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Mathematical planning essential for successful recruiting

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With the start of the season just around the corner I thought it might be a good time to take a look at the math that goes into the planning of a college program's recruiting efforts. Without careful foresight of the entire year, recruiters can end up in a tougher jam than some of Wall Street's finest, and believe me, the NCAA offers no bailouts. There are two numbers that have to be monitored and strategically planned for to make the best use of a program's permissible time -- 100 and five, both representing limits the NCAA has drawn for programs and individual recruits.

100 Person Days

One hundred is the number of days a program can have coaches off campus for recruiting purposes between September 14 and April 1. That includes all contacts and evaluations for recruits in every class throughout that time period. The NCAA refers to each of those days as "person days." That means if two coaches are out at the same or different events, it counts as two of the program's 100. Basically, every time a coach leaves campus for a practice, game, tournament, school or home visit, or just lunch with a coach, it counts as one of the 100. This time frame includes the fall and spring contact periods, the fall and spring non-scholastic evaluation weekends and, of course, the high-school season. The July recruiting period is not part of the calculations a coach must consider when planning their year.

When planning for those 100 person days, coaches will look ahead and "set aside" a certain number for specific events or individuals in their recruiting plans. With three coaches on the road and three days for both non-scholastic evaluation weekends, they would automatically set aside 18 days. Coaches almost always attend their own state tournaments as well as those in surrounding states and will block off a predetermined number of days for those events up front. Depending on the number of recruits that they're hoping to sign in a specific year, coaches will set aside so many days for each of the athletes they get commitments from in the fall or hope to sign in the spring. A lot of schools will also commit to seeing their top juniors the maximum number of times. That total of 100 available days dwindles pretty fast and they still have to set aside days for open gyms, and school and home visits.

Tournaments are a goldmine for recruiters. Just having a lineup of multiple teams alone isn't enough to get them out. There have to be potential prospects across the rosters of a large majority of the participating schools. Events like the Nike Tournament of Champions in Chandler, Ariz., each December provide coaches the most bang for their buck. If two coaches attend for two days and each sees eight games each day, that's potentially 64 teams evaluated while only using four of 100 person days. Of course coaches wouldn't see 64 separate teams since they'll be babysitting recruits already on their radar or getting second looks at someone who might have caught their eye the first day. It's still a major bargain, evaluation-wise, for the time spent in the gym. Additionally, with today's economy, "bang for the buck" has more of a literal meaning than it has had in recent past.

Five Evaluation Opportunities

The number five comes into play when a school considers each individual recruit. The NCAA limits the evaluation opportunities per athlete to no more than five during one academic year. An evaluation

opportunity can be both an evaluation and a contact. Of course, contacts are only permissible with senior prospects and no more than three of their five opportunities can be contacts.

The calculation of these five is where question marks sometimes come up in regard to some recruiters' math abilities. It's amazing how many times some coaches see some prospects play. If a coach goes to the school and meets with the coach about one or more of their players, it's one evaluation for every player on the roster. If a coach watches practice, a game, or any other workout, it's one evaluation for every player on the floor. Now, if the college coach meets with the high-school coach and then watches a game or practice in the same day, it's still only one. You can't utilize more than one evaluation in a single day.

If a college coach watches an athlete during a fall individual event, they then only have four opportunities remaining. This becomes an issue since watching an entire team play counts as one for all athletes. If you're at your limit on one player on the floor, then you can't watch the others. And no, the coach can't just "leave the gym" when that one player is in the game. That same principal comes into play with seniors and contacts. If a school has two fall contacts with an athlete who does *not* sign with them in the fall signing period, they're then limited to seeing the team play three times during the season.

If a student athlete *does* sign with a school, those coaches now have unlimited opportunities on that particular athlete. However, they are still bound by the limit of five on the remaining players in any evaluation situation. Any time a coach is looking at where they stand for a particular game, they have to consider both teams participating and every athlete playing. The standard for coaches in any team or individual setting is the athlete on the floor with which they have the fewest remaining evaluation opportunities.

Smart Planning

Smart recruiting coordinators with great vision will have their schools seeing games between their top prospects. It still counts as one of five for each individual recruit, but the school only uses one of its 100 person days when they have prospects on both teams. High-school coaches have the best opportunity to get exposure for their players when they schedule games with high-profile or recruit-laden teams to increase the odds of college coaches utilizing one of their precious days.

Going back to tournaments for a moment, there is one individual twist to the calculation of evaluation opportunities. Using the Tournament of Champions again as an example, let's say player A and her teammates make it all the way to the finals. A school could have a coach watch every game they play over a four-day period, which would utilize four of the school's 100 person days. No break on that total. Where the twist comes in is that the NCAA considers a tiered tournament on consecutive days as only one evaluation opportunity for the individual athletes. Conceivably, a school could watch four or five games and have it count as only one of their five evaluation opportunities for those players. State tournaments are calculated the same way. The cost for coaches is using multiple person days for one evaluation opportunity, but they end up getting a lot of game action in return. As I said, tournaments are a recruiting lottery ticket.

It's very easy for coaches to fail to plan ahead and get caught up in a numbers situation. There are some Ebenezer Scrooge type coaches who keep a few in their pocket "just in case" for the sleeper they didn't know about or just to have some flexibility in their recruiting schedule. Ideally coaches will want to use up all their days and make the most of their opportunities with each player. Understanding what limits they deal with and how things are calculated can give you some insight as to the choices recruiters might make throughout the year and why they can't just check out this prospect or catch a game here or there. It's simple -- they have to check with the team accountant first!

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