

*“Keep us updated with your playing schedule- once you get your schedule for a tourney let us know it”*

- Follow-up

Once the letter, resume and team schedule has been sent, now what. The majority of surveyed coaches encourage follow-up while some indicated if they are interested, they will follow-up. When a coach responds with questions, he expects the player to respond within 24 – 48 hours. On the flip-side, it is helpful to understand that some schools will receive upwards of 1,200 – 1,500 letters of introduction. Coaches do their best to respond and most have departmental systems in place to help them manage the communications, but they do not always respond in a timely fashion. Patience and persistence become assets.

*“Follow up if you need to inform us of your tournament schedule (or any changes), or if you have any questions. If we see you play and we like you, we'll follow up. As well, every prospect who writes us gets put into our database, with tournaments he/she is attending and should get a basic response from us confirming that we received the inquiry.”*

- To Video or Not?

On the question of videos, coaches stressed watching the player live is most important. However, video can be helpful to spark interest for a coach to come watch a player.

*“We'll never take a player based on a video, but it may spark an interest. I like highlights. “*

Because you want to be in a position to respond promptly to a coach, parents and players have found it is better to have video than to have to scramble to get a video together. It is best to put together 5 – 7 minutes of highlights followed by 20 – 30 minutes of unedited play.

*“Video should be a combination of highlights and a match – brief is good. Trying to get an idea about speed, athleticism, touch.”*

In producing a video you have two options: do it yourself or hire a production company. Because coaches are not looking for Academy Award quality video, if you are able to film your child's play yourself that can be very economical. To edit a highlight video, you will need to find a video production company.

- Camps

The majority of schools host summer camps. The camps serve a couple of purposes for the schools and their soccer programs: source of income for the program, recruiting and awareness building for the school.

Attending the camps of the schools your child might be interested in is not mandatory, but it can be very helpful. For your child, it gives him an opportunity to experience the school and to interact with the coaching staff. For the coaches, it is an opportunity to better assess a player's skills, attitude and team fit.

According to the coaches surveyed, many actually recruit players who they saw at camp.

*"It is a hugely important part of our recruiting process- not only do we get to see them play but we also get to know them personally and see if they would be a good fit with the other players on our team"*

*"There's usually at least one player from each recruiting class that came from camp"*

*"Our Elite camp is a very important recruiting opportunity for us, particularly when it may be the only chance we have a seeing a prospect play. If we don't see them play, they will not get recruited. We (University X), do not attend HS games unless they are local (I saw 1 HS game in 2007 on the way home from practice), **so sending us your HS schedule isn't necessary.**"*

Something else to keep in mind about attending a camp is that coaches from other schools often work at the camp for their own recruiting purposes. So, your child is exposed to multiple opportunities.

And if your child attends a camp(s), he needs to make sure that at some point during camp, he introduces himself to the coaches. During registration/arrival and departure, coaches are inundated by parents trying to make an impression on behalf of their child. But, it is the player that the coaches will remember.

- Coaches are watching

Players need to be mindful that coaches are a little like Santa – you never know when they are watching and they see more than a player might think. Coaches were asked besides skills, what are they looking for when they watch a player.

*“Work ethic, attitude and coachability are also attributes that we look for.”*

*“Speed, athleticism, ability to deal with conditions, poor refereeing, yelling coaches, etc.”*

*“Work rate, winning attitude, attitude toward ref and coach and parents”,*

*“Clues that give us an idea of what type of person he/she is. Does he help carry the balls, does he shake hands with the referee after the game, etc... Athleticism, awareness on the field and pace”*

- Unofficial and official visits

An *unofficial visit* is any visit to a school that is paid for by the player or parents. There are no limitations on when you can visit or how many visits can be made. The only expense a school may offer to pay is for three complimentary tickets to a school's sporting event.

There are more regulations pertaining to an *official visit*. Briefly, an official visit occurs at the invitation of a coach and is paid for by the school. Please go to the NCAA Web site for the specifics on unofficial and official visits.

A helpful tip for official visits to DI schools:

- keep multiple copies of the player's high school transcript
- have SAT and/or ACT scores handy
- register with NCAA Eligibility Center (formerly known as NCAA Clearinghouse)

The player will be asked to provide the coaches with transcripts and test scores as well as confirm registration with the Eligibility Center.

During a visit, how can the player best represent himself?

