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Recruiting: All the world's a stage

By Mark Lewis
HoopGurlz

What do "American Idol" and women's basketball recruiting have in common? Plenty, as it turns out.

Both highlight people who have a dream. Both offer the opportunity to compete against peers for the chance to grab the brass ring. And both provide a setting for life-changing highs or ego-crushing lows.

The goal of the Idol auditions is to get a ticket to Hollywood and to be part of the competition for this year's title. More than 100,000 people auditioned throughout the seven various cities. Each pinned his or her hopes to an incredibly selective process that may well come down to a one- or two-minute performance. Sound familiar?



Recruiting and auditioning have much in common.

Recruiting isn't that much different. Look at the summer evaluation period and all the hopefuls who show up at the multitude of different events to "audition" for coaches. The process is just as selective but you have a lot more judges sitting courtside than the Simon, Randy and company. You also have the luxury of only needing one judge/recruiter to like you enough to get an shot at your dream.

The common ground? on both sides, some contestants live in a vast fantasy world. While I may not be qualified to pick the next winner of American Idol, I feel pretty confident in identifying the ones who are throwing up an acoustic air ball. It's great to believe in yourself and have faith that you were meant to do something, but it's important to keep a grip on reality too.

On Idol, it's amazing to watch the family and friends who pump up contestants and reinforce their illusions. Apparently love isn't only blind, it's deaf, too.

That's where I see a crossroads with recruiting. To be successful as an athlete you must understand not only your talent level and potential, but your limitations as well. If you're not starting on your high school team or you're a 5-foot-7 post, your email inbox most likely isn't going to fill up with offers. Even if you're putting up 20 points a game, breaking school records and earning all league honors, the opportunities that you end up choosing from may well not match the ones you envisioned coming your way.

Just because basketball is your passion and you've spent every waking moment in the gym doesn't mean you'll automatically get your ticket punched to the top level of collegiate women's basketball. In fact, it's no guarantee that you'll play at any level beyond high school.

I'm not preaching negativity or trying to temper the enthusiasm that makes high school and club basketball special. Understanding what it takes to play on the various levels and what coaches look at in

the recruiting process goes a long way towards finding the right fit to continue your athletic and academic career.

All too often college coaches come across players who seem to be waiting for "something better" when the truth is they're lucky to be getting the interest they already have at that point in time. That mentality and approach can, and many times has, left an athlete to settle for virtually anything she can find in the end.

Take a good look at the interest that has come your way and try to find the consistencies that might be there in terms of what schools are knocking on your door. If you've heard from only one major conference program and 25 others that might be thought of as mid-major, odds are you already know what level might be more appropriate.

That doesn't mean you don't pursue that other "big time" option, but you need to get clarification on what role they see for you and what the extent of their interest might be. Nobody wants to be recruited as a role player but it happens every year.

Players who could play 30 to 35 minutes a game for several programs recruiting them end up sitting the bench for one of the big dogs because they might have overestimated their own potential.

It doesn't make it a wrong decision for everyone, but a lot of players would have chosen a different path when all was said and done.

That's why it's important not to eliminate schools from your recruiting process early because you perceive yourself to be a higher caliber player than the level you think their program plays on. Take your time and see who's in the mix and find out how sincere their interest might be.

Don't confuse letters and questionnaires from some of the upper echelon as being actively recruited. Call them and pay close attention to the personal notes and emails as well as how much the head coach is involved with your recruitment.

Don't hesitate to ask if they're offering. Any answer other than yes tells you that you're not at the top of their list and they may be recruiting you as a back-up or even one of those role players.

Lastly, remember that the people who love you may not be the most objective folks in your life. Listen to Mom and Dad but take it with a grain of salt and in some instances a whole shaker full. Pay attention to who's actually recruiting you and be honest with yourself about your game. If you've played in front of recruiters and evaluators multiple times but the interest or the ranking isn't there indicating that you'll have your choice of schools, it's time to identify what level best fits your future.

At one time or another we all see ourselves competing at the highest level. In reality it's an elite few who possess the physical skills and basketball tools for success at that level. Nobody's ambition is to play five minutes a game or to be recruited over by successive incoming classes but it happens to talented players every year. Keeping perspective in what you can do on the floor and what programs offer you the best opportunity will keep you singing throughout your career.

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Mark Lewis is the national recruiting coordinator for ESPN HoopGurlz. Twice ranked as one of the top 25 assistant coaches in the game by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, he has more than 20 years of college coaching experience at Memphis State, Cincinnati, Arizona State, Western Kentucky and, most recently, Washington State. He can be reached at mark@hoopgurlz.com.
