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## Keys to finding the right school

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Recruiting and the road have a lot in common. You have to hit the road to get on the stage during the NCAA's summer evaluation period and it's in your best interest to get back on the trail for the spring and fall viewing weekends.



When it comes to recruiting, you've got the green light to travel.

The road again comes into play as you narrow down your choices of schools because it is in your best interest to see firsthand the opportunities that each interested program has to offer.

A lot of athletes take the chance to make unofficial visits during the summer or combine them with club team travel. Of course any visit during the evaluation period wouldn't include the coaches but a lot of folks still like to take a look if they happen to be playing in the neighborhood. Any opportunity to see campus is a good thing, but it's important to keep in perspective that the summer and the traditional school year aren't exactly the same thing. Sure the actual campus, the facilities and the coaches (when permissible) will be the same. Without the whole student population or even the entire team on hand, you're missing the biggest components of "who" a program really is and what everyday life is really like.

The fall offers a great opportunity to see a university in full swing and a program in action. The start of a new school year provides a glimpse of campus life and the atmosphere that surrounds a university. Conditioning and individual workouts provide an insight into a coach's style and the dynamics of her or his relationship with players.

### Importance of Campus Visits

Campus visits, both official and unofficial, are a critical component to the decision-making process and often can be the deciding factor for an athlete as she tries to find that "right" fit for her future. An in-person confirmation of what a prospect has been hearing and reading about helps the player picture herself in that setting. Unfortunately, the picture that some recruiters paint of the campus, resources and

people who make up their program sometimes bears little resemblance to reality.

One of the obstacles that can often get in the way of a productive visit is the choreography that coaches put into the itinerary of all activities. From the selection of dates and hosts (for an official), to the choice of whom you meet with and even what time of day to take you on a tour of campus -- every aspect of the schedule is analyzed. Yes, scheduling and planning are a necessity but every moment also has to serve the whole recruiting effort and nobody is leaving anything to chance.

In some way, recruiting is a distorted form of dating. Up front, everyone is paying attention to the every detail and putting on their best. Not that I'm any expert but it seems for any relationship to evolve the two parties have to truly get to know each other and get beyond the presentations and marketing efforts. Doing that might take a little proactive work on your part.

One way to do that is to visit on your own. If you've doing an unofficial visit, find some time to check things out yourself. Come a day early or stay a while after you leave the coaches without them knowing. Take your own tour of campus and the town. Develop your own feel for the setting and see how it matches up with what the staff has shared with you. Be sure to try and see things on a weekday. College campuses are drastically different Monday through Thursday than they are Friday through Sunday.

### **Getting Unfiltered Information**

Many of my former coaching peers won't be fond of this idea, but see if you can sneak into a workout or drop in unannounced. Most coaches will share their workout schedule with you and if you can see them in action without their knowing you'll get a true sense of what being on the floor with them might be like. Some workout facilities don't offer the chance to slip in without being noticed but dropping in unannounced can still offer some good insight. I can't imagine any coach telling a recruit that she is not welcome. On visits coaches are careful which individual workout you see and sometimes even plan some of their floor activities with the idea that a recruit will be present.

As impersonal as it sounds, recruiting is sales. Coaches have to sell the opportunity that they're offering and all of the components that would make it the right choice for you. In doing so they're not going to just offer up all the negative things that might impact your decision without putting some spin on them. So here's your chance to put them on the spot a bit. It's simple; for example, "Coach, you know me well enough to want me in your program, tell me five things I'm not going to like about your program or school." They should jump at the opportunity since it's their chance to address those concerns as well. The coach who can't or won't provide you with some answers is someone to be suspicious of.

Your areas of interest could be things as simple as parking on campus, the food in the cafeteria or whether the school is a ghost town on the weekend. It may be that the nice dorm they showed you actually isn't the one you would live in your freshman year or they can't guarantee that you'll actually get into the major you want. It might be the percentage of minorities in the entire student population. Coaches love to quote that number from the athletic department rather than the student body as a whole because the percentage is usually higher. Be specific, too. One school I worked at had a 21-percent minority enrollment but only seven percent were African American. Guess which number we offered up when asked?

Talk with the quiet players. On unofficial visits as well as official ones you need to meet and talk with as many members of the team as possible. On an official visit you'll have a host who's been carefully selected by the coaching staff. On unofficials there will be players who'll step up and be more social and forward. These folks are a great resource and will provide you with a lot of information. However, keep in mind that they've been completely briefed on you before you arrived on campus and the staff has most

likely let them know your interests and concerns. Find the players who aren't quite as forward and make an effort to ask them the tough questions. It may be that they're just quiet, but they also may just be the ones who will provide you with more than just the company line.

On any campus visit there are going to be things that aren't as nice as they were portrayed or how you might have imagined them. At the same time there will be things that exceed your expectations and even some things that had not come up in recruiting conversations that will catch your eye. In the end finding the reality of a campus and a program is evidence of a successful visit. It doesn't make any school the right or wrong choice but it helps you consider that offer without any makeup or spin.

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