



Moving forward: some recruiting advice for HS Juniors class of 2021 from a college coach

“Well...Now what?” is a statement that has been shared a **LOT** in the last three weeks within our sport of track & field and really, all of the sports world. You have most undoubtedly heard a ton of heartbreaking stories about your senior teammates having their final season pulled out from under them, many who will probably not compete in this sport on a competitive level again. However, the sense of loss that is felt does not discriminate.

We all feel it. Seniors, College track & field student-athletes, Coaches, everyone. Including you Juniors. And that is who I want to share a bit of advice with in this “letter”. My goal is to hopefully give you some motivation to help pick you up off that couch and get you moving forward again, especially those of you that have dreams and intentions for competing at the collegiate level after next year. Also remember that there are a lot more opportunities to continue competing in our sport in college than you think! Just because you might not be a perennial state podium placer and scholarship level athlete, does not mean there is not a college program here in GA or another state that would not love to have you on their team!

One of the more often used coaching phrases us coaches use is to “**Control the controllables.**” Do not spend your time focusing on the things you do not have control over and keep you from working on the things you do. This is most definitely one of those times! In a time where everything feels like it is happening **TO** you, make a list of the things **YOU** are making happen. For example--continuing to run (not in groups!), workout, lift, learn more about your event by reading/watching videos, getting better grades (more on that later), sleeping and eating habits, and owning your own recruiting process to name a few.

Normally, what happens during this time of the year for you Juniors as it relates to the recruiting process generally follows this timeline for most college divisions. Most college programs have sent an initial interest letter to you juniors if your PR’s (usually from your sophomore year) meet the standard they are looking for. This is especially true for you distance runners as us college coaches had at least your junior XC season to evaluate. For you Sprinters, Throwers, Jumpers, and Hurlers, you may not get that letter until Fall.

Some colleges might not have sent them knowing they would be sitting in an empty school office right now. The letter is usually based on your PR’s from Milesplit or from recommendations and personal interactions we have with your HS coach. While it is true that not having your junior track season to improve on your times/marks makes things a little tougher, it is not a deal breaker. Most of us college coaches have been doing this long enough to be able to see progressions in your seasons, growth rates, consistencies, etc. We get it. Remember that we lost our seasons too and know what you are going through. Below are some key opportunities that are **IN YOUR CONTROL** as to relates to you owning your recruiting process.

- **Do some homework on potential colleges.**

Find out the difference between the different NCAA Divisions, NAIA, and NJCAA. Do my times fit with their level at the conference and national level? Would my current academic success gain admission at that school? Do they have both XC and Track or are they XC only? Do they have the major(s) I'm interested in? How far from home are they? What else do they have to offer? Are they the most beautiful and largest college campus in America like Berry College? (Sorry, shameless plug. Lol)

Check out websites like: <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future> and <https://www.ncsasports.org/mens-track-and-field>

- **Take virtual visits to colleges you like.**

Initial campus visits usually take place during this time of the year but with most college campuses closed for the semester, that makes things more of a challenge as well. The NCAA D1 and D2 schools (Not D3) have a recruiting Dead Period in effect till at least April 15th which means no on or off campus in-person contact or visits. Since this is something that is “out of your control”, own the thing that is “in your control.” Take an online video tour of the campus. Most colleges have video tours on YouTube or one their websites. Spend more time getting to know about the school through their website or their T&F/XC social media pages, etc. At our school, we have even been setting up personal video walking tours and talks with our recruits so they can see campus and interact with us coaches.

- **FILL OUT THOSE QUESTIONNAIRES!**

You know, the ones we ask you to fill out in the letters we send. This is also something that does not require any interest from us or waiting to get a letter. Most colleges have a link to their recruiting questionnaire on their track & field and/or XC homepage from their college athletic website. **Fill out the form and fill it out COMPLETELY.** Be honest with your PR's (we all have access to them). If they do not match what is on Milesplit or differ significantly, most college coaches will think you are lying and that will be a deal breaker. Also do not use “splits.” Same goes for your GPA and test scores. Do not leave the academic section blank. The first thing we think of when we see a recruit who does not list their GPA is that they are trying to hide it and we assume it is bad. Be honest! Because of recent developments and with SAT and ACT testing dates being canceled, just let us know that. Fill out the questionnaire anyways and update us later with the test scores.

- **Send an email to the Head Coach.**

Like many others, we have quite a bit more “free” time now than ever before so this is a good time to make that effort. Make it personable. Include at the very least, your full name, high school, GPA and test scores, PR's, HS coaches contact info, AND why you are reaching out to them/their school specifically. Tell me why you think you would be a good fit at my school and what it is we have to offer that you like. It shows you did some research

and you are taking initiative. I would rather get an email directly from you than your HS coach or parent.

- **Plan for a little more hectic fall.**

Because some of you will have to now take the test in the fall, it might make your schedules a little more crammed. Especially the XC runners. On top of that will be unofficial and official visits. Most of these will take place on the weekends. What else happens on the weekends besides the SAT/ACT? XC invites. Make sure to come up with a plan with your HS coach about what invites are ok to miss and which ones are non-negotiable.

- **Your GPA is the most important controllable.**

For every \$1 in athletic aid out there, there is over \$1,000 of academic scholarship aid. Remember that there are only about 12 scholarships for NCAA D1 men's programs (for a roster of 40 guys) and D3 has no athletic aid. It is a much more wise investment to focus on your academics, than it is your athletic ability. Even though the challenge of taking your classes online right now might not be your idea of best case scenario, put just as much time into your school work as you would if you were in school. Your 3rd and 4th Qtr GPA this spring carries just as much weight as your 1st and 2nd Qtr GPA from your 9th grade year. The higher your GPA and test scores are, the more affordable your college experience will be. What if you competed and trained just as hard and intentional for your grades as you did for your event? Compete in the classroom the next 7 weeks!

One of the biggest “take-aways” from this challenge we are all experiencing and “controllables” is how will you respond to this experience? What would you give for the opportunity to just practice with your team right now? What do you think your senior teammates would give for just one more meet? What about the opportunity to go on that long run with your teammates? Or the chance to lift in a weight room with the other throwers? Going forward, will you still view workouts (even the horrible 400m ones) or practices as a “have to” instead of a “get to”?

As a guy who was your age during the 80's big hair bands, I think back to the hard rock ballad by Cinderella “Don't know what you got til its gone...” Maybe a better, more relatable example would be Eminem's “Lose Yourself”. Either way, make an effort to grow from this challenge and go back to focusing on the things in your life that are most important.

Good luck and remember to take charge of your recruiting, Juniors!

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2005-2010, Coach Syverson was the XC/Track & Field Coach and Athletic Director at Mount Rainier Lutheran HS in Tacoma, WA. Syverson is a former D1 long and triple jumper at Washington State University and graduated from Kamiakin High School in Kennewick, WA.