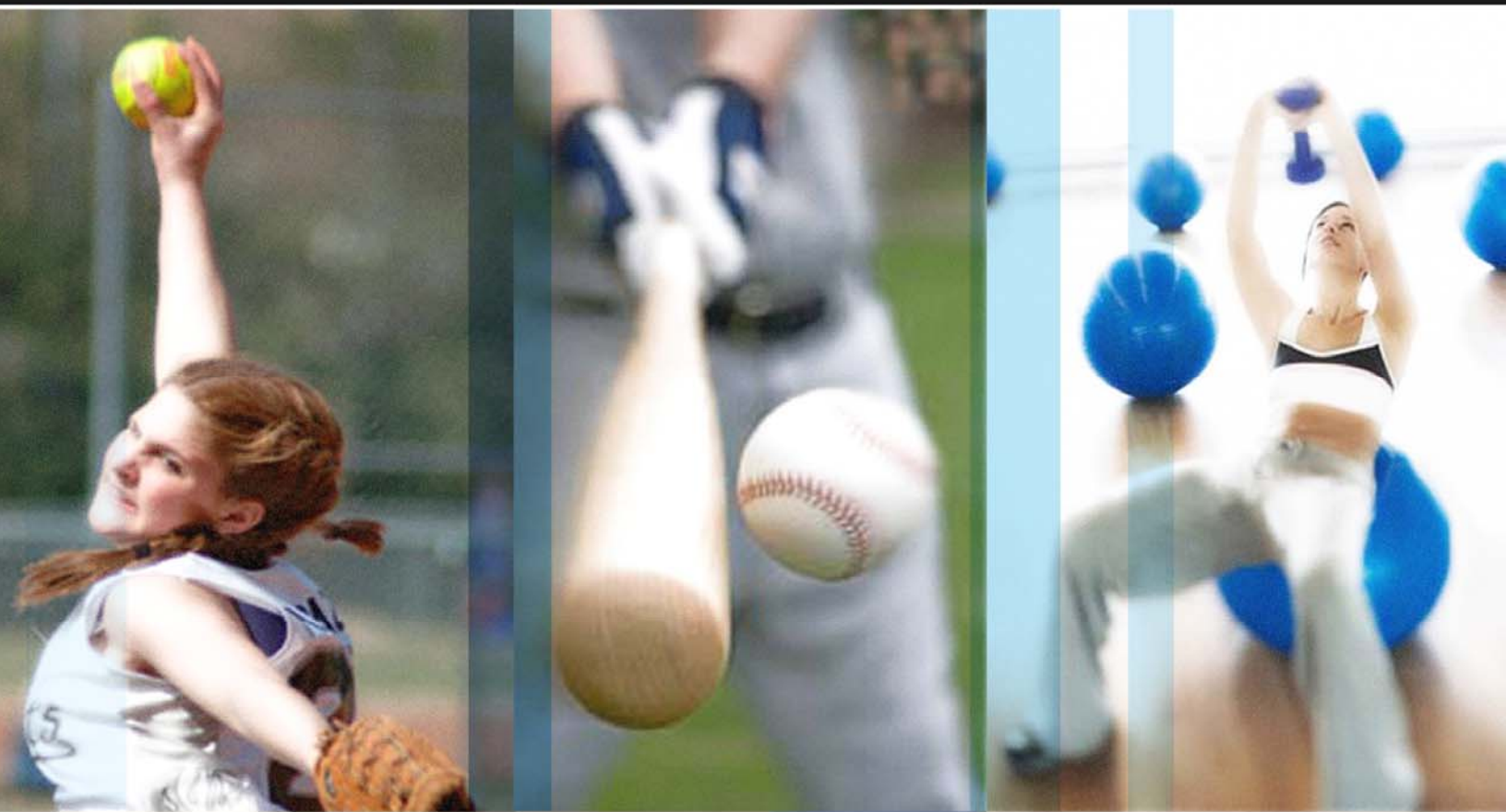


Special Report: How to Prepare to Play College Softball



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*Powerful Resources to Quickly
and Easily Boost Your Game!*

By Marc O. Dagenais

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Marc O. Dagenais is a sought-after peak performance coach and an expert at improving performance, developing talent and helping athletes and teams reach their full potential. He works with softball players to help them turn their athletic talent into extraordinary performances and he consults with coaches on how they can get more out of their players, turn their struggling team around or get an edge over their opponents.

