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Wednesday, July 9, 2008

## Lewis: Players should be armed with knowledge during the recruiting process

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By Mark Lewis  
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One of the most defining questions in the recruiting process is simple and to the point. "Are you offering?"

If you really want to know where you stand with schools actively pursuing your future, put them on the spot and ask. It's a fair question and you should know the answer. It doesn't mean you should drop the schools who aren't, but you should know if the offer is on the table. Even more, if it's not, you should know why.

First, let's talk about an offer that is made to you. There are a few more questions that need to be posed so you know what you're dealing with. For the sake of this discussion, let's assume you're a junior and it's a Division I full scholarship offer (room, board, tuition, books and required fees). Obviously if it's a different level, you need to know what the offer entails and what expenses would be covered. If you're younger, it may not be time to throw this question at them unless you've got several offers already. Even then, if they're not offering and you're interested, hang in there. It's early and there's lots of time to prove yourself to them.

Besides, the offers you hear about going to sophomores and freshmen have to make you wonder about the homework the schools involved are doing on their recruits. They're based on how they play alone and who knows what kind of semi-possessed personality that might show up on campus three years from now. For a lot of schools it's important to say they were the first to offer. Somehow they think that makes their offer a better one. Just remember, the 3-pointer at the end of the game counts the same as the first one.

Assuming a full ride is being offered, find out what parameters are being drawn for your decision. If the offer is yours until you make up your mind, you're as high as you can get on their list. At the same time, don't overreact. Just because they've made that commitment to you doesn't make them a better choice. The last school to offer just might be the best fit. If a school is willing to wait and hold a scholarship for you, you're in a position to take your time and explore all your options.

You also could get an offer with a specific time frame. Not a bad thing, but a little challenging if you're hoping to go all the way through the process and be thorough. It doesn't mean you can't still be, but you have to do it by their clock. The length of that time they give you is a big indicator about how they really feel about you. The longer they give you, the more they want you. The shorter the time, the more you can bet they like a few others about the same. Don't worry if you got the offer first or not. That's just ego and a great way to lose your objectivity. If they're offering, they want you and the decision is in your hands now anyway. Be clear on what happens if you don't make up your mind in their time frame. Find out if you're out of the picture or now just one of several. That can help you decide how much risk you're willing to take.

Some coaches call this "playing hardball," and a lot of times it is. It's their prerogative to put their needs

before yours. Don't make any decision because they drew some lines in the sand. Decide because it is or is not the place you're looking for. This process is about you, not them. If you're not comfortable with their approach, pass.

Another answer you might get would be that the offer is being extended to you and one or two others and the first to accept gets it. This doesn't mean you don't have a date for the prom, but you need to decide pretty quickly if this one is Mr. Right. A lot of the control still remains in your hands but you need to be doing your homework so that an opportunity that might be right for you doesn't slip through your hands. You're still way up there on their list, but they're protecting their interests. If a school definitely needs your position and can't afford to come away empty handed, they'll identify their top two or three and take this approach. It's not the same as saying you're the one, but the offer is there for the taking if you get busy. This might mean taking some unofficial visits (something you should be doing anyway, but we'll get to that another time) and getting aggressive in seeking answers academically, athletically and personally.

The biggest problem in this scenario is that the timeline is being dictated by several parties and you don't know where each of them are at in their own decision making process. Some folks see this as a form of pressuring. Maybe... maybe not. Don't let that feeling get in the way of the fact that there is an offer there for the taking. Ask who else has the offer. There's absolutely no reason for them not to tell you unless they're perhaps being creative with the truth. Yes, coaches have been known to lie to get a commitment. Imagine that. There's a good chance you may know who else is in the running and often there's information out there about visits they may have scheduled or schools they might be considering. Besides that, who they are comparing you to as a player is always interesting insight.

Of course the answer that nobody really wants to hear is, "No, we're not offering". Usually that's followed by "at this time" and some imaginative explanation as to why. I've heard of schools saying they don't offer until a campus visit or they want to do it in person and even (I love this one), "We want you to like us for who we are first, not because of an offer." Call me a cynic, but I'm not too sure there are any real good explanations other than, "We've got somebody else we like better." Some will tell you that they want their team to meet you first. That's not all bad and it shows they value their team's opinion. It also says that the jury still is out on you. Again, I don't think this is a reason to eliminate this school from your list, but it at least allows you to look at them knowing it may not be an option in the end. They may still be worth waiting for, but be sure your other relationships get plenty of love in the meantime.

You need to know where you stand with the schools you're considering. The last thing you want to do is go all the way through the process and identify that perfect fit, only to find they don't feel the same way. Your time and effort is valuable and limited. Make the most of it and focus on the coaches and programs who are genuinely interested in you. Trust your instincts and ask the uncomfortable questions. The answers you get will be revealing and give you a clear view of what your options really are.

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