

From Ken Gamble:

Here's a letter I wrote to a player on my team about college. I've removed the name and specific details but the point is the same.

Dear player,

It's not that unusual for a Division I school to only have 2.1 scholarships for 25 players on the men's team. In fact, it's pretty standard that the men's program at a D1 school has a lot fewer scholarships than the girls' soccer teams because men's football uses up most of the boy's scholarships (85) and there is no girl's sport that requires anywhere near as many scholarships. Because of Title IX they have to have about the same number of scholarships for boys' as well as girls' sports. For that same reason there are more scholarships for boys' soccer at smaller schools where there is no football program. Many smaller D2 programs have more soccer money available for boys. And although Division III programs (usually private schools) don't offer athletic scholarships, they can usually provide enough academic money to pay for the higher tuition costs to good student athletes who have a 3.0 GPA or better.

If the player is a reasonably good student, most schools can provide scholastic scholarships to make up the difference AND those scholarships are available for four years if the student keeps up his grade average (usually require maintaining a B average) whereas athletic scholarships are renewable from year to year at the coach's discretion. If after a year, the college coach doesn't like a player or doesn't think he will help the team he can pull his athletic scholarship. For that reason academic scholarships and grades are very important. In my mind they're more important than the athletic scholarship.

Here's an example. Let's say that a player decides he wants to go to a school. If he contacts the coach early enough and expresses interest in the school and soccer program and the coach thinks he's worth it he will ask about the player's grades. The earlier that he gets to this point the better, because there is a limited amount of academic scholarship money available very early for "B" average high school students with a decent ACT score of say 27. Later in the year as the scholarship money is used up, the admissions office may have higher standards and only have money left for "A" or A+ average students with ACT scores of 31 or higher.

So the coach may only offer 1/4 or 1/3 of a full athletic scholarship - but he can offer academic scholarship money to make up the difference. The key is getting it early, before the academic money is gone. And as I said, academic money is usually good for as long as the student keeps up his grades. So if after a year at the school, the player realizes that he really doesn't want to play college soccer (or has a career ending injury or has a new coach) he can give up his athletic scholarship - BUT - he can keep his academic scholarships and continue his education at the school. That's the reason it's more important for boy athletes to have good grades than girl athletes. And that's also the reason that a player should pick out a school that he wants to attend even if he doesn't play soccer.

As far as recruiting goes - that varies widely from school to school. Coaches from Division I schools will attend only the very top tournaments. Other NAIA, Division II, and Division III teams don't have big recruiting budgets so they rely on foreign players, word-of-mouth, local players and players who contact them for their teams. Coaches hate wasting time on players who have no real intention on attending their school. So it's important that the player decide what kind of school he wants to attend (liberal arts, state university, engineering, pre-med, etc.) and then visit the school and the coach to let him know of his interest. College soccer camps are also great places to have the coach scout him, because it represents no cost to the school.

For his senior year I would recommend that the player join a Division I U18 or U19 team or guest

play with one that plays in the better tournaments if he wants to attend a D1 college. BUT, I also think it's much more important for him to contact the schools he wants to play and send the coach video highlights of his games and letters. You have to remember that he can have a great season, but a coach may only scout one of his tournament games. He could have an "off" game or a nagging injury or his teammates could play poorly and not get him the ball. It's a "crapshoot" to have a coach see only one or two games and form an opinion of his ability from those games. It's better to show the coach video and to also attend a camp at his school so he can see him in person and within the NCAA recruiting rules.

The most important thing is for the player to decide what kind of education he wants and what kind of school he wants to attend. There are lots of great Division II and Division III schools that he might fit in perfectly. I can put him in contact with some of the ones that fit what he wants out of a school. Let me know what I can do.

Thanks,

Ken Gamble