

7 Tips to a Highly Successful Recruiting Process

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The college soccer recruiting process can be intimidating and overwhelming to navigate. Having recruited at each level of college soccer (NCAA Division I, II, and III), I've noticed distinct differences from recruiting Minnesota players and those from other states. While I have no scientific evidence to support this position, peers of mine have expressed the same sentiment: many Minnesota players are too lackadaisical during the recruiting process and miss opportunities.

Below I've taken coaches' biggest complaints and transformed them into 7 tips that you can use to help guide your player through this period.

7 Tips to a Highly Successful Recruiting Process:

1 - Communication

The foundation to a positive relationship is strong communication and the recruiting process is just that- a relationship between your son or daughter and the coaching staff. While technology has changed the way coaches and players communicate, the biggest thing to remember is to respect the time each coach has taken to show interest in your player. Reply within 48 hours to a phone call, email or even a text. Every time, regardless of your interest in that program at the time. Interested or not, being a consistent communicator will set your player apart from the competition and shows maturity and care for the process. Note that coaches receive many emails a day from prospective students and aren't always able to reply quickly. Don't let this be a deterrent. Instead, tell your player to follow-up with the coach and take the opportunity to cement their interest in the school.

2 - Players Lead, Parents Support

Every college coach in our country is looking for leaders - people that they can trust for 4 years to not only be a part of their program, but to help guide it. What better example to show to a coaching staff than to be the one that is responsible for the communication from the very first email to the on-campus visit. Coaches want to hear from the players. Parents, help guide, encourage and suggest, but allow your player to be at the forefront of their search. If they are not confident socially or have a hard time engaging in conversation, have them begin preparing by getting a part-time job or volunteering where they are required to speak with others, including adults. Showing confidence and having poise is a great first impression.

3 - Branding Yourself

What would be the first 3 words your high school or club coach use to describe your player? Are they positive and would you hire them to work at a company based on these words? College coaches invest a lot of time over the course of 4 years into your player on and off the field. As you wouldn't hire someone without learning more about their past, coaches dedicate a fair amount of research on each player and the first question usually isn't, "Can he/she play at our level?" More often than not, it has to do with character, work ethic and being good teammate. Do they make positive decisions off the field? How do they speak to their parents and friends? I recently heard Brad Stevens present on the topic and as the Head Men's Basketball coach at Butler University, he used to ask high school and club coaches if a recruit "raised the energy when they walked into the room." Each coach has their own criteria, but making sure that your player's brand is a positive one will go a long way in this process.

4 - Go Watch!

Minnesota has every level of college soccer on the women's side from Junior College to NCAA Division I. The men's side is home to a very strong Division III conference and a number of Junior College programs that have developed players for each level of college soccer and beyond. While it is appropriate for kids to dream of the highest level, they should first start by watching and following local high level college soccer in their own backyard. This is the best place to evaluate the level, note the differences and to gauge where you might fit into the equation. Getting out and watching games is a great place to start your search, regardless of age.

5 - Focus on What Matters

Often I find parents getting wrapped up focusing too heavily on the wrong aspects of the college recruiting process. Should I invest in someone to make a highlight reel for my child? Do they have the right protein drink? Should I hire a personal trainer? Don't get me wrong, these are all worthy investments on some level, but they should not take precedence over working hard and working smart. Working hard means putting in the extra hours away from team training to improve. I find it ironic that many pay money for extra training, but the player never sticks around after training or arrives early to put in extra work. Don't be fooled, there is a lot of value in simply working individually or with a friend. Working smart means taking feedback from knowledgeable coaches and applying those changes to your development.

6 - Be Honest

If your player isn't a Division I scholarship athlete, that's perfectly normal as most are not. I've spent time at each level and a great college soccer experience happens at every level, all over the country. Coaches want to deliver a memorable, competitive and worthwhile experience. Be ambitious and encourage your child to reach for the highest level, but it shouldn't revolve around an "all or nothing" mentality. Search for the best fit and be open to hearing from each level.

7 - Research

Before you send a formulaic email to a coach explaining how badly you'd like to play for them, research the school and team to see if it has the potential to be a good fit. Utilize any resources (high school and club coaches) and get to know what makes the program tick. When you sit down to visit with the coach, you'll be able to speak intelligently about what makes their program unique and special. Showing a genuine interest will make it more enticing to stay in touch and keep you in the mix for a spot on the roster.