Marc has an exceptional combination of softball coaching expertise and sports sciences knowledge – which is a very rare combo in the world of softball. He has intimate knowledge of what it takes to develop and maintain a high level of performance in

athletes.

Marc has worked with numerous elite amateur, college and professional athletes including hundreds of softball players. He has also been coaching women's competitive fastpitch softball for almost 20 years and has coached at every level of the game from grassroots to the college and the international level. He has served three years as an Assistant Softball Coach at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C and he presently works and coaches with the Canadian Women's Softball National Team Program.

In addition to having an extensive background as a softball coach, trainer, and consultant, Marc has advanced studies in sport sciences (high performance coaching, sports psychology, and strength and conditioning) and numerous high level certifications.

Also, in addition to being an expert strength and conditioning specialist and a high-level softball coach, he is also extremely well-versed in the areas of sports psychology, sports nutrition, and injury management.

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Special Report: How to Prepare to Play College Softball

Choosing a college to attend is one of the most important decisions a young person will face. Because the four years spent at college are such formative ones, this one decision has the potential to shape and impact the rest of a young person's life. In light of the magnitude of such a decision, the college search can often seem like a frustrating and overwhelming endeavor for both parent and student. This feeling is magnified even more if the college seeking student is a female athlete who wants to compete in sports at the collegiate level. However, this does not need to be the case. Though the process of seeking out a school that meets all of the student's needs seems daunting, the reality is that the options for female athletes have grown exponentially throughout recent decades. As a result, colleges across the country have been offering more incentives and scholarships to female athletes. The entrance of the USA softball team onto the global stage (and their subsequent domination) has served as a catalyst, subsequently furthering the cause of women's softball in the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA. Phenomenal players like Jenni Finch and Cat Osterman have been able to serve as spokeswomen of the sport, making it more popular among young girls, and more in demand at the college level. Though the prospect of picking a college and obtaining a scholarship may seem impossible, becoming familiar with the process means that half of your battle is already won. There are several factors to keep in mind when it comes time to choose your ideal college, one that will allow you to play the sport you love and receive the education that will be vital to your future.

Narrowing Your Search

When it comes time to think about colleges, there are an almost infinite number of factors that come into play, many of them dependent upon your own personal preference. The first step in choosing a college team is to compose a list of all the colleges that you may be interested in attending. This list can, and should, be based on a number of aspects that will vary in importance from person to person, including the location of the school, its size, the division in which it competes (whether it be NAIA, NJCAA for junior colleges, or one of the three divisions within the NCAA; I, II, and III), academic strength, and the general campus life.

Though there are a number of options to consider, the most important question to ask is what specific factors are important to you. For example, some students may want to attend a smaller school within a couple hours of home. In this case, the NAIA and various junior colleges can be very viable and realistic options. Not only do NAIA and junior colleges often boast very competitive softball programs, they also offer a somewhat smaller atmosphere and the opportunity for easier transfer between schools (without losing a year of eligibility, as is the case in the NCAA). To others, the reputation of the faculty and living conditions may take precedence. As far as the school's softball program is concerned, does it matter to you that they have a strong record? That they compete in the NCAA Division I? That the school competes in the NAIA and not the NCAA? These are all factors to consider when researching potential schools. And as you make this initial list, make sure not to underestimate just how

important research is. Though this is still the initial phase of the college search (you will likely not visit all ten or fifteen schools on your list), it is important to thoroughly research everything possible about the school. In doing so, you may discover an aspect of the school that doesn't match with your needs, which will then eliminate the institution and save you time and money in the future.

Selecting a list of colleges may also depend on what schools have taken an interest in you as a potential player. For example, if there are five schools that have expressed interest in your skills as a softball player, then those five should automatically be added to the preliminary list. However, this does not mean that other schools should not be represented as well. On the contrary, this list should include schools you are interested in playing for, even if they have not necessarily contacted you. This initial list will be reduced in size as you learn more about what each school has to offer to you in general, and to you as a player. If you are a female athlete seeking a place on a college softball team, it is vital that you have a basic knowledge of the NCAA recruiting rules and guidelines. Not only will this prevent you from becoming entangled in any illegal recruiting tactics, it will also aid you in making a more informed decision about which specific college is the right fit for you.

