

# Nine Big Mistakes That Will Keep You Out Of College Sports

There is no magic formula that can guarantee the student-athlete's automatic selection to a college sports program. However, there are a number of common pitfalls that can cost them the chance to play a college sport. Avoid these mistakes and you will already be ahead of the pack.

## 1. Underestimating academics

Student-athletes who do both their academic and athletic homework have the most success in getting college coaches to give them a chance. Coaches are more inclined to select players who seem to value the academic as well as the athletic programs available at their schools. Very few coaches are even remotely interested in athletes who are just fishing around for a place to participate without looking into the total experience that their college offers.

## 2. Unrealistic expectations

The main reason that many good athletes never get a chance to compete in college is their own unrealistic perceptions of their ability. It is also sad but true that athletes are too often sabotaged by well-meaning parents or club/high school coaches who foster inflated expectations. Unrealistic dreams often lead athletes to severely and unwisely limit their options by refusing to consider anything but the most highly visible, nationally ranked programs. These programs have many athletes competing for a chance to play. For example, Creighton University's nationally ranked men's soccer team processes over 1,000 letters a year from would-be players. In a normal year, they will receive over 700 telephone requests for information. The competition for the few positions open on the squad is intense.

## 3. Parental over-involvement

If a coach is interested, he/she usually prefers to communicate with the prospective player and not parents or others during most of the recruiting process. If a player is recruited to a college, he/she is going to have to be able to communicate with the coach. College sports are not like youth sports which foster personal interaction between coaches and parents. College coaches view students as young adults. While they are more than willing to communicate with parents about legitimate concerns regarding their children, they are very wary of the parent who makes her/himself a nuisance before the athlete is even offered a position. Many a coach has said, "I would have recruited the kid, if it weren't for his parents."

## 4. Burning bridges

With the exception of those sports that feature timed or distance events, there is no universally accepted or objective standard to judge the performance of young athletes. During the recruiting process, it is the college coach's *perception* of an athlete's ability that counts. As strange as it may seem, a top recruit at one college may be considered a reject another school.

College coaches often communicate with each other. It is not unusual for them to discuss the new crop of hopefuls. Publicly venting disappointment will not help anyone and will give the athlete a very bad reputation on the recruiting circuit.

Although it may be hard and unpleasant, it is helpful if a player can ask the coach, who has communicated that there will be no spot available, what can be done to improve and what other college programs the coach might recommend. Some coaches will give helpful responses and some will not, but the athlete has nothing to lose--and possibly some helpful assistance to gain--by asking.

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