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Wednesday, February 17, 2010
Updated: March 30, 11:21 AM ET

Old-school advice still holds true

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To mark his 50th birthday, columnist Mark Lewis offers parents, coaches and players a half-century of advice.

Since physical aging seems to be the only gift that keeps on giving (and giving), I've decided to offer a few thoughts that can be filtered through the realm of recruiting.

Keep in mind that your competitors are the teams you face, not your teammates.

I've spent 26 years of that time in women's basketball mostly as a coach and more recently as an evaluator and columnist. For all of you who have called through the years and pitched your player to me by saying that she's better than one of our current players, I've got a bulletin for you. We don't play ourselves.

Of course the goal of any coach is to improve his or her roster but you don't do that by using your current team as the sole standard. When you assess talent as a recruiter it has to be done predominantly against your competition.

How can your player make our team better against our competitors? That's the pitch you should be making.

Truth is, most of these calls come from folks who have already been told "no thanks" by those same teams we play. Sure, go ahead, send us a DVD.

Your daughter will benefit by making her own decisions and learning to speak for herself.

Often when we're talking with parents they have a tendency to use the all inclusive pronouns: we and us, as in "We" like this and "we" like that. They see "us" playing this position or they want "us" to commit. It's OK to talk about we if everyone went on a campus visit and saw or did some things. It also fine to reference that they told "us" something if it was shared to the group at some point. But keep in mind that they're not offering "us" a scholarship and "we" won't be going to school. "She" is making a decision and will ultimately be the one on the court and in the classroom. Of course if "we" want to run some of the sprints during conditioning, give "us" a call.

Coaches should exhibit exemplary behavior. Set an example for your players.

A lot of my conversations with high school and, when it was still within NCAA rules to do so, club coaches, were not spin. They were outright lies. Of course we're going to tell you that your kids looked good or we liked how you did this or did that. We're recruiting your players. But I can't stress enough



The latest spin? Tried and true advice can apply to all recruits.

how often I have wanted to tell said coaches to stop acting and start really coaching. Ranting and yelling, berating officials, using animated gestures, throwing towels and diagram boards are actually effective coaching techniques.

The coaches who spend the majority of their timeouts pointing out what everybody just did wrong isn't getting them ready for what's next and will end up spending another time out just to play the blame-game a little bit more. If recruiters were totally honest we would be telling those screamers and foot stompers to teach a little more and perform a little less.

For today's students: Be present.

The cell phone changed a lot about the recruiting process and not all of it was for the better. It definitely became easier to reach a recruit and you didn't have to worry about the rest of the family rushing her off the line so they could use the phone. On the other hand we endured the era of texting and its subsequent banishment from recruiting communications and we still have a few folks out there that believe some recruiters use throw-away cell phones to get around the one call a week limit.

The real problem we're still left with is cell phone etiquette or rather the lack of it. It's an issue when you're on your cell or texting while you should be interacting with your teammates and developing something that used to be known as team chemistry. Probably the most inconsiderate use of cell phones is on official campus visits.

Calling and texting people back home while you're on a campus tour or at a dinner with your coaches, host and team members says something about you and it's not something good. Turn it off, put it away and pay attention to the folks who took a lot of time planning your visit. If you can't, cancel the visit and stay home.

Put the number of summer recruiting events into perspective.

Way back when I got started as a recruiting coordinator, planning the summer evaluation schedule for a coaching staff wasn't complicated. We followed all the AAU National championships, hit a few camps and decided between a few other tournaments that would allow us to see the kids we were interested in or the ones from our area.

With the explosion in the number of certified events the past two summers, recruiting has turned into a game of hit-and-miss and a lot of watered-down competition. So each year when new event operators launch the new batch of tournaments hoping to draw coaches, evaluators and media to their gyms, I approach with healthy skepticism.

There are 20 days total for the July evaluation period and there already are some long established, competitive and well-run events. Will these new events provide anything we don't already have? Are they more about financial gain than basketball?

Find the right college, no matter how long it takes.

As I've mentioned many times in many columns, how long a school recruits you should have absolutely no bearing on your recruiting process and ultimate decision. It doesn't make their program better for your future in any way. All it means is that maybe they saw you sooner or that they're more aggressive in their approach with younger athletes.

You still need to consider your needs as a student or an athlete. In the end, if a school is willing to offer

and they have the resources you're looking for, it doesn't matter how long they've been involved. Eliminating schools based on time may mean eliminating your best fit.

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Mark Lewis is the national recruiting coordinator 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.
