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## Sometimes it's just about the game

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One of the most frustrating questions I get asked these days usually comes from parents and coaches who have good intentions but very little perspective. Hearing "How do I get my daughter/player ranked or recruited?" almost makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate where they're coming from. I even understand why they think that there are some predetermined steps to automatically advance the future possibilities for their favorite recruit.

When you think of all the recruiting do's and don'ts, the letters, e-mails and phone calls, the official and unofficial visits, the club teams, coaches and tournaments, it's no wonder they think it's simply a step-by-step process. The problem is that you can follow each and every one of those steps and things still won't add up the way you want in the end. At some point it's going to come down to the basketball itself and what a player can do on the court.

Too often in club basketball, the politics and interference of well meaning people get in the way of a talented player reaching her potential. Additionally, many prospective recruits get caught up in the attention and lose sight of what's really important and ultimately why they're in the gym. Now is the time of year to put the focus on the game itself and the skills an athlete actually brings to the floor.

The NCAA allows college recruiters 100 days throughout the entire academic year to recruit off campus. Each time an individual coach leaves campus it counts as one of their 100 days and that includes all contact and evaluation periods as well as the fall and spring non-scholastic weekends. That number shrinks quickly and becomes very limiting to recruiting coordinators, so if a coach spends one of his or her valuable days checking out your high school game or practice, you don't want to let that opportunity go to waste.

**Recruiters chart progress.** Chances are if a college recruiter is coming to see you play during the academic year it's because he or she saw something during the summer evaluation period. When coaches hit the gym during the regular season they're trying to confirm that what they saw previously was accurate. They are also charting the progress you've made in your game since they last saw you in action.

They want to see that your focus is on the work you do on the floor rather than if you have different colored shoelaces, one sock up and one down, sleeves like Iverson or some other meaningless cosmetic aspect of what you wear. They want to see your game. The last thing you want to happen is that they leave feeling that they overrated you in July or feel that there hasn't been a lot of advancement since then.

**It's not just the coach observing your progress.** Another recruiting reality this time of year is the fact that often the coach that shows up to catch your game may well be someone on the staff who has yet to see you play. A lot of college staffs want to be sure that all of their coaches have seen the prospects that they're interested in play and you don't want that individual going back to their fellow coaches asking

them what they could have possibly been thinking. This may be your first and only chance to impress a coach who could have a major impact in a school's recruiting decisions.

Every time you take the floor you never know who might be in the gym that could be talking to college coaches. Recruiters can collect information on prospects better than the CIA, FBI and IRS combined. We talk with opposing coaches, athletic directors and referees. You never know what parent or fan might be an enthusiastic alumnus keeping us up to date.

One time I had a janitor tell me that all the bottles in a junior college recruit's trash weren't exactly shampoo bottles. Not a good sign. If a school is going to risk investing in the room, board, tuition, books and fees for an athlete, they're going to do more than rely on a few simple evaluations from the bleachers.

**Play consistently.** The easiest way to avoid some of these potholes and to make the most of every recruiting evaluation is to practice and play one way. Take the floor as if there were 100 college recruiters courtside every time and your entire academic and athletic future was dependent on that one workout. You should never be able to "turn it up" when those folks actually are in the gym. If you can give a little more for their benefit, then you're not going hard enough every day.

**Extra work equals extra credit.** Avoid the mistake of thinking that your team's practice is enough. That's the equivalent of thinking that what you learn in class will suffice to pass an exam without any additional studying. Even during the season, if you're a player who has the potential and talent to play at the college level you've got to put in the extra work and take ownership of your skill development. Each game is a test and while you may well win on the scoreboard it's no guarantee that you'll get a passing grade in the eyes of a recruiter.

Don't sweat it if you have a bad game or a tough day on the practice floor. Recruiters aren't looking solely at what you're doing but more so at what they think you're going to be capable of in the future. They're good at what they do and they know that people have bad days, but never forget the fact that they can easily recognize when someone's not been putting the work into their game as well. If the potential of your freshman season isn't a reality by your junior year a good recruiter is going to start having second thoughts.

**Play your best game.** It's an undeniable fact that recruiting is very much a process but ultimately you still have to be able to play well enough to impress the folks with the scholarships. The easiest way to catch the attention of coaches and evaluators is to be the best player that you can be. The one true facet of the entire process that you alone control is what you do on the floor. Not every player is destined to be an All-American, play Division I or even suit up in college at any level, but it's not always about that. Sometimes it's just about the game and finding out just how good you can be.

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