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Spring recruiting? It's complicated

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Spring recruiting once meant one event annually. Most programs had at least one of their staff at Hampton, Va., for the Boo Williams Invitational and the last recruiting opportunity of the academic year.

Eventually, as summer basketball evolved almost exclusively toward team events rather than individual camps, the landscape in the spring expanded for a period of time to essentially three major events. With the NCAA limiting the number of coaches on the road to three, a lot of programs sent one staff member to Virginia, one to North Carolina for the Deep South Classic and another to Arizona for the Arizona Elite's event. Some, based on their geographical regions, budgetary limitations or the specific focus of their recruiting efforts might have doubled up on one event or even put all their eggs into one basket.



The spring evaluation period is key for both coaches and players.

The approach today is different. With 47 separate events currently certified by the NCAA for this year's spring evaluation period, recruiting decisions aren't as simple as they once were. Additionally, limited by only three days of permissible off-campus, non-institutional (club) recruiting, where to spend time is a critical and an almost no-win situation for coaches.

Like any other aspect of recruiting, programs ask these questions before hitting the road for the upcoming spring evaluation period.

Which teams are playing where? This one is rather obvious and nothing makes a recruiting coordinator happier than to see that many of their prospects will be predominately at one event. Things get a lot more complicated when you have the athletes you've been actively recruiting spread out among multiple tournaments with only 72 hours to be on the recruiting trail.

Where should the boss go? The head coach's presence matters. Top recruits want to know they're important enough for the top dog to be courtside at their games. With limited time it's difficult to sacrifice gym time for travel time, but that's why the airlines have redeye flights. The spring weekend can be an evaluation juggling act for head coaches.

Where should the rest of the staff go? Decision-making for the kids on the bubble is more effective if most of the staff has seen these recruits in action. With the top kids on their list there's usually not much debate. However, decisions still need to be made about who to make offers to and who they'll be adding or dropping from their lists.

How deep is the tournament? Again, with very limited viewing opportunities, it's important that the

events college coaches attend also have depth both in the number of participants as well as talent in younger age groups. While the focus may be on those athletes they're hoping to sign in November, coaches are also looking to see younger players they already know, identify additional prospects they will want to see and recruit in the future. Sometimes they are simply hoping to find that under-the-radar athlete who might have slipped through the cracks. Smaller or less competitive events don't offer many opportunities for "window shopping" beyond current active recruits.

Keeping these general parameters for college coaches in mind here are a few additional considerations for you to think about as you approach the recruiting weekend.

Communicate your plans. Be sure any coaches who have been recruiting you or you have been in contact with are aware of where you're going to be playing. Make sure they know what club team you'll be with, the division you'll be playing in and your coach's contact information. Also, stay on top of your club coach to provide an accurate roster to the event. The last thing you want is to have a college coach interested in your game and have the wrong numbers or incorrect information on your team.

Manage your own expectations. Don't read too much into it if the folks that have been actively recruiting you aren't at every minute of every game. As you look at all the scheduling concerns they face you can understand the demands on their time over a much too short recruiting weekend. Keep in mind that college coaches are always looking at more than one class. Their first concern may be with the next group, but good recruiters are constantly looking down the road at the talent and positions that they're going to need over the next several years.

Evaluate the offer, not the amount of attention you get. Lastly, avoid putting any stock into the "babysitting" approach that some of the coaches use with their top recruits. They'll tell you that because you're so important to them that they'll be there every time you play. In reality that kind of attention doesn't change one aspect about their school or how it might be the best fit for you and your future. It's just a recruiting ploy to give you the illusion that they want you more than the others who won't commit that kind of time to a single athlete. In reality, those other coaches want you just as much if they're willing put a scholarship offer on the table as well. They've just made the decision to make use of their limited evaluation time with a bigger picture in mind. They know you have to have talented teammates, too.

Make the most of every moment of every game this spring. With all these constraints, you may get only one chance to impress a coach. A lot of recruiting decisions for the July evaluation period come from what a staff might see in the spring. Give them a reason to want to see you play again.

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