NCAA Recruiting Rules

The NCAA has very precise and specific rules for recruiting that must be adhered to by both college coaches and prospective players. It is important to keep in mind that the guidelines for each sport are different. Because this report is focused specifically on the recruiting procedures for women's softball, if you have an interest in participating in

any additional sports, it is imperative that you research and identify the differences. The NCAA guidelines vary depending on what year of high school you are in. A student is officially termed as a “prospective student-athlete” by the NCAA when one of two events occur: the student begins ninth-grade classes or the student is given any financial aid (this includes financial aid distributed to the student’s friends or relatives) before their ninth-grade year that the college would not otherwise distribute.

During a student’s sophomore year of high school, she may receive brochures for camps and questionnaires from an NCAA college, in addition to making as many unofficial visits to a college campus as desired. The NCAA deems an unofficial visit as “any visit by you and your parents to a college campus that is paid for by you and your parents.” In other words, you are not allowed to accept any type of reimbursement or payment from the coach or any college representative (the only exception to this rule is that the student may receive three complimentary passes to a home athletics event). Also, any official visits to the campus (which are visits sponsored by the college) are prohibited. You are also not yet allowed to meet with the coach or representatives of the college off campus. College coaches are prohibited from calling students during their sophomore year of high school, though the student may make calls to the coach at their own expense.

Starting September 1 of your junior year, college coaches are permitted to send you various recruiting materials (in addition to just the camp brochures and various questionnaires). As was the case during the student’s sophomore year, they are allowed to make unlimited unofficial visits to college campuses. However, during your

junior year of high school, you are still prohibited from making official visits to college campuses. You may still make calls to coaches at your own expense during your junior year. In addition, starting on the July 1 after your junior year of high school (right before your senior year), college coaches are permitted to call you one time per week. Also starting on the July 1 after your junior year, you are allowed to have limited off-campus contact with coaches.

Throughout your senior year, the NCAA does allow colleges to send recruiting materials to you. As with your sophomore and junior years, you are still allowed to make an unlimited number of visits to the college campus (or campuses) of your choice. As was established during the summer after your junior year (and prior to your senior year), you are allowed to have off-campus contact with coaches, though these contacts are limited to no more than three times throughout your entire senior year. You are still allowed to make phone calls at your own expense to coaches. Also, the NCAA allows you to receive phone calls from potential coaches (though each coach is allowed only to call you one time per week). In addition, during a student's senior year, a coach is allowed to see you up to seven times for evaluation and official contact. This type of contact includes anytime a coach comes to evaluate your athletic ability (during practice or in a game). Also during your senior year, you are allowed to make official visits to college campuses. Official visits are defined by the NCAA as "any visit to a college campus by you and your parents paid for by the college." Under NCAA regulations, on an official visit, the college may pay for your transportation to and from the school, rooms and meals (three per day) throughout your stay, and reasonable entertainment

expenses (this includes three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest). As a senior, you are allowed one official visit per college, up to five NCAA Division I or II schools. However, it is important to remember that before a college may invite you for an official visit, they must be provided with an official high school transcript, a copy of your SAT, ACT, or PLAN scores, and you must register with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse (see section on NCAA Eligibility Clearinghouse for further details).

NCAA Eligibility

The eligibility standards required by the NCAA can often seem overwhelming. Because students are required to fulfill a number of obligations (ranging from achieving a satisfactory score on standardized tests like the ACT to maintaining a comprehensive grade point average throughout high school), the process can often seem confusing. However, the academic eligibility standards are relatively straightforward and can be broken down into four main sections.

The first academic eligibility requirement for a student is that she graduate from high school. In some cases, equivalent graduation tests (such as the GED) may be used to satisfy this particular requirements. However, this does not mean that the student is exempt from satisfying all other academic requirements (such as completing the list of core courses and maintaining a minimum grade point average).

