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Looking at the flawed concepts and misperceptions of recruiting

By Mark Lewis
ESPN HoopGuritz

With both the Democratic and Republican conventions dominating the airwaves these days, I figured that it was an appropriate time to deal with some of the fiction and creative aspects of recruiting. While college coaches are really amateurs next to the political blue chippers, they still provide more than their share of imaginative answers and approaches to recruits and their families. So let's take on some of the fairy tales and bedtime stories and remove the spin.

First off, how long a school has recruited an athlete doesn't mean a thing. All it does is indicate that they saw you first or liked your game at an earlier date. Apply some logic here; neither of those facts makes their school any better for a recruit than the next. "We've been there from the start"& so? The last school to contact you may be the perfect fit for your needs and you may miss out on that opportunity if you put stock in when schools jumped into the race. In the end any school offering a scholarship wants you just the same. If they're willing to invest four years of room, board, tuition, books and fees on you (yes, I know, one year at a time) then give them equal consideration. It's about you, not them. Your needs in finding a school outweigh any amount of time they may have put into recruiting you. Don't hold a visit for them or allow them to stay on your list if they don't fit the bill. They're getting desperate if they think this is a reason for you to keep their program on your list.

In that same light, whether you were someone's first choice should be downplayed as well. As I mentioned earlier, if they're willing to invest all that scholarship money as well as their own job security on signing you, they want you more than enough. When those scholarship players show up on campus in the fall, coaches don't look down their roster and view players differently due to the way their recruiting unfolded. You'll get every opportunity you want because of a simple fact -- coaches' love, and need, to win. If you're the one who can help them do that, you'll get your shot. Even if a school has offered and been turned down by another prospect before putting the offer on your table, take a good look. If that university has the resources to meet your needs you may need to put your ego in check and let the coach off the hook for being temporarily confused. If I would have had a thing about being someone's second choice (or third or fourth) I would have never had a date in my life!

Since we mentioned the Democrats and Republicans earlier, let's move on to negative recruiting. Simply put, it is never appropriate in any form. Coaches are paid to recruit athletes to their school, not to bash or put down another program and university. The old adage is that if you have to say bad things about someone else, you don't have enough good things to say about yourself. There are coaches who hide behind the philosophy that, "if it's true, it's OK.." Problem is, they're still talking about something from the outside and really can't have personal insight to whatever trash they're spreading. Even if a recruit or her parents ask about something with another school, the professional answer is to suggest that they talk to that school's staff about whatever the concern might be.

The only place another school should come into a recruiting conversation would be in the question of who else is recruiting you. If a school wants to point out a specific concern for an athlete with another school then they need to highlight it as a strength with their program. From there it's up to the athlete and her family to connect the dots and look at that specific issue with the other schools. It's almost a

compliment as a coach to have another school negative recruit against you. It says they're so threatened by you that they're willing to abandon any shred of class and dignity to make themselves look better. Of course, they're only doing it because they have your best interests in mind. Right, how thoughtful of them.

Let's move from the subjective area of ethics and take a look at the reality and the objective simplicity of NCAA rules. No, there's certainly nothing simple about the NCAA guidelines governing recruiting, but the actual following of them is incredibly simple. Contrary to any cloud of smoke that may have blown your way, there is nothing "gray" about recruiting legislation. It is black and white, and there are no times that it's OK to take a detour off the compliance highway. If any coach crosses any NCAA line that you know, return the favor and cross them off your list. If you know the rule, then you can bet they do, too, and they've made a choice that makes a huge statement about their character.

If it's a line they're crossing that you're not sure about, ask another coach. Don't tell them who, just ask if it's legal for ABC to occur. If they tell you it's illegal, bring it up with the offending coach next time. There is the chance the NCAA may have given different interpretations to different schools. It has been known to happen. I've been told by recruits that some coaches are telling them "nobody follows this one" or "it isn't a big thing." They're *all* big things. That kind of response should shorten your recruiting list by one school quicker than an Allen Iverson crossover. The simple things like one call a week, no texting, no face-to-face contact or conversation with seniors outside contact periods or the offer of a new Cadillac Escalade (my personal favorite) are simple and have no explanation other than the coach who is ignoring the legislation isn't someone you want to play for. If they need to break rules, they need to find another recruit.

In recruiting there are a lot of concepts and misperceptions that come into play year after year. As hard as it is to believe, logic can usually clear up a cloudy situation. Imagine that, recruiting and logic in back to back sentences. There is hope for coaches and athletes everywhere. Keeping the focus on the recruit and her needs rather than the schools and their agendas will make the process simpler and much more efficient. This column could go on for a while, but then Glenn would have to pay me more. How about an Escalade instead? It isn't a big thing!

Editor's Note: Mark Lewis really does get paid for writing these columns!

Discuss this on our [Message Board](#) Mark Lewis is a columnist and national evaluator 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.
