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Comparing recruiting to financial world

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Today's headlines are seldom without reference to the volatile economy we live in and how it's impacted by the rise and fall of our financial markets. Ironically one of the most common statements you hear



Sometimes recruiting and buying stocks are like scrambling for the basketball -- you just have to go for it.

around the gym regarding recruits and their recruiting prospects is that "her stock is up" or "her stock is down." Fortunately, the performance of most players today is considerably more stable than the daily roller coaster of the ticker monitoring the Dow and NASDAQ averages. However, it's hard to ignore the fact that the recruiting landscape bears a remarkable resemblance to the world of stocks and commodities.

In recruiting, as in the market, it's all about perception, projection and a willingness to take a risk. The bottom line for someone buying and selling stock is that they're looking for returns on their research, gamble and investment. Publicly traded companies or owners of commodities are looking for an influx of cash to facilitate their operation in addition to their own profit at the end of the day. On the recruiting side, college programs are looking for high-yield returns as well, but more in terms of athletic performance and university representation. Athletes are looking for short-term and long-term gains from their efforts on the court and in the classroom as well as the reward of their overall collegiate experience.

In the market a key to success is anticipating when an investment has run its course and being willing to sell or get out. The similar situation for a coach in the evaluation process is sensing that a prospect has not developed as anticipated or peaked at a young age and doesn't have that much room for advancement as a collegiate athlete. The coaches then have to weigh that perceived ceiling against their current performance and decide to buy or sell, so to speak. For the player knowing when a program isn't going to provide the challenge or setting academically, athletically and personally to the degree you're seeking indicates it might be time to remove that school from your recruiting portfolio.

Conversely, a recruiter, just like successful traders, will recognize individuals (ie., opportunities) who may have just scratched the surface of her potential. However, that kind of speculation doesn't come without substantial risk. Offering an ultra-young recruit or a raw project player can be a real gamble. From the athlete's perspective the hunch you have about a first-time head coach or a seemingly up-and-coming program is the kind of opportunity you have to confirm as much as possible with thorough and detailed research. For all parties the futures market can be a real winner, or end up breaking the bank.

Look deeper and you'll see plenty of other common ground. We've even got our own stock analysts with all the recruiting services, evaluators and rankings. College coaches may utilize that information like a stock tip but in the end, just like an investor in the market, they're still going to make their own decision based on their knowledge and instincts. And just like that investor, that decision may vary from year to year based on their job security, current strength, potential of their roster and their perception about the depth of future classes.

We even have our share of the bad from the financial markets. Anybody with even the smallest amount of recruiting knowledge has little doubt that there is some insider trading going on. It might be club coaches screening calls and information or limiting access. Of course there are also plenty of advisors (sounds better than street agents) trying to influence and steer recruits one way or another because of their own agendas and interests. If you wouldn't trust them with your money, you sure don't want to trust them with your future. It's too bad that the fines and jail time handed out by the Securities and Exchange Commission are not equally applicable for the wannabes exploiting the trust of families and inserting themselves into the recruiting process of a teenage girl whom they have no interest or relationship with beyond basketball.

The greatest truth in both the financial and athletic arenas is that there are no guarantees. Even the best investments go bad and don't live up to their prospectus and expectations. From the basketball standpoint there are several things that can devalue a venture from the vantage point of both the athlete and the program. For the player coaching changes, injuries, college transition challenges, position shifts or simply overestimating your own potential often lead to diminished returns. For the programs injuries again come into play as well as the learning curve of the athlete, a poor assessment of potential, academic issues, homesickness and often the ego blow of no longer being "the one" can cap performance as well.

College coaches indirectly have money on the line with every recruiting decision they make. While they can't just buy and sell every day as brokers do on the exchange, every recruit carries an impact on their long term success in the "market". It's no coincidence that both sides of the fence put a premium value on assets with the blue chip tag attached. Of course they're still going to hedge and diversify their investments, looking to minimize the ones that don't perform as hoped. Recruiting, just like finance, requires constant monitoring and carefully calculated decisions for consistent gains.

Athletes have even less opportunity to "trade" their assets since their career is more like a perishable commodity with a brief window of value. Lots of choices can provide a positive return, but that limited timeframe makes it imperative to find the best fit for stability and long-term returns throughout and after their playing days.

No matter what the perspective, stock broker or college coach, asset or athlete, every decision has long-term implications and requires smart, well researched decisions made without emotion or pressure other than that which you place on yourself. You have to put in your time and effort.

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