The second academic eligibility requirement is that the student must have completed a certain number of core academic courses. A core course must meet four criteria laid out by the NCAA. First, it must be an academic course in one or a combination of these areas: English, math, natural/physical science, social science,

foreign language, nondoctrinal religion, or philosophy. Second, the core course must be four-year college preparatory. Third, the course must be at, or above, your high school's regular academic level. This means that no remedial, compensatory, or special education classes will count towards fulfilling the student's core requirements. Finally, a student must complete the core course requirements no later than the graduation date of his or her class. However, as of the 2007-2008 academic year, students who graduate high school on time (in eight semesters) are permitted to use one core course taken in the summer after their senior year to satisfy the core course requirements of the NCAA.

It is important to note that the NCAA requirements regarding core classes will be changing slightly, beginning for the class entering college in 2008 (which would be the 2008-2009 academic year). In previous years (through the 2007-2008 academic year), incoming college freshmen were required to have completed (and achieved a satisfactory grade point average) fourteen core classes. Beginning in 2008, the number of core classes required for eligibility will increase to sixteen. These sixteen core courses are comprised of four years of English, three years of math (Algebra I or higher), two years of natural or physical science, one extra year of English, math, or natural/physical science, two years of social science, and four years of extra core courses (which can be from any of the above categories, foreign language, nondoctrinal religion, or philosophy).

The third and fourth requirements for becoming academically eligible to compete in the NCAA are achieving a minimum grade point average (no lower than a cumulative

GPA of 2.0) and a satisfactory ACT or SAT score. The NCAA's required grade point average (for core classes) is actually determined in conjunction with the student's score on the ACT or SAT. Essentially, the higher a student's GPA is, the lower their required score is on the ACT or SAT and vice versa. For example, a student who achieves a 3.5 or higher GPA in core classes only needs to receive a 400 on the SAT or a sum score of 37 on the ACT to be considered academically eligible by the NCAA. Conversely, a student who has a lower GPA in core classes, such as a 2.0, would need a score of 1010 on the SAT or an 86 on the ACT. It is also important to note that even though you may be academically eligible to compete at an NCAA school, simply meeting these standards does not guarantee your admission to a college. You must still complete the admissions process and be admitted by the institution. The following is the first part of the sliding GPA/SAT/ACT scale required by the NCAA. The remaining scale follow suit – with the cutoff being a core GPA of 2.0 (the lowest the NCAA will accept regardless of test scores).

CORE GPA	SAT	ACT
3.550 and above	400	37
3.500	420	39
3.400	460	42
3.300	500	44
3.200	540	47

3.100	580	49
3.000	620	52
2.900	660	53
2.800	700	57

NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse

One of the most important, and often overlooked, tasks that a student needs to complete to ensure NCAA eligibility is registration with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse (also known as simply “the clearinghouse”). This clearinghouse, while not a part of the actual NCAA, is officially aligned with the NCAA and is used to perform academic evaluations for the NCAA. As a result, any college freshman that wishes to participate in Division I or II softball must be registered with the clearinghouse. It is recommended that potential NCAA athletes register with the clearinghouse at the beginning of their junior year of high school. To register, the student will complete the online Student Release Form (SRF) and then mail the hard copy (along with a \$50 registration fee) to the clearinghouse. The SRF performs two functions. First, it authorizes every high school you’ve attended to send the clearinghouse your transcript, test scores, proof of graduation, and other academic documents used to verify NCAA academic eligibility. Second, the SRF officially authorizes the clearinghouse to send any of your academic information to colleges that request your eligibility status. Though it is advised that the student register at the beginning of their junior year of high school, enrollment with the clearinghouse is not required at that time. However, if you are a

player who is considering the possibility of competing in softball at an NCAA school, it is wise to register with the clearinghouse as soon as possible. Not only is registration with the clearinghouse ultimately required before you are allowed to compete at an NCAA school, the earlier you register, the earlier the clearinghouse can become a helpful tool in monitoring your academic progress (and bringing to your attention anything you may have inadvertently left out).

NAIA Eligibility

It is important to note that options other than playing in the NCAA are available to softball players. Many players find success playing either at the NAIA level or the junior college level. Both can have advantages in their own right, specifically for an athlete that is also competitive academically. Those softball players often end up having more of their schooling paid for (through a combination of athletic and academic scholarships) than some who play at the NCAA level. In order for incoming freshmen to be eligible, they must meet several requirements. These requirements are very similar in structure to those mandated by the NCAA, but they are slightly different. The NAIA requires that incoming freshmen athletes meet two out of three primary standards (in addition to earning a high school diploma or a high school equivalent).

