



32332 Camino Capistrano  
Suite 205  
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675

## THE BASICS OF PREPARING FOR COLLEGE SOCCER

For a talented soccer player, finding the right college can be an exciting experience. There are so many strong programs. Indeed, the number of quality college soccer teams, including those offering scholarships, seems to increase every year as the sport surges in popularity throughout the U.S. and more foreign players come to the country. With so many options, a family must carefully weigh which school is best for their child. That may mean combing through mounds of information, including brochures, guidebooks and Web sites focused on university admissions and college soccer.

This handbook will familiarize you with the college recruiting process and provide other helpful information. Use it to complement other resources. But also remember that finding the right school requires hard work. Moreover, it means using common sense and listening to your heart. If a place feels right, it probably is. That can make for an enjoyable and rewarding college experience.

### SHOULD YOU PLAY COLLEGE SOCCER?

If you are playing on a high level team, then most would think that you are bound to play college soccer. However, the commitment once you have made the team is similar to that of a part time job. Your job is to prepare and compete at a collegiate level. You'll be practicing more, not including optional training and conditioning sessions that aren't so optional. You may not be able select courses that meet during practice or you'll miss class when you travel to away matches. Indeed, in some conferences with schools spread over several states, travel to other schools can take hours. Crammed into a hotel room with two or three other players, you may also not be able to study. Academics, is after all, the primary purpose of attending college – at least for most people. But the rewards are undeniable. Consider that:

- Soccer can boost your chances of admission. Given two candidates with roughly equal grades, a school is more likely to favor an athlete. That may be especially helpful at academic powerhouses where competition for openings can be fierce.
- Most schools offer partial or full scholarships. If you receive one, you'll be able to afford college at a time when the cost of education is skyrocketing.
- You'll broaden your perspective. You'll meet people of many, different backgrounds; some of them may be teammates. In the course of a year, you'll learn from them in ways that cannot be matched through more casual contact.
- You'll learn life lessons. Sports offer a unique variety of experiences and the better the competition, the sharper those lessons become. You'll continue learning about such areas as teamwork, discipline and dealing with adversity.
- Athletes receive perks. Some schools offer athletes early registration for classes. Among other benefits are easy accesses to tutoring and first pick of dorm rooms.

## **CHOOSE THE COLLEGE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU**

Over the years, we have noticed that our players' biggest challenge is matching their academic aspirations with their athletic ability. For example, you may have a 4.5 GPA but don't possess the athletic ability to play at a Nationally ranked Division I program. Therefore, you'll have to consider whether the school will satisfy your academic needs? Does it have strong offerings in your potential major? On the playing front, do you relate to the coach? Chemistry can be everything in player-coach relationships. Some players have spent their first year at a college only to find out that their personality doesn't match that of the coaching staff's. They wind up unhappy, and in some instances, transferring or leaving the team. Are you likely to get along with the players? They may offer the best evidence of the type of program that you're going to join. We highly suggest that you trust your gut and use common sense. Finally, once you have begun your college journey, you must remember that you are representing your family and your club as a member of the team and university.

## **GETTING INTO THE COLLEGE OF YOUR CHOICE**

- At minimum, a 3.0 GPA is necessary along with the required classes for entry into a UC or Cal State school. College is after all primarily about education. Schools seek serious-minded students.
- Train and play each day as if you are being evaluated for a college program. Ensure that you're competing in the right events outside your club schedule. College coaches don't typically have the time to watch a league game; they're leading their own teams. But they do make a point of attending college showcase tournaments. Make these a priority in your playing schedule.
- Complete all administrative paperwork on time. Don't miss deadlines for filing applications and other documents and don't rely on others.
- Develop contact with potential coaches. Remember that life is built on relationships. Even casual conversations can create lasting bonds. If coaches know you, they're more likely to remember you when they're considering scores of potential recruits.
- Follow up on the contacts you make. We're not suggesting a hard sell. But persistence pays off. And by all means remember proper manners. Top recruiters in the business world favor candidates who greet them, look them in the eye and speak respectfully. As a college applicant, you're a candidate. Do the same as any wise job applicant would.
- Brush up on NCAA recruiting guidelines and dates. They occasionally change and it's your responsibility to stay current. You'll find all of the above at [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org). You may also order your free copy of the "Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete".

## **WHAT DOES THE PLAYER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COLLEGE, COACH, TEAM AND SCHOLARSHIP OPTIONS?**

### **College**

- Does the college have your choice of interests or majors? Additionally, does the college have a strong networking system to assist graduates with obtaining a job?
- Does the college have a state of art student union? More and more, students are looking to recreate at the student union.
- Are athletes given preference in scheduling? It's convenient not having to wait in line for classes.
- Where is the college located? Some athletes perform poorly in colder climates or prefer a location closer to home. Others see college as an opportunity to explore new terrain.

- Class size. Does the school have large lecture halls or small classes with close ties to their professors?
- Does the college operate on a quarter or semester system?
- Is tutoring offered to student-athletes? Is there a fee? Is there a mandatory study schedule for athletes? Some student athletes bristle at the thought that they'll have to study at a required time; they're self starters. Are there mandatory or optional religion classes at the college?

