

College Soccer:

Advice from College Soccer Perrone Ford

As a coach of both college and older age group youth teams, I am often asked by parents and player how to best get seen by college coaches and how to win scholarships. I thought I might share with the list a posting I wrote for them as it might help your players.

This past weekend, I had my first official college recruiting trip. I went to the CASL (Raleigh) Shootout. For those of you who have been, you know what kind of event this is, but for those of you who have never attended such an event, I will tell you that it is something that will change your life as a soccer player.

I thought I might offer some words of advice to those of you seeking wisdom on how to make yourself more presentable to college coaches, and how to help yourself get a college scholarship.

- **Be realistic.**
You need to have very realistic impressions of how good a player you are, and what your chances are of playing in college. Those of you who are playing on TOP soccer teams generally know you are. Here I am talking about Colorado Rush, San Diego Surf, Texas Challenge, Ohio Premier, Busch SC, etc. The opportunity for you to realize your dreams of playing at a very high college level are quite good, but certainly not guaranteed. Those playing for smaller or less strong clubs really are going to have to take a hard look at where you want to play.
- **Focus on your education.**
The number of female soccer players who earn a living after college in the sport is incredibly small. This means that when you graduate, you will need to have a good education. Select a school where you can do well. If you go to a high school that is in a small town and has 15 people in a class, don't assume that if you go to a large school like Ohio State or Florida state, and you have 500 people in your freshman biology class, that you will do well. If you go to school in the northeast, is moving to the desert southwest REALLY a smart thing? Don't pick your school based on soccer alone.
- **Work at your grades and test scores.**
Believe it or not, college coaches will usually look at your GPA, class rank, and SAT/ACT scores before they watch you play. The better your grades, and the better your test scores, the more attractive you are to most college coaches. This doesn't mean you need to be on the Dean's list to get into your school (usually) but it means that the college coach will have to spend less money on your scholarship which greatly increases your chances of getting to play where you'd like to play.
- **Have a complete set of fundamentals before you ask a coach to come watch you.**
If you want to play striker at a large school, you need to be able to receive, turn and shoot under pressure and at match speed. With both feet. Your shots need to be on target and strong enough to beat a good goalkeeper. College coaches are not looking for players to sit the bench. They are looking for players who can come right out of high school and start. This is how teams get better. So when you watch UNC or Stanford, and you decide that is where you want to play, you must ask yourself honestly if you could step on that field and be better than at least 5-7 of the girls starting. If not, you need to get better, or choose another school where you will have a better chance.

- **Contact schools early.**
 When you are a Junior, and you begin selecting schools, send emails to the coaches at the schools you are interested in. This is especially important if the school is some distance away. Most colleges have very tight budgets and coaches must decide quite early who they are going to go see. Quite often coaches will recruit at a few specific tournaments and that will be all. They will generally go to the largest tournament in their home state, and 2-3 national tournaments like WAGS, Raleigh Shootout, Orange Classic, Dallas Cup, USA Cup, Surf Cup, etc. If you want to get seen by larger schools, you need to get yourself to these tournaments.
- **When you make your college profile, include your intended major AND the size of school you are interested in.**
 If you've decided that you don't want more than 20 kids in your classes with you, don't call up UF or Portland.
- **Don't be afraid of smaller schools.**
 If you are a good player, don't ignore smaller schools. Very often small schools will make very generous offers to strong players. Many players who would only get small scholarships at large schools and limited playing time, would often be able to attend school for free, or very cheaply. If you are a senior and an ODP state player or Region player, call a few small schools in your state and see what they have to offer. Quite often you'll find they will bend over backwards to have you, and the team will appreciate having you. Many smaller schools play larger schools anyway so the level of competition is often quite similar.
- **Keep your parents involved at every step.**
 The most important relationship in the life of a scholarship athlete is the one between your parents and the coach. When your parents and the coach have a good relationship, it usually benefits everyone. Your parents can talk to college coaches on your behalf (during the legal time periods), and can smooth the way for you to be able to play at the schools of your choice.
- **Be polite.**
 If you've written a school and you ask them to come see you play and they do, be thankful. Nothing turns off a college coach faster than having a player ignore or disregard them. You don't have to fawn all over the coach, but let them know you appreciate the effort they put into coming to see you. In my own case, I spent several hundred dollars (of my own money) to go watch 5 players. I left my home at 4am, worked 18 hours on Saturday, 8 hours Sunday, and got home at 11pm. Each player I spoke with was very polite and thankful. Those players may not come to my school, but I appreciated them listening to what I had to say and acting interested. Send thank you letters if a coach comes to see you. The coach will potentially spend tens of thousands of dollars on you. Let them know that you are willing to spend 35 cents on a letter to say thanks.
- **Be happy with what you get.**
 If you do your research and find out that a school is the right place for you to play then go there and enjoy it to the best of your ability. Don't go and be angry that you maybe didn't get into your first choice school. If you are a good player your teammates may resent you feeling that way because maybe that was their first choice. If your school doesn't have a shoe contract, or only buys uniforms every other year instead of every year like your club might, don't get angry. Be thankful and remember that there are over 20,000 girls every year who never even get selected by ANY college and never get to realize their dream of playing at the next level. If you find that you don't like the coach or you can't stand your

teammates, don't blame the coach. It's up to you to do the research on the school, spend time with the coach, meet some players, and ask the right questions before you accept the school offer.

- **FINISH SCHOOL.**

Even if you don't play soccer, you are there to get a degree. Do that much. If you have to transfer to another school to finish school, then do so, but make sure you finish school.

I hope this helps some of you out there who are looking to play at college, or parents if you are looking to help your kids get into college. If you have questions about this stuff email me privately, and I'll try to answer your questions honestly and openly. Please don't ask me about getting a scholarship to my school. I won't answer those questions. If you contact my school for an offer in a official way, I'll be more than glad to help out.

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