- A student must achieve a minimum score of 18 on the ACT test or a minimum score of 860 on the SAT. Residual tests are not permissible.
- A student must achieve a minimum high school grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.

- A student must have graduated in the top half of their graduating class at the time of final transcript compilation.

NCAA vs. NAIA and NJCAA

While the NCAA typically gets most of the publicity involved with college softball, the reality is that the NCAA is hardly the only division in which an athlete can compete. The NAIA and the NJCAA all have grown more competitive over the years and now offer an attractive environment for softball players to compete. Besides boasting powerhouse softball programs (such as NAIA schools like California Baptist University and Oklahoma City University), these lesser publicized divisions can often turn out to be exactly the right fit for many softball players. The NAIA offers many of the same athletic scholarships that are available at smaller NCAA schools, which means there is still plenty of scholarship money to be had by talented athletes. Another advantage to NAIA schools are that they are typically smaller. As a result, playing in the NAIA may be a very viable option for those women who want to play softball at the college level, but want to enjoy the smaller classes and environment of a less populated university. Junior colleges can also be a great option for athletes who seek to play at a college level. Not only are junior college softball programs growing increasingly more competitive, they also offer a number of attractive options as well. First, junior colleges tend to be much cheaper than four year universities. Because junior colleges are local, they offer reasonable in-state tuition to students. Also, though they don't typically offer much in the way of financial scholarships, the junior college system can serve as an option for women who may just want to participate in a couple years of collegiate

softball or for those who would like to use the junior college experience as the gateway to another school. Many four-year universities, both NCAA and NAIA, will often supplement their existing teams with players who have shown promise on the junior college level.

NCAA Divisions

As has been previously discussed, there are three divisions within the NCAA – Division I is considered the largest, Division II is below that, and Division III schools are the smallest of all of them. However, each division has its own set of pros and cons. Division I of the NCAA is the most prestigious and elite – it is made up of powerhouse softball programs like Arizona and California. While playing at the Division I level is often the goal of many athletes, it does come with its share of drawbacks. First, it is very difficult to make, let alone play on, a Division I softball team. Division I is made up of the best of the best and as a result, players that are not standouts typically will not see the field much. This also means that there will be less scholarship money to give out. Since all programs are only allotted a certain amount of scholarship money, the Division I programs typically reserve that money for their standout players. In addition, Division I players face a rigorous schedule – both in terms of training and competing. Much of a player's college life will be spent on the field. However, if you are a top quality player, and are willing to commit the time and energy to the program, then Division I softball certainly is a realistic option. Not only are Division I athletes the top in the country, the institutions themselves are larger, which means more opportunities for players off of the field as well.

Even though NCAA Divisions II and III are smaller, it certainly doesn't mean that they are not competitive. On the contrary, these divisions often produce powerhouse teams in their own right. However, one of the major negatives is that the scholarship money that is allotted to each program becomes less with each step. For example, a NCAA Division I softball program will have more scholarship funds at their disposal than a NCAA Division III program will. But this does not mean that there is no money available. On the contrary, many Division II programs still are given enough scholarship money to cover several athletes. Often, in Divisions II and III, this money is divided up amongst players, meaning that there will be several players who are earning "half" softball scholarships. There are certainly advantages to playing softball at a Division II or III school. First, the institution itself is smaller, which means smaller classes and a more tight-knit, familial community. Second, the opportunity for softball players to actually see playing time increases exponentially. There are many cases in which an athlete will turn down a Division I school where they were going to sit the bench to attend a Division II school where they will start and play throughout their college career. Also, even though there is not as many softball scholarships available at Division II and III schools, there are often more opportunities for academic scholarships. In fact, it is not uncommon for coaches of these smaller institutions to work with the athlete who is receiving a "half" softball scholarship to help them find any possible grants or scholarships (academic or otherwise) that would offset the majority of their tuition costs. As a result, playing at an NCAA Division II or III school is a very attractive option for many students.

