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Embrace the high school game

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One of the great debates in recruiting discussions revolves around the impact and importance of an athlete's high school season. Over the years, the focus, growth and influence of club basketball has allowed it to seemingly surpass



The bond with your teammates from high school and the memories made then can last forever.

scholastic basketball as the main stage and gateway to college recruiting. The accuracy of that perception is debateable, but many agree that the downplaying of the high school game has contributed more than its share of speed bumps and potholes on the recruiting highway.

In the last several years, some athletes have bypassed high school basketball, instead committing all their time to training and club basketball. It's hard to imagine that something that's been an integral part of the educational process and a key in the athletic development of athletes has evolved into a secondary focus for some individuals. Fortunately few have ultimately made that choice, but its mere consideration is a telling sign about the distorted perspective that seems to have evolved as a byproduct of the recruiting process.

The influence of non-scholastic teams and collegiate recruiting on high school basketball creates some real headaches for coaches. Naturally you've got the battle for the athlete's time in the offseason. More and more high schools are going to team camps without their top players, who are busy with their club teams. There have been players who could have made it back from injury for the end of their high school season but instead chose to "play it safe" to ensure that they were healthy for the spring and summer evaluation periods. Nobody wants someone to come back early, but bypassing games you're healthy enough for is essentially quitting on your teammates.

There's no question that the foundation for the large majority of the decisions that college coaches make about their recruiting schedule is based on what they see in July and during the spring and fall recruiting weekends. The intent there is twofold. Obviously, for players whom t they've been impressed with or

even offered a scholarship to, recruiters are going to be courtside for their high school games trying to strengthen their position in the athlete's future plans. Secondly, coaches are going to get out and see other players they liked in the summer to confirm their evaluation or to see the progress of younger players who might have caught their eye.

Because of the limited days that the NCAA allows coaches to be on the road during the academic year, they're going to be selective about where they invest their time. In today's recruiting environment you won't find too many coaches randomly going to high school games or checking out players they haven't previously seen in person. Exceptions might be to see a player who may have been injured and not played in the summer or possibly somebody that wasn't on their radar in the past who's having a breakout season.

For you high school coaches hoping to generate interest in your players and get some recruiters in the gym, here are a couple of hints. First, schedule teams that have high profile recruits, preferably multiple prospects who are underclassmen. It doesn't matter why a college coach came to the gym, in the end they'll see your kids in action against good competition. Secondly, think tournaments. With those limited days that recruiters have to contend with, the more teams they can see the better. Again, keep in mind that they still need a reason to be there. Look for competitive events with strong teams who have athletes that are being recruited. You want to be playing the best competition anyway so here's your opportunity to kill two birds with one stone.

From a recruiting perspective scholastic basketball obviously is not the primary showcase that it once was for college prospects. Club basketball may be your best opportunity for exposure, but high school ball still provides a setting that plays a critical role for an athlete. Coaches aren't always completely sold on a player after the summer or maybe only one member of their staff has seen her play. What they see when she takes the floor with her school team could be the determining factor in their decision to make a scholarship offer or not. Often highly recruited athletes play more of a leadership role and are the "go to" players on their own scholastic teams more than on a talent-laden club roster. Sometimes a prospect will have to play a different position than they do with their club and recruiters will want to see how they handle another role.

No matter what uniform you might be wearing, anytime you're on the floor can be a revealing performance to any college coach who might be in the gym. It may be that college coaches are evaluating how a player handles the more structured coaching on the high school level. The day in and day out routine of practice and game preparation is something not often found on the club level and plays a key role in getting a player ready for the college game. And never underestimate the value of playing for season-long team goals and championships in creating a goal oriented, winning attitude in a prospect.

Lastly, never dismiss what the experience of high school basketball will mean on a personal basis. Sharing the ups and downs, as well as the sweat and hard work, with teammates is something unique and hard to find anywhere else in life. It's important to embrace those relationships and moments. You can't imagine how much they'll mean when there are no more games to play.

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