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Crunching the numbers

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College coaches may not be engineers or rocket scientists but they need and love numbers. Watch any game these days and you'll see them not only charting different trends or results on the bench, you'll also see them



Being highly ranked in high school doesn't assure immediate success in college, so do your research.

handed an up-to-the-minute stat sheet during every full time out. Statistics can be revealing over the course of a game and they can also be an eye opener for recruits.

Go to the websites of the schools you're considering and print off their up-to-date stats and their roster. There's a lot of insight and information that you can learn from looking at the numbers that can help you.

The first thing to look at would be those athletes who play the position you see yourself playing. Identify them on the roster and take note of what class they happen to be in. Now look at the state sheet and note their contributions. See if they've been in the starting lineup and notice how many minutes they're playing. These could be players you could be replacing, playing with, or with the wrong choice, playing behind.

The next thing you'll want to look at is their performance. Look at all areas but pay close attention to categories that generally are more specific to a position. If they're a post or forward they should be putting up strong rebounding numbers and their field goal percentage should be higher working and finishing around the rim. Assists and turnovers are often a reflection of backcourt play just as three-point shooting can be. Of course, a lot of bigs like the three these days, too, so some things aren't always what they appear to be.

From a team standpoint you can make some deductions from their statistics and production by position as well. As you look at the stat sheet pay close attention to the scoring leaders and to the players leading in field goal attempts. More often than not they'll be the same players, but not always. Once you've

identified those particular players take a look at the roster and see what position those athletes play. You can get a good idea of the offensive focus and philosophy of a coach by seeing where most of their scoring and shot attempts come from.

Look at the number of three point attempts that a team has taken. Some teams aren't hesitant to fire away from downtown and if they're putting up a bundle every game you'll know they've got the green light. At the same time, look at their shooting percentage from behind the arch as well. Firing away isn't always a good thing if nobody can knock it down.

Don't ignore their opponent's stats as you look over their numbers. Checking out a program's opponent field goal percentage or the number of turnovers they're forcing the opposition into gives you a good indication of how big a priority that defense is in the scheme of things. In that light, check out how many offensive boards they give up as well. A good defensive team limits the second looks they give up!

Though seniors won't be returning next year, they still warrant a close look. If most of a team's statistical leaders are seniors, next year's squad is going to have a different look. That doesn't always mean they'll be worse or not competitive, but you'll want to know who'll be stepping up to fill those roles. It may well be you in the right situation.

The freshmen and sophomores on the roster are players who could be your teammates for two or three years. See which players are getting playing time and posting good numbers. Check out not only your position but all those on the floor. If you're point guard and there aren't any productive posts, the only outlet you'll be getting for the break might be an inbounds pass. In turn, if you're a threat on the low block you want to know they've got some guards on the roster that can get you the ball.

As you consider the contributions of a program's younger players, keep a few things in mind. The transition from high school to college basketball is a bigger challenge than most players and parents understand. Players who have started every game in their high school careers or averaged impressive scoring totals don't always find the same success as a freshman -- or sometimes ever at the collegiate level. The statistics for the ESPN HoopGurlz top 40 ranked players of the 2010 class (as of 1/17/11) who are actually playing this season show a tough road even for the most elite players. As a group, in the games they've participated in, they've only started 40 percent of the time. In those same games, combined, they're averaging just 17.6 minutes of playing time. The scoring average at this point in the season for the group as a whole is 6.4 points per game and they're shooting 41 percent from the field. Another telling stat is turnovers. Despite playing less than half of the total minutes in the games, they're averaging 1.52 turnovers.

Stats don't always tell the whole story in performance or recruiting, but they can shed some light on a program, player or coach. Check out the numbers for the programs you're considering as well as the players you've competed with who may have already moved on to the college level. Numbers can give you a better understanding and appreciation of your opportunities and provide perspective on your future.

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