Bringing the Colleges to You

If you are a talented softball player with a future playing at the college level, whether it be NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA, chances are that you have already been approached by one or more colleges. You may have interacted with coaches who have come to watch you play or who have heard about you from your high school coach. However, just waiting for a college to come to you is typically not enough. Unless you are among the top elite few, you will not necessarily have dozens of schools waiting to offer you scholarships to play at their college. But this doesn't mean that you CAN'T get a scholarship to play at their college. Often, a big part of the recruiting game is showcasing your best talents to the right coach at the ideal time. There are a number of options by which you can highlight your specific talents, using both traditional and less traditional methods. For example, with the advances made in digital and video technology, you no longer have to rely solely on the coach of your choice seeing a live game. Instead, you can create a DVD highlighting your specific talents and strengths. Just this one simple change in approach can greatly expand your list of prospective colleges. For example, if you are a junior shortstop from Florida, you no longer have to settle for local coaches coming to watch you play nearby. Instead, you have the option of submitting your highlight DVD to a coach all the way across the country in California. If you can do an exceptional job putting together your video, you have a better chance of attracting that coach's interest, whether they are across the country or across the state.

So what makes an unforgettable recruiting video? There are a number of easy tips to keep in mind when compiling your video. The first tip is to keep your video as short as possible, including only those plays which showcase the absolute best of your ability. Though this seems obvious, many student athletes make the mistake of distributing footage of themselves that, while good, is certainly not their greatest. Though sending a college coach a recruiting video certainly has its advantages, this particular mistake accounts for one of this method's greatest potential downfalls. When college coaches view a recruiting video that has been sent to them, they are expecting to see the player at the very top pinnacle of her game. Obviously, since a player is ultimately in charge of what makes it to the video, by nature they would want to showcase the very best of themselves. As a result, coaches who view a video that contains some great play mixed with some average play will assume that those clips showing the average play are actually a more accurate representation of the player's overall ability. Therefore, make absolute certain that the clips showcased on your recruiting video are an accurate depiction of your best play. Even if this means the video is somewhat shorter in length, it is still preferable to having subpar play shown on the video. Furthermore, the recruiting video should be used to showcase all of your talents. For example, if you are a talented shortstop also known for your frequent home runs, you should include clips of you both playing shortstop and batting in your video. It is these seemingly small measures that will make a great deal of difference to the coach on the receiving end of your video.

Another important thing to keep in mind when preparing to submit a recruiting video is that unfortunately, it has become standard for most coaches to no longer accept unsolicited videos. As a result, you will need to contact the coach prior to sending them the video. However, before you do this, it will be beneficial for you to first do some research, not only about the school in general, but about the coach and the softball program as well. This first step will help you determine what schools might be a potential match for you (see later section on what questions to ask when narrowing down your list of schools). After you decide on your list of potential schools, you should then research all you can about the school's softball program. This includes learning everything from the name of the coach (you would be surprised to learn how many athletes sending recruiting videos misspell the name of the coach), to the recent win-loss record of the team. If you are serious about attracting the attention of a particular coach or school, taking the time to research these small details can help make a significant impression on the coach. If the coach (or coaching staff, as the case may be) can see that you are serious enough about competing to really learn about the school and the program, that will speak volumes about how serious you are willing to take your position on the team.

One option for you to consider when trying to attract the attention of a particular coach or school is the use of a recruiting service. In the last decade (due in large part to the explosion of the internet), the popularity of recruiting services has grown exponentially. Many such recruiting tools can be found online and offer very specialized services, ranging from tracking and submitting your most recent stats to the

colleges of your choice to crafting (and then submitting) personal resumes detailing your accomplishments and most up to date information. Also, if you hire a recruiting service, they will help you put together, and then distribute, your recruiting video to various colleges. All in all, utilizing a recruiting service can be a valuable asset in guiding you through the process of gaining notice from a coach or college. However, it does have its disadvantages. First, most of these services (and especially the most reputable ones) require a membership fee. This fee can range anywhere from \$25 for the most basic service to up to \$500 for the more advanced and well-known services. In addition, though many of these services are indeed reputable, the stigma still associated with hiring an actual service versus submitting a video or meeting with coaches the more traditional way is still a very real factor. If you do decide to hire a recruiting service, make certain that you research all of the options out here. The best option would be to employ a service that is more reputable (such as the National Scouting Report or InBounds College Athletic Referral), even if that means spending a bit more money. Attached at the end of this report is a recruiting checklist that can also be of help to you in knowing when and how to pursue your options.

