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Too many cooks

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The classes may change, the talent level can be scholarship or walk on, and the priorities will differ from one prospect to the next. However, the one constant from year to year and player to player is that the athlete will be the one packing



Players may have to pass on unsolicited advice from various parties during the recruiting process.

her bags and going to college. Mom and Dad aren't moving to the dorm, the coaches won't be sitting in the classroom, lifting the weights or even breaking a sweat. In the end, nobody else will have to live with the decision day-to-day the way the recruit will.

Because of that reality, it's critical throughout the recruiting process and at the end that she can take ownership of her choice and say: "This is my decision and where I want to go to school." Over the years I've seen and heard countless stories of prospects making commitments because of what their parents want or as a result of a high-school or club coach's self-serving agenda. The only obligation a student athlete has is to herself: to find the best fit for her academic, athletic and personal future.

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying: Parents and their concerns are absolutely a consideration and their input is invaluable to a young adult making possibly the first major decision. But contrary to what a lot of well-meaning or overzealous parents believe, those concerns can't be deciding factors unless they're also the concern of the recruit herself. Sure, Mom and Dad want to be at every game they possibly can and if that's just as important to their daughter, she'll use distance as a parameter as she narrows her list. On the other hand, she may have other criteria that outweighs that consideration and makes programs farther from home more appealing. It's awkward for an athlete to tell her folks that she may have a separate agenda. This is where it becomes important for parents to share their concerns but at the same time offer sincere support in allowing her to go a different way.

Whether it's distance, the alma mater of a family member, church affiliation or some sort of geographic loyalty, any consideration of the family has to ultimately carry weight with the athlete as well. Parents, if

it isn't high on her list, tell her why it happens to be important to you, but avoid the guilt trips, threats of financial restrictions or even bribes you might be tempted to offer. Never let her doubt that she has your full support even if she follows a different path than you would prefer. If you try to force her to choose what you want, the price you may pay in your relationship with your daughter might be higher in the long run than any cost.

Both high-school and club coaches warrant only the input that the athlete and her family choose to allow them to have. There's no entitlement to recruiting input just because he or she happens to be their coach on the floor. If they've had experience with previous recruits and the process, or they've been on the collegiate side themselves, they can be a tremendous resource for information. In any event, the input of any coach should be limited only to the process and not the decision. It's fine for them to point out strengths and weaknesses of programs, how things work or recruiting concerns that you might want to keep in mind -- but that's where it should end. No scholastic or club coach should ever tell you that you "Should go here" or "Not go there."

College coaches work their relationships with club and high-school coaches like the Kardashian sisters work the media. Because there are no contact restrictions other than the two 10-day evaluation periods in July, recruiters try to build relationships for both information and access. There are recruiters who call high-school or club coaches almost daily as if that might provide evidence of greater interest than other programs. Too often many of those coaches misinterpret that attention and forget their role and that their first priority lies with the athlete rather than the college programs. Time and again you hear of coaches screening schools or not relaying interest or information to the family. Regardless of the degree of their involvement, the family should be made aware of every call and e-mail as well as receive any snail mail that arrives concerning the recruitment.

Often coaches are used to facilitate unofficial visits or to help get kids to call or communicate with recruiters. Again, as with parents, this should only be if the recruit herself has an interest in doing so. No athlete is under any obligation to call a school just because they asked or extended an invitation to visit campus. Beware of the "team" approach as well. The invitation will suddenly arrive for the whole team to check out practice or a game and that coincidentally comes as the school is recruiting a specific individual on that roster. If it's a standing invitation every year, that's one thing. But it's funny how that hospitality tends to show up for the first time when recruiters are wooing an athlete.

One last set of party crashers to keep at bay are the services or advisors who want to assist you in your decision. Whether they're recruiting services, paid consultants or self-professed experts who befriended you along the way, they won't be going to school when the time comes either and their interest is most likely ego or financially-driven. Be particularly wary of anyone in working relationships with college coaches. If an individual is getting a check from recruiters, odds are their advice will be tainted by the school colors of their subscribers.

In the end, trust your own judgment and instincts. Even people with the best of intentions can't fully appreciate all the things that will be important to you once you're on campus and making the transition to a college student and athlete. Rely on the advice of your family and the people who have known you beyond basketball for direction. But take ownership of the decision. It's your future and the first step in your education is deciding where you want to spend it.

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