*“When the recruit speaks more than the parents do”*

*“Eye contact”*

*“When they come prepared with questions and have clearly put some thought into this very important decision”*

*“If the player is educated on your school or not”*

*“Can talk to you and not parents, how easy is he to talk to and how he treats his parents”*

*“The players character, manners and maturity.”*

*“Ability to communicate and ask questions, mainly.”  
“I am impressed by kids rather than their parents asking the questions”*

*“When they can represent themselves in a well spoken and confident manner, rather than have their parents do all the talking for them and when they have a good idea of what they are looking for in a college, academically, socially and geographically.”*

### NCAA Rules

It is the player’s responsibility to understand and abide by the NCAA regulations. It is strongly suggested that you and your child spend time reviewing NCAA regulations. The NCAA Web site is a wealth of information and easy to navigate.

Go to [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org). On the left side of the home page, go to Academics & Athletes. Next to access the Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete, click on Eligibility & Recruiting. The guide will answer all your questions.

### NCAA Eligibility Center (formerly known as NCCA Clearinghouse)

The NCAA Eligibility Center establishes the player’s amateur status and eligibility. There is an online form that needs to be filled out by the player. He should complete this online information by the end of his junior year, preferably before summer starts as he might need information from his guidance counselor. Go to [www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net) to complete the form.

## **Section II: Academics**

### Choosing a school

Getting an education should be the first priority. A player should not choose a school based solely on its soccer program. As a prospective college student-athlete, you must choose a school based on both its academics and its soccer program.

When considering schools, players need to ask themselves several questions:

- Do I want to go to a big school or a smaller school?
- What part of the country would I like to be in?
- What do I think I might want to study?
- Does the school offer what I want to study?
- Does the school fit our family’s budget?
- What are the athletic facilities like?
- What are the soccer facilities like?

### Your guidance counselor

If your child hasn't met with his guidance counselor, now is the time. The guidance counselor can be a tremendous asset during the college process. The earlier your child meets with the counselor the better because the counselor can educate him about the college application process, the high school's process for supplying transcripts, recommendations, meeting deadlines. Also, check out your school's Web site and the guidance department's section. Most guidance departments will have a guideline and tips pertaining to the college application process.

### Transcripts, GPA and Class Rank

In preparation for the letters of introduction, at the end of the player's sophomore year, he should request a copy of his transcript which will include his GPA. This transcript is considered an "unofficial" transcript. Coaches understand that official transcripts are not available until a player's junior year as well as class rank. When the player receives his official transcript, he can forward it to coaches as necessary.

### SATs & ACTs

As it relates to recruiting, the important thing is to make sure the player has registered with NCAA Eligibility Center and puts the NCAA Eligibility Center code on his test as the scores have to be sent directly to the NCAA. The code is 9999. Be sure to thoroughly read the NCAA regulations.

### Applications & Deadlines

As the search and recruiting begin to narrow, the player needs to be mindful of application deadlines. The player doesn't want to find himself in a situation where he receives an offer from a coach in mid-January only to find out he has missed the deadline to submit his application to the school. The player might want to consider submitting applications as soon as he begins any discussions with a coach.

### Scholarship and Financial Aid

Soccer at most schools is not a revenue-generating sport like football and basketball. Therefore, the soccer programs do not have the depth of scholarship money like the other sports. Each program is given a set number of scholarships for the program – not per year. So, the scholarship money available to the player's recruiting class is usually dependent upon the graduating scholarship players. It is not unusual for players to receive partial scholarships, which allows coaches to spread the funds across several players.

Because of limited scholarship funds, players and parents are encouraged to research the financial aid and merit scholarship options available through the schools. Again, the player's guidance counselor can be very helpful navigating the financial aid process.

*“Understanding of finances can now be an issue as the cost of schools is continuing to go up, so it is important to remember that in a typical year a fully funded program on average has 2.5 scholarships available.”*

*“Best advice; don't ask about scholarships, money e.t.c. because if your son is a candidate for a scholarship, he'll be offered one. Do, however, inquire about financial aid and what the academic standards are for merit aid.”*

NCAA Div 1, 2 and 3 have certain guidelines to follow in regard to scholarships, grants in aid, eligibility and so on. There are also NJCAA (Junior College) programs that may offer merit based scholarships and financial aid. NAIA schools also exist in certain areas of the country and typically have their own set of rules and guidelines in the areas of scholarships, age limits, and eligibility based on their conference affiliation.

In general, NCAA Div 1 and 2 programs have a maximum of 9.9 scholarships for men and 11 scholarships for women. Division 3 programs cannot offer athletic scholarships per se but many offer excellent financial aid awards based on academic performance and need based aid. Some schools allow their athletic programs to recruit players that do not meet the “normal” admissions entrance requirements. Be careful of this situation and make sure there will be adequate support systems in place to help students in this category.

Best of luck, be diligent and never feel afraid to ask a question during this important process.

ACS Staff