Narrowing Your List

As was discussed earlier, selecting a college from the almost limitless number of options can often seem daunting. However, there are a number of basic questions (in several different areas) that can help you determine which college is the right fit for you, both academically and athletically. By considering and seeking the answers to these questions, you can significantly narrow down your list of colleges. After you've

narrowed your list down to about ten colleges, it is smart to start asking more specific questions (both of the coach and the school in general). As a result, the answer to these questions can serve as a huge asset in determining the final two or three schools that you are considering attending.

Area One: Athletics

1. What position will I play on the team?

This is an important question often overlooked by many athletes and their parents. Though a softball player may have a position that she is most comfortable with and feels she is best in, that may not fit in with the needs of the particular college program. It is not uncommon for a player's position to change in the transition from high school to college. As a result, it is better to address this up front with the college coach. Even if you are willing and open to being moved from your typical position, it is best to learn the intentions of the coach before making any commitments. For example, if you are a talented second baseman and decide to meet with a coach representing a program that already has an All-American second baseman on his or her roster, chances are that you will not have much opportunity to see playing time as the second baseman on that team (particularly not right away). However, this doesn't mean that the coach wouldn't be able to use you in some other capacity or position, but it does mean that you would be moved out of your ideal position. For many athletes, this change is acceptable, but if you are not alright with shifting positions, you will certainly want to know beforehand that a change in position is included in the coach's plans for you.

2. What type of expectations do you (the coach) have regarding training and conditioning?

While this may not necessarily seem like an obvious and important question, the answer could provide you with vital information about the commitment that will be required to be a part of the team and the commitment of the coach and team to bettering the program in general. Most Division I schools adhere to a rigid and thorough training and conditioning schedule, but many do so to varying degrees. The answer to this question should help you to formulate realistic expectations about the demands that competing will make on your time and on your body.

3. Will I be red-shirted my freshman year?

Many programs have policies regarding the red-shirting of incoming freshman. You definitely want to find out if the coach has any such policies, and find out under what circumstances they might ask you to red-shirt your first year out.

4. How many walk-ons do you typically accept? And how many scholarships do you have available?

These questions will give you a general idea of what you're up against. For example, you will stand a better chance of having playing time on a team that doesn't allow walk-ons and perhaps has five available scholarships that year than you would on a team that usually accepts walk-ons and only has two available scholarships for the year you begin school. Though most coaches will not be eager to give you specifics (they like to keep their options as open as possible), try and gather the best information

you can from this. The last thing you want to do is sign a letter of intent with a school that has no real money or playing time to offer.

Area Two: Academics

1. What type of academic scholarships am I eligible to receive?

This question is of the utmost importance. Each and every college is different and offers a variety of scholarships for academic achievement. Many offer scholarships based on your cumulative high school GPA. Others offer it based on your score on standardized tests, such as the ACT or SAT. As a result, it is important to research exactly what types of academic scholarships you will be eligible for at the prospective school of your choice. The answer to this question may also play a significant role in allowing you the freedom to accept less money from a softball scholarship (because the rest has been offset through an academic scholarship) and play on a team you may not otherwise have been able to be a part of. For example, if the coach of one of your top schools is only able to offer you a half scholarship, you may be more hesitant to attend. However, if you find that you qualify for a half academic scholarship as well, you can still attend the top school of your choice without paying more tuition out of your own pocket.

2. How many hours should I take while in season? While out of season?

The answer to these questions will help you determine how long your particular program typically takes to complete. Once again, ultimately the choice of college is yours, based on the school that meets the most of your needs. So, you may want to pick a college where the athletic commitment is such that it allows you take an increased number of hours to graduate on time. On the other hand, if you really want to

participate in a particular softball program, spending an extra semester in school may be worth it to you. Along those same lines, make sure to ask the coach what the policy is on students who take more than four years to graduate. Many student athletes will need to go an extra semester, or even an extra year, beyond their four years of eligibility. As a result, it is important to fully understand the coach's and the school's policy on financing tuition past that point of eligibility.

