

# College Entrance Exams - Making the Right Moves

Fall is the time for the serious high school student-athlete to plan a strategy for taking college entrance exams. Entrance exams are used as one of the admissions criteria by most college admissions offices. Many students put off thinking about these exams until May of their junior year or fall of the senior year. But, a student-athlete who wants to play college sports cannot afford to wait that long to begin to think about the testing process.

Student athletes need to be aware of four tests: the SAT, the ACT, the PSAT and the PLAN. Last year, nearly 6 million students took the SAT and 1.3 million took the ACT. Traditionally, the ACT has been a Midwestern test accepted by most Midwestern schools while the SAT was required by the rest, especially by ivy league or other highly selective academic schools. In recent years, this distinction between the SAT and ACT has blurred. A majority of the schools now accept either SAT or ACT scores. This can work to a student's advantage because some students consistently get better results on one test or the other. To prepare for the SAT and ACT, preliminary tests called the PSAT and the PLAN should be taken during the sophomore year to give students a predictive score for the actual ACT or SAT. These predictive tests are especially helpful because they give families an idea of what college academic level a student should be considering.

It is a fact that college athletes cannot play unless they are academically eligible. Most college athletic programs are governed by organizations like the NCAA or the NAIA that have established academic eligibility rules for athletes at member schools. In addition to these minimum standards, some colleges have their own, more rigorous academic requirements. Taking the PSAT or PLAN or both is a MUST for would-be college athletes. If a problem does surface during the sophomore year, the student athlete will have plenty of time to work on improving his/her scores. Of all the criteria for college admissions, the college entrance exam scores are the easiest to improve. High school counselors, independent academic advisors or programs like KAPLAN Testing or the Sylvan Learning Center can help students better their test taking skills. If you have a problem, sign up to work with a local program that has shown results in helping students improve their SAT and ACT scores.

Take the PSAT or PLAN again early in your junior year to see if you have shown any improvement. Some colleges pay generous academic scholarships based on nothing more than a student's SAT or ACT scores, so even student athletes with relatively high scores may want to try to raise them in order to fall into the academic scholarship range. Athletic scholarships are great. But, most are given for only one year at a time and must be renewed annually. In contrast, the majority of academic scholarships are given for four years providing a student maintains a certain grade point during college. Keep in mind that the PSAT is given twice in October and that is all. If you miss it, there will be no other chance to take it during the year. Juniors planning to try for the National Merit Scholarship should be aware that scholarship winners are selected from junior students on the basis of October PSAT results. Juniors who miss the October PSAT will not be eligible for the National Merit Scholarship program. Sign up for these tests through your local high school guidance office. Remember that high school guidance counselors work with more non-athletes than athletes and may not realize how helpful it is for athletes to take their predictive tests in their sophomore year. It is not unusual for high school counselors who are unfamiliar with the college athletic recruiting process to suggest that students really don't need to take the PSAT if they aren't on a National Merit academic level. Since many students dread the thought of taking these tests, they cheerfully accept the counselor's advice and decide not to take the tests. This is not a good idea. Be firm and polite with school officials but sign up for one of the tests. If the tests are not being given at your school, check around and arrange to take them at

[over]

CollegeInfo

Kent & Ramona Barber 1001 Woodland Pk. Dr. W. Des Moines, IA 50266 (515) 223-0987

© Copyright 2001