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Recruits need to show class when turning down an offer

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You would think it would be a given that, after all that a school puts into the recruiting of a prospect and with the development of a personal relationship, an athlete would want handle things appropriately. You also would think that parents and coaches would want to teach them that, as difficult as it may be, it's something that must be done. The large majority of recruits do handle things the right way and show their appreciation to the coaches and programs that have spent so much time, effort and money throughout a prospects decision efforts. However, every year there are stories of email notifications, letters, parental or coach phone calls or, worse yet, no word at all.

I'm talking about how to say "no" to the schools that have been a part of your recruiting process.

Early in the process, as a recruit narrows her initial list, a letter or email is entirely appropriate. Letting schools know at the earliest date that they are not part of that list is a classy and considerate way to handle things. Personal notes or email are appreciated but if there are a large number of schools leaving the recruiting stage, a form letter isn't out of line. You don't owe them an explanation or even the list of schools that made the cut. Just let them know you've narrowed your choices and, while you appreciate their interest, they were not one of the programs you're continuing to consider. Wish them well with their season and thanks again. Mission accomplished.

Dropping schools from one's list may get more complicated after relationships have been built. Whether it's through phone calls, emails or even face to face on unofficial visits, knowing someone makes the task tougher. At the same time, it's that same relationship that makes it important for you to address things the right way when the time comes to drop them from your list.

If you've been on a school's campus, talking on the phone and corresponding over a period of time, you've got to do the difficult thing. If they were willing to invest a couple hundred thousand dollars in your future in the classroom and on the court, the least you can do is give the head coach a call. This is not the time or place for email. Take the time to make the call and talk to them in person. Sure it's hard, but if you want all the positive things that come with being a recruited student athlete you have to accept all the responsibilities that come with it.

In addition, this one is on the athlete's shoulders. Mom, Dad and the coaches need to sit this task out. I appreciate the intent of any adult to make it easier on a young individual, but this isn't the place to carry the weight for them. Yes, I'm still an idealist. I believe that there are a lot of things to be learned throughout the recruiting process, and that includes the difficult part of saying no to someone who won't be glad to hear it. Athletics provides so many experiences that mirror real life and prepare an individual for the time that it will pop up again in their personal or professional life. It's a shame to allow them to avoid this life skill opportunity, even if it does seem to be for the right reasons. If it's their decision to tell one school yes, then in turn it's their responsibility to tell the others no.

Every year we hear of recruits who avoid phone calls or emails from the coaches for whom they have bad news. Coaches who have had them on their campus and whom they've gotten to know personally. They deserve better than to be ignored or handed off to someone else.

Once an athlete has made her choice, her first call should be to that school and their head coach. As much as you want to enjoy that moment, you want to immediately let the other finalists know of the decision. You don't want them getting the news second hand or reading about it somewhere while they still think they're in the picture. The recruiting culture that revolves around women's basketball today is small and talkative and even delaying overnight might have coaches finding out from a source other than the recruit herself. Another reason you want to let them know as soon as possible is the impact that the decision may have on their other recruiting efforts. If you were important enough to them in their process they may need to schedule other visits or even make an offer to another individual.

One other aspect of handling things the right way is the transfer rate that exists today in women's basketball. You don't want to make any decision with the idea in your mind that it's not going to work out, but you never know whose path you may cross down the road or for what reason. Additionally, a large number of transfers end up at schools that were on their final lists the first time around. Aside from transferring, those coaches might also be the one's voting for All-Conference teams or you might be applying for an assistant coach's job with them in a few years. Leaving the right impression is well worth the effort and it's simply the right thing to do.

Now, I would like to say all the coaches you call will be total professionals and make it easy for you. Most will, but some will be about as pleasant as being judged by Simon on American Idol. If they're giving you a hard time it's a confirmation to you that you've made the right choice by dropping them. Some coaches will ask what it was about your choice that you liked or what it was about their program that didn't work for you. That's OK, and it's best to give them some honest feedback. It will be appreciated.

When you consider the number of recruits a coach pursues throughout their career, you realize that they hear no much more often than they hear yes. That doesn't make it easier, but they can handle it. Avoiding the responsibility of telling a coach or letting someone else tell them says something about you personally that you don't want people thinking. They must have thought you were pretty special since they were recruiting you in the first place. Prove to them that they were right, even when it comes to saying no.

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