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Seniors should be realistic about options

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For the 2009 class, midnight is looming just around the corner and for the uncommitted seniors hoping to lock in their futures as Division I athletes time is running out. Players looking to sign a National Letter of Intent can do so during the spring signing period, which begins April 15 and continues through May 20. The toughest question for senior prospects this time of year is "what can I still do to help my situation?" The reality is that there isn't a lot of time, nor are there a lot of options, but the final horn hasn't sounded as of yet.

There are coaches still looking. We receive calls again and again from college coaches and I know other recruiting services and evaluators are getting the same calls. While they still may be looking, don't mistake that for a willingness to sign a player that they're not going to want on their roster a year from now. The player they find late has to be one who will fill a need that they have now as well as be able to continue to contribute to the program long term.

First and absolutely the most important factor at this point is being realistic. If you're not in regular contact with schools or have not made or received invitations for official visits by now, the odds are pretty slim. However, there are things that you can do and it's on your shoulders to approach things like it's the last shot of a championship game because it just may well be.

You need to be playing. This coming weekend is the last evaluation opportunity for coaches until July, and the majority of their efforts are going to be geared towards the next couple of classes. Those programs still looking to sign late will be looking at the few seniors participating in events, but the majority of the teams in action are going to be made up of underclassman rather than seniors. There are a few events being run for unsigned 2009 and Junior College sophomores. Check the list of NCAA certified events and ask your coaches to help you find an opportunity to play anywhere you can in any event that you can.

Go back through any recruiting correspondence you may have received over the last two years and make some calls. If they were interested in you at one point they may well still be. All you have to lose is a little time on your cell phone and we all know you have a plan with unlimited minutes. Ask them where they stand in their recruiting and if they are still looking. If they are, offer to send them game film by overnight delivery. (Keep in mind you're not the only one making these calls) Remember, ditch the highlight films and send one quarter from each of your three or four best games. If they seem interested at all, offer to get in the car right now and head that way for an unofficial visit. Tell them you would love to bring them some video and, better yet, want the opportunity to play with their team in open gym. The coaches can't watch but you can bet they'll get the full report from their players afterwards. Other than seeing you in person this is their best feedback.

A few things not to do:

Don't send out a bunch of video and letters and sit back and wait. I promise you they've got a full mailbox and their phones are always ringing. Make sure one of those calls is from you. Don't have them

inundated with calls from every coach you've ever had, your parents, pastor and any ex boyfriend you're still on speaking terms with. You make the call and share with them the phone numbers of your high school and club coaches. Let them choose when to reach out and touch someone. Do not expect them to invest the time and money in an official visit just because you called them or they showed some interest in your video. They might offer to bring you in, but at this point you're in no position to wait if they don't. Open your wallet, or your Dad's, and offer to come on your own dime.

Don't overestimate their interest and tell them you're ready to sign when there's not an offer on the table. Some situations might call for forward, aggressive behavior; trust me, this isn't one of them. No coach honestly likes signing late and if they have to they're going to take their time and get it right.

Let's deal with the very real possibility that there still may be no interest from schools from which you have previously heard. It's time to approach other schools you may have an interest in and find out the same information. Ask if they've completed their recruiting class and if they haven't, ask what they're looking for. Be honest and portray your height, position and stats exactly as they are. Also, don't rationalize why you don't have better numbers or didn't play more minutes. Lastly, don't blast your coach as some excuse why recruiters aren't knocking down your door. Nobody likes to hear that kind of thing and it won't help you in the eyes of a good recruiter.

Finally, it's time to start asking about the possibility of walking on. If your heart is set on playing at the Division I level you may have pay your way and prove you belong. Ask each coach about their walk-on policy. Not every school takes walk-ons and some have tryouts in the fall with no guarantee that they will keep you. Coaches usually are pretty honest in this area. If they think they might keep you around as a walk on they'll let you know. If they don't see it as a realistic possibility, they'll let you know that just the same. Just be sure you know up front before you apply, enroll and pay the tuition bill.

Keep in mind, you have to be better than the least talented player on their roster to get playing time. If they have money invested in another player and you and she are equal, she'll get the minutes. Also making the team as a walk on one season doesn't mean the same thing will happen the following year and it's certainly no indication that a scholarship is coming your way. Positive thinking is always important, but it's a big risk to make the assumption that you'll automatically earn a scholarship. It's not unheard of but it's a rare occurrence.

If Division I is not in your future and you truly love the game, don't hesitate to look at Division II, III, NAIA or even junior college. There is a lot of great basketball being played at four-year schools who may not be lining up against all the big dogs. Additionally, everyone who plays JC basketball isn't there because they're an academic casualty. Playing at a two year school also gives you the opportunity to develop your game and maybe get a second shot in front of Division I recruiters. Being open minded may be just as good for your career as being open on a backdoor cut. The countdown is on and the ball is in your hands. It's time to make a play!

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