



# So You Want to Continue Playing Soccer in College?

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You don't have to make the Olympic Development Program or be an all-star selection to play on a college team ... if you are realistic about yourself and the colleges you want to attend. There are hundreds of college soccer teams and lots of kids playing college soccer who were simply solid high school players - not stars.

Your first priority must be finding colleges which will provide you with the education you want and need. But unless your educational requirements limit your choices to just a few schools, if you were good enough to play soccer on a premier level club team and start on your high school varsity as a sophomore or junior, you can probably find a college soccer program where you can play.

One word of caution here - stay away from the "pay-me-first" recruiters that are out there making promises to kids that they have no intention or possibility of fulfilling. Their sales pitches may sound good on the surface but doubtless will only leave you hurting and poor.

There are a few things you should consider before deciding to play college soccer:

- The life of a college player is very regimented. That is you get up early, go to work out, go to class, go to practice, go to study hall, go to bed, and then start over. There is time for "college life" but not nearly so much as a normal student.
- You must be prepared to sit the bench. This is probably the most difficult transition that a star high school player can make. Unless you are lucky enough to go to a team that has no one else to play your position, you are going to have to bump someone out of their position in order to play your freshman year and that is very hard to do. The older players are going to get first shot at their positions and if they are good you may not get a shot until they graduate. That is why it is really important to look for a team that NEEDS someone at your position.
- College ball will be a big transition. Many kids are not able to handle it. And it is not for everybody.

Now, if you're still interested here's a roadmap to help you find your way to that college team of your dreams:

## **Freshman/Sophomore Years**

- Get your grades up. They must be 2.0 or better in solid college prep curriculum. Do some academic planning, making sure you take all of the right college prep courses and get prepared for the SATs. Take any Advanced Placement (AP) courses you can handle.
- Find a good club team & play year round
- Aim at making high school varsity as a sophomore
- Try out for ODP - the Olympic Development Program ... but, don't worry if you don't make it.
- In the tenth and eleventh grade get somebody to shoot video footage of you in games. This will go in your packages you send out to coaches.

## **Junior Year (The Most Important Year)**

- Make sure your grades are good, somewhere between 2.5 and 3.5 will get you in most schools.
- Take the PSAT as soon as possible. Take the SAT and ACT also, if possible.
- Start on the high school varsity
- Make the best club team you can - one where other D1 - (Division 1) prospects are playing is preferred.
- Make the best travel team you can - one where other NCAA D1 - (Division 1) prospects are playing is preferred. You can only prepare for college ball by playing against the best competition you can find. A very fast speed of play and a very physical style of play are the hallmarks of college soccer. You won't generally find that in local competition. Seek out the best competition you can find.
- Play year-round on as many teams as you have time for.
- Begin studying colleges for educational interests and soccer program.
- Develop a list of 50-75 schools that serve your educational needs - where you could play.
- Have somebody shoot video footage of you in games.
- Prepare a package documenting your educational and soccer qualifications. Include the video footage.
- Send your package to each head soccer coach on your list.

## **Spring of Junior Year/Summer Before Senior Year**

- Take the SAT and ACT if you have not already done so. When you sign up for the ACT or SAT use code 9999 to have your scores sent directly to the NCAA Clearinghouse.
- Register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. You must pass certain high school core courses and score a minimum score on either the SAT or ACT test in order to be certified to participate in NCAA Division I or II athletics as a college freshman. This must be done in the month of May in their Junior year. The fee to register is \$27 and the booklets with the form inside are available in most high school guidance offices. Your counselors can obtain registration materials, at no cost, by calling the clearinghouse at 319/337-1492. A list of instructions, questions and answers and approved core courses is on-line at NCAA Clearinghouse. If you have particular questions about the NCAA Clearinghouse, please write to: NCAA Clearinghouse, P. O. Box 4044, Iowa City, IA 52243-4044.
- Keep a list of all the college soccer coaches who respond to your package.
- Keep notes on your conversations with coaches, if any.
- No response from a top choice? Resend your material
- Make unofficial, unannounced visits to 10-12 schools you are most interested in.
- Keep playing on as many good teams as you can.
- Division 1 prospects - make the ODP pool team if you can.
- Find out your high school schedule; send it and test results to college coaches.
- Narrow list of top choices down to maximum of 10-15 schools.
- Follow all of the NCAA's recruitment rules.

#### **During Senior Year Season**

- Set goal to improve your GPA.
- Be a varsity impact player - starter for sure, captain, all-league or all-star, etc.
- See as many of the college teams you like play as you can - meet coaches. Decide if there are coaches you like ... and coaches you don't like. It is important that you get a feel for the coaching techniques of the coaching staff. The coach is going to be a different person from the one you see when she/he is recruiting you and you need to know that you can handle her/his coaching methods. Talk to players, watch games, and try to read between the lines. Remember, college ball is going to be different from high school - they have to win to keep their jobs so there is going to be a lot of pressure on them (and correspondingly you) to perform.
- Analyze the style of play of the college teams - where would you fit in?
- Decide if there are coaches you like ... and coaches you don't like.
- Which schools did you like? big, little, rural, city, etc. which programs?

#### **After Senior Season**

- Pick 5-7 schools, send applications.
- Send senior season package to college coaches where you have applied.
- Keep in touch with admissions departments and college soccer coaches.
- After January 1st, fill out all financial aid documents.
- Continue to follow up with admissions offices, financial office & coaches until decisions are made.
- Review any new possibilities that present themselves (sudden interest from a different coach, etc.)
- Review all offers of admission and financial aid.
- Revisit or make formal visits to 3 schools you are most interested in.
- Pick the school with the best combination: education, financial aid, right soccer program for you.
- For a club, I suggest that you collect all the packages prepared by the players (their resumes and educational summaries) and put them into book which you can have available at tournaments and showcase events in case a college coach scouts your team.

I am going to add this note of advice from another coach, Jim MacQueen. "Another dark secret of college soccer: From the moment they get a kid to sign on the dotted line, they are looking for someone to replace him. Why? Well, since college programs only have limited financial aid and scholarships to work with, recruiting usually does not come down to money. It usually focuses on playing time as a freshman, and in some cases, on playing a certain position.

Now think about that...if you have to promise playing time to freshmen to get them to come to your school, what is going to happen to the upper class player who started in that position the year before?

Some of the greatest players to come out of our area have only played for one or two years in college before some other freshman came into the program and took their spot. In my humble opinion, a player has to really be a team anchor, and avoid injury, to play college ball for four years."

My own ideas about Jim's thoughts about this are that most colleges are not known for progressing the skills of players they recruit. Because the NCAA limits the amount of time a player can train and that coaches can coach - college soccer players at many schools are at their best physically when they report to school their freshman year after playing year-round soccer (club, ODP, high school). In one or two years of part time training they are likely to lose their own starting jobs to new in-coming freshman.