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## Small decisions can have major impact

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With the passing of last month's spring NCAA recruiting weekend it seems an appropriate time to share a few thoughts about some observed behaviors and offer up an important reminder for players, parents and club coaches before July and the next exposure period rolls around.



Even seemingly unimportant items such as visible tattoos can be turnoffs for college recruiters.

The reality of the NCAA recruiting calendar is that there are just 26 days of nonscholastic evaluation opportunities for Division I coaches between one high-school season and the next. With so few days and the enormous emphasis now placed on club basketball performance, college coaches are making recruiting decisions based on very limited observations. Sure, they'll babysit the players they know and in whom they already are interested, but they simply don't have the time or willingness to watch marginal play, unfocused athletes or immature and undisciplined behavior.

Today, more than ever, coaches have much more on the line with every recruiting decision they make. Winning and job security are self-explanatory interests, but the recruiting environment has changed. Now the wrong call on a prospect has a farther reaching impact than at any time in the past. Women's basketball maintains the highest public profile that it has ever enjoyed -- plus the budgets and expectations to match. The need to find the "complete package" of athletics, academics and personal character in a prospect may have evolved from a desire into an absolute necessity.

The "Butterfly Effect" is most often utilized when discussing chaos theory or weather prediction. The theory is that the smallest behavior on one end can cumulatively lead to enormous impact and results at the other. The example most often cited is a butterfly flapping its wings in Africa, triggering a chain of events ultimately leading to a hurricane halfway around the world. It's no different in the recruiting process. The simplest, seemingly small or even one-time behavior could have a far reaching impact on

an athlete's collegiate options and future. Recruits, their families and coaches would be well served to embrace that mentality every time they walk in the gym this July.

Obviously, the basketball itself is the gateway standard to a player's recruitment. It's a given that if the player's game isn't up to the standards recruiters are looking for nothing else is really going to matter. At the same time, unless you're hanging on the rim like Brittney Griner or dominating the floor like Maya Moore, recruiters are going to be looking for more than just results on a stat sheet. Just because someone happens to play well doesn't automatically mean the phone will be ringing, the inbox will be full and a multitude of offers will be coming her way.

Last month I observed first-hand one college coach's willingness to pass on a talented prospect based on her behavior coming out of a game and on the bench afterward. It doesn't mean a scholarship offer would have been forthcoming or even that the player would have had an interest in that specific program. However, because of some childish antics and disrespectful responses to her coach and teammates, the possibilities ended then and there. What's worse is that numerous college coaches were sitting immediately adjacent to the bench and took in all the action, on and off the floor. Apparently the athlete didn't notice or, worse yet, didn't care. The coach left at halftime.

I also know of two examples of college coaches making the observation that an athlete couldn't play for them simply because of their tattoos. Not because they had them, but due to the very prominent placement and size of the artwork. Individualism and ink aren't the issue, representation is. Every coach envisions the athletes they're recruiting playing in their uniform and acting as an ambassador for their program on campus and in the community. Right or wrong, the school colors tend to be received better on a warmup rather than your skin.

You would think this would be obvious, but if someone says "can you hear me now?" in the gym, it's important that they be talking about stopping the ball on the break or switching defenders on a screen. No cell phone should ever see the light of day anywhere near the bench. Unfortunately last month a lot of coaches and evaluators were talking about a high-profile prospect who went to the bench and dug the phone out of her bag while the game was still going on. I don't know any coaches who would pass on this particular young lady on that basis alone but the call became the topic of conversation rather than her play. A less-established recruit might raise some red flags about her focus by reaching out and touching someone from the bench.

The April period also revealed a greater willingness by players to whine to and cry about officials during the game. Recruiters take notice of that kind of behavior but at the same time it's hard to fault them alone when you listen to the constant and somewhat less-than-objective examples coming from the parental sections at many of the games. If you're under the illusion that the college coaches aren't watching or listening, think again. One coach, whose campus is a cross-country flight from a prospect's home, said he wouldn't be recruiting a particular athlete if the parents lived within driving distance. Apparently the thought of them at every home game would have dampened his enthusiasm for their daughter's future.

These examples are just a few from only a three-day evaluation period. Don't forget, it's a given that they're also looking at how you interact with coaches and teammates as well. They've got their eyes on you when you go to the bench and look to see how you react to bad calls or plays that don't go your way. They're watching for the athlete who commits the cardinal sin of listening to voices and advice from the stands rather than their coaches on the bench. And don't think they won't notice who spends more time with their phone than with their teammates before and after games. Good recruiters don't miss much and you never know when and what they might be watching.

It's important to focus on your game and to play your best basketball anytime you're in front of recruiters. However, it's also critical that you remember that they're looking for more than just an athlete who can play. They're looking for one who can play while being coachable. They're looking for one who can play but is also committed, a good teammate and focused. They're looking for one who can play as well as represent their university, team, coaches and themselves with class. They're looking for the whole package. Flap your wings the wrong way one time and who knows which way the recruiting winds will blow.

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