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## Lafayette's College Advisor The College Advisor's Role in Counseling College-Bound Athletes

By Elizabeth LaScala



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College admissions can be complicated for everyone, but for college-bound athletes the process is often especially intimidating. College counselors can assist these students by preparing and guiding them through the recruiting process. But even when the signs all point in the direction of successful recruitment, that doesn't mean it will happen. Counselors can't guarantee admission offers. They can show you how to examine your options, narrow down opportunities, get on the coaches' radar. They can help you assure a balanced set of prospects for your education. But things still may not work out exactly the way the student hopes. Just like any other admissions outcome, you can only control what is directly under your control.

Although I could fill a book with the exceptions, there are still some common rules of the admissions game. Here are some general guidelines that get you going in the right direction:

**Set Your Priorities.** There are college athletic consultants that place a primary emphasis on the athletic recruitment process. From my viewpoint, though, you should always put academics first. Very few athletes in college continue as professional athletes. Instead, they go on to a career they prepare for in college. This fact should inform the choices you make now. Here's an example: Let's say a nationally recognized water polo athlete knew he wanted to major in engineering. This goal, along with a strong desire to pursue his sport, was the primary motivation that drove his college list. Now imagine that his athletic skills are so strong that Harvard, Cornell and MIT all reach out to him. The athlete may forgo his opportunity to go to Harvard, with a relatively weak engineering program, in order to ensure that he is accepted at a college with the best engineering training he can obtain. This example makes an important point. Who would ever turn down a chance to go to Harvard? The student who opted to consider his options carefully in terms of academic and career goals weighed against athletic opportunities.

**Protect Your GPA.** Many college-bound athletes have been putting a priority on grades since their early years in school. They are often hard working students with a good work ethic. With that in mind, college coaches like high achievers for many reasons, but one of the most important is that they don't have to plead with the admissions office for admission. All coaches prefer not to have to worry about this aspect of the recruitment process. The message here: study hard and keep up your grades.

**Get Started Early.** Students who are considering collegiate sports need to be ahead of the curve. They should start getting informed by the end of the sophomore year and register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; [www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org)) early in their junior year. There is an excellent NCAA guide that explains the procedures you must follow. A college advisor can add clarity to these procedures, especially those surrounding unofficial and official visits, and other sticky issues for prospective athletes.

You must initiate the recruitment process. Some coaches have athletes on their radar years before they apply, but that is actually rare. Don't wait to be contacted. Put together a packet of materials to send to coaches. This should include an athletic resume with a photo, high school transcript, a schedule of upcoming games or competitions and a letter from your high school coach. Introduce yourself in a brief email, expressing interest in the sports program and academic offerings. Include bullets emphasizing your most prestigious, recent athletic accomplishments. Many smaller and/or less prestigious schools would welcome a top athlete, but lack the budget to recruit.

**The Parents' Role.** I think it is okay for a parent to help out with the workload during this process. For example, the parent can send out the material packet along with the email the student writes to each coach. It's perfectly all right to ask the coach if he or she had a chance to look at the package and ask a simple "So what do

you think?" That's about as far as a parent should go at this point. Let the athlete's resume speak for the athlete. As the student begins to narrow down the options, they should take the lead completely. You should stay informed, even be involved in a conference call, but try to say as little as possible.

Keep Your Eye on The Ball. Try not to get wound up over every twist and turn. Some coaches lead on athletes, then go cold and later make offers. Some athletes lead on coaches and then drop the college. This can be very hard on students and parents, coaches and colleges. Stay focused on the objective: getting one or more offers of admission to a college where you can spend four happy and productive years pursuing your major of interest and participating in the sport you love. If you get your heart set on just one school and that is the only school that will do, you may find your heart is broken.

Just like students who are pursuing the regular admission process, my best advice is to remain open to the possibilities, visit colleges, and apply to a well-researched list of schools that includes the whole range of selectivity; each one should be a school you would love to attend.

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