3. How good is the department in my major?

The time you spend in college will help shape the rest of your life, through your participation in sports, in social activities, and most importantly, in academics. The time you spend studying and learning in college will help prepare you for your chosen field. As a result, it is imperative that you choose a school that offers a strong department in the major you have chosen. If you have not yet determined a specific field, try and think about what you might generally be interested in and go from there. For example, if you are interested primarily in English, but are unsure of what specific field you'd like to pursue, you will most likely want to pick a school that has a strong English department.

Area Three: College Life

1. Where do student athletes typically live?

Do student athletes typically live in the dorms? Or do they tend to move off campus? The question of living arrangements will often play a significant role in the decision of where to attend college. Sometimes living expenses (at least basic lodging) is covered under scholarships. Other times, the student is responsible for fielding all

living costs. It is important to ask the coach these questions and if possible, to tour the facilities yourself.

2. What is a typical day for a student athlete?

The answer to this question can help paint a picture of what your life might be like if you attended the college. As a result, you will be able to get a rough idea of whether the projected schedule meets your needs and desires. Also, it will help you determine where and how your time will be divided; how much time will be devoted to practice, how much time will be devoted to studying, etc.

When it comes to choosing a college, the task can often seem overwhelming. This is particularly true for young women who are seeking to participate in NCAA softball as part of their college experience. Though it seems daunting, understanding the rules and procedures is vital in choosing the right school. Having a clear grasp of what questions should be asked and what requirements the NCAA has mandated can help eliminate confusion and worry. Understanding the requirements can then free up the student's attention to focusing on what's truly important to them – participating in a sport they love while getting a quality education that will properly prepare them for the future.

Recruiting Checklist

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Compose your initial list of schools that you are interested in. Remember to keep in mind influencing factors, such as how close to home you want to be during school.

- Decide what level you want to compete on (NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA). At this point, it's okay to have schools on your list from multiple divisions, just make sure to be realistic.
- Write letters to softball coaches.
- Start to develop your recruiting video. It is wise to do this at the end of your sophomore year or beginning of your junior year.

JUNIOR YEAR

- Finalize your recruiting video and begin submitting it to various coaches.
- Make sure that the courses you are taking in high school are going to be sufficient to guarantee your eligibility. Checking with a guidance counselor can be valuable at this time.
- Take the ACT or SAT tests.
- Register with the NCAA Eligibility Clearinghouse.
- Start to think about what course of study you would like to pursue during college. This decision can help you cut some of your potential schools off the list.
- Respond to any softball questionnaires that softball coaches have sent you.

SENIOR YEAR

- Follow up on your eligibility with the NCAA Eligibility Clearinghouse.
- Retake your SAT or ACT if you want to improve your first scores.
- Start collecting college applications, making sure to be aware of deadlines.

- Let coaches know when you have applied for admission at their institution.
- Narrow your college choices down to about five or six.
- Decide which colleges to visit and then make the necessary arrangements with the coach and other admissions advisors.

For More Information

For more information about recruiting procedures and eligibility guidelines check out some of these helpful sites.

- www.ncaa.org – This is the official site of the NCAA and contains almost any information imaginable on competing as an NCAA athlete, including recruiting procedures, eligibility requirements, and top schools.
- www.naia.org – This is the official site of the NAIA. Like the NCAA site, it offers information on everything ranging from top softball schools to recruiting and eligibility stipulations.
- www.njcaa.org – The junior college association's site offers much of the same information as the NCAA and NAIA sites, just geared towards those interested in competing on the junior college level.
- www.nfca.org – Though this is the site of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association, it also holds valuable information for students and their parents, including a section dedicated to various scholarship opportunities.
- www.acenet.edu – This is the site for the American Council on Education, which offers an in-depth look at ways to make college possible – from how to choose the right college to navigating the admissions process

- www.fastpitchusa.com – This site corresponds with Fastpitch magazine and offers numerous articles and columns on all things softball – including how to choose the right college to play at.



Are You Struggling to Achieve Your Full Potential?

Is Your Team Underperforming?

Does Your Game Need a Boost?

If so, visit us at www.softballperformance.com and discover how we can help you boost your game quickly and easily!