### **Soccer Coach and Team**

- Study the conference of your top 10 college list. This is an impressive attribute of the player who demonstrates knowledge about the conference of the school that he or she desires to attend. The Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big Ten and Pacific Ten are perennial powerhouses. But teams from smaller conferences have frequently ranked among the nation's best teams.
- What are the coach's goals for the team? Make sure they dovetail with your own ambition.
- What is the team's style of play? Clearly, you don't want to play for a possession team if you're more comfortable counterattacking.
- How many players will be on the roster and how many will travel with the team? Most college teams today carry a roster of 25+. On a team with talent to spare, you may spend most of your time on the bench. It's better to play the games.
- How many trips are planned for the coming season?
- What are the pre-season and post-season schedules?
- How often is practice during the season, and post-season? Some coaches work their charges harder than others. Others may see a greater value in down time when players can get away from soccer. See what meshes with your philosophy.
- How many seniors have left? How many red-shirt players – older players who have skipped a season because of injuries or other reasons? On a team with many juniors, seniors and red-shirt players, you may have to wait a couple of years before you have the opportunity to play much.
- What position is the player being recruited for and how many others are already playing there or are being recruited? Some players relish the competition, secure in their ability to outshine teammates who play the same position. Others prefer guaranteed playing time.
- What type of medical or physical therapy treatment is offered to the athletes?

### **Scholarship Concerns**

- If a school doesn't offer a scholarship, will playing on the soccer team offer you a better chance of being accepted?
- If you are offered a scholarship, what expenses does the scholarship cover? What is the duration of the scholarship, and how can it be terminated?
- If you're injured and can't play, will you lose the scholarship?

### **COMMUNICATION**

Make sure that you do the communicating and not your parents. Take notes on the people that you talk to from the college. The more people you talk to, the better understanding you will have of the college.

Complete all forms and return them promptly. It will demonstrate that you're serious-minded and conscientious. Besides if your paperwork is incomplete, schools may not be able to consider your application. Return all calls and emails promptly.

Demonstrate to the college coach that you are enthusiastic about attending their school and that you are responsible enough to handle the recruiting/admissions process. Coaches favor players who have expressed serious interest in their school. Don't waste your time or theirs by pursuing schools in which you have marginal interest. Act decisively and you'll streamline your search. You'll be able to focus more tightly on what's important. Lastly, when you have made your decision on what college you will attend, CALL each coach that you have been in contact with and thank them for their time and inform them of your decision.

## **CLUB, ODP, HIGH SCHOOL AND CAMPS**

Club and high school teams, Olympic Development Programs and soccer camps all play important roles in recruiting. Club play is essential and is the platform for college showcase tournaments and ODP recognition. Coaches seek players who have competed for clubs with a reputation of developing talent. While not essential, selection to play on an ODP team can be a bonus since many coaches recruit from state, regional and national teams. ODP can be a helpful complement to a good club team.

## **WHAT ARE COACHES LOOKING FOR?**

Each college coach is different much like each club or high school coach is different. Additionally, they look for players that will fill a need within their team. They may also favor a particular style of player or temperament. Like our United FC, they want players who combine athleticism, skills and integrity (They may even make note of your conduct off the field). They look for resilience –an ability to bounce back from adversity – determination, passion and competitiveness. By position, they seek:

- Forwards who possess speed, confidence, tactical ability, fitness and scoring touch.
- Midfielders who are fit, strong, and possess tactical and technical skills, and who keep their cool under pressure.
- Defenders who are fast, strong, disciplined and have the ability to win challenges without losing their composure.
- Goalkeepers who are confident and athletic, and possess strong leadership and communication skills.

## **RECRUITING BASICS**

- Even if you're a good club player, there's no guarantee you'll play in college. Only 3% will participate on a college varsity sports team, and only 1% will receive any type of college athletic scholarship. There are more than 30,000 children playing club soccer along in the Coast Soccer League, which extends from Bakersfield through Orange Country and inland past San Bernardino. A school may be in contact with as many as 250-350 players per year; 40 – 50 seriously (handwritten notes and letters, the one call per week, etc.); 6 – 12 all out; colleges will ask for early commitments from the top 3 – 4 they will ask for early commitments. However, participating with a club such as United FC with strong support and networking will provide a much better opportunity for you.
- Strong academics will help your cause. But athletic prowess may help you overcome poor grades. In other words, if you're a good enough player, some program will want you.
- Conduct at least some your initial research into schools on the Internet. The NCAA Web site posts a list of colleges offering intercollegiate soccer. You can find more in-depth information about admissions and the soccer program on a school's Web pages. Most athletic departments have separate sites with links to their respective teams.
- If you want to learn more about a particular college team, invest time into watching a practice or game.

- Evaluate the head coach and coaching staff just as they are judging you.
- Contact former and current players and/or parents. Hopefully, they'll offer an honest appraisal of a program.
- Determine if you would attend this school even if you had a career-ending injury and could not play. If the answer is yes, it speaks well of the college.
- Remember you can have five paid visits and drop and add visits as you go.
- Division I soccer isn't for everyone. But that doesn't mean you can't play soccer. Division II, Div. III, NAIA and Junior College all provide a fantastic opportunity to continue your playing career.