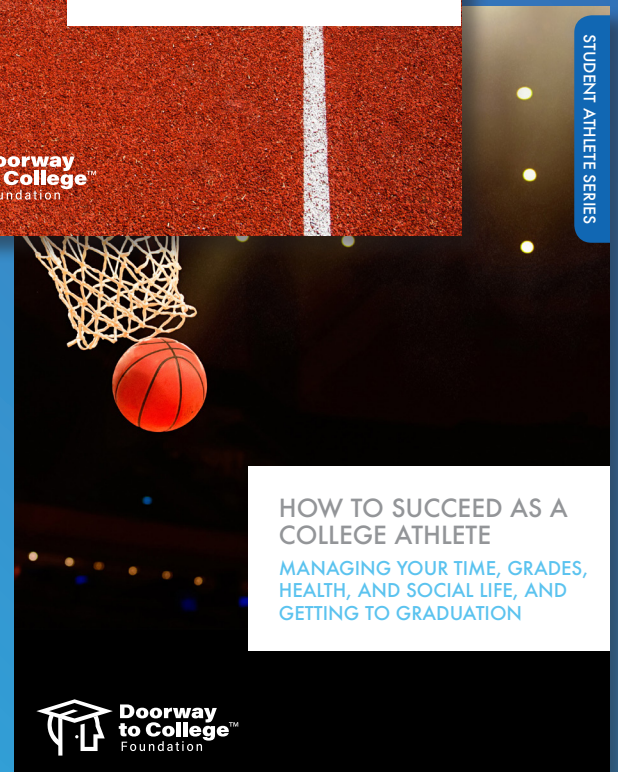
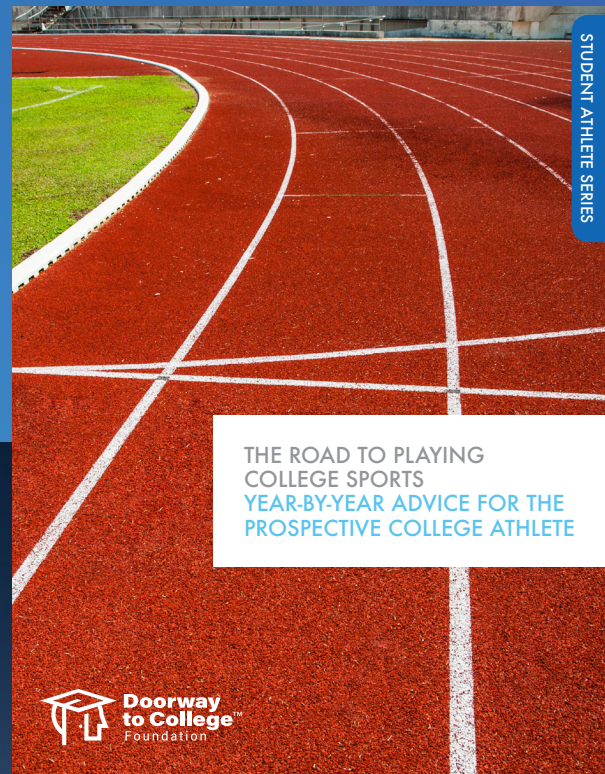




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STUDENT ATHLETE SERIES





GOAL SETTING FOR
STUDENT ATHLETES
...AND THEIR PARENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Some people go through life without a real plan. They simply wake up each day and see what happens. Sometimes they get lucky, but more often they simply float along with the current, going where life takes them instead of seizing control of the boat and making it go where they want.



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If you want success as a high school and college athlete, set goals for yourself. As Tony Robbins, a motivational speaker and author, says, “Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

As researched by R. H. Cox (1994), goal-setting can increase performance in four main ways:

- It puts strong focus on the task at hand. A clear goal allows you to take an inventory of your performance to determine whether you are performing at the desired level. If you aren't able to meet your goal, you will be motivated to improve.
- With increased focus comes increased effort. An athlete with a clear purpose can devote full energy and effort to achieving that purpose.
- Greater focus and concentration can eliminate distractions and increase

persistence to succeed. This is particularly important because every athlete goes through challenging training or practice situations from time to time.

- When your attention is focused on your goal and you are concentrating on completing tasks to help reach a goal, you can adjust your current strategies and develop new ones. Always keeping the bullseye in sight helps you to find the most effective ways to hit the target.

So what's your goal? To make varsity, all-conference, or all-state? To play college sports? To earn a Division I college athletics scholarship? To secure a professional contract? All these are admirable goals. They're easy to set and fun to talk about, but unless you take further steps toward achieving them, they're just talk.

SMART GOALS

The hard part of goal-setting involves answering this question: How — *exactly* — are you going to achieve your goal? What concrete steps will you take to reach it?

When setting goals, think of the word **SMART**. As explained by G. T. Doran (1981), each letter stands for a different attribute of an effective goal.

Specific. Goals should be narrowly tailored, not wide and open-ended. A clear and specific goal allows you to measure progress along the way. Which leads us to . . .

Measurable. To track progress, you must be able to measure it and see whether you are getting closer to the goal.

Achievable. Having a big dream is admirable, but setting a far-fetched goal is not usually a great idea. Your goal should be one you can actually accomplish. Push yourself a little bit with your goal, but be realistic.

Relevant. Be sure to choose goals that matter. Is your goal a worthwhile one? Will it get you where you ultimately want to be? Is now the right time to pursue this particular goal, and does the goal fit well with your other current efforts and needs?

Time-bound. When will you accomplish your goal or certain concrete steps along the way? This is important for tracking and measurement, and for making sure you will be able to accomplish your goal within a definite time frame.



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For example, think about this goal: “I am going to lose some weight.” Now compare it to “I want to lose an average of one pound per week this year so that I can weigh 200 pounds on August 1. To lose this weight, I will exercise 30 minutes/day, decrease my calorie intake by 300 calories/day, and keep a workout log.” The second goal is a SMART goal. The first goal isn’t much more than a wish.

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Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.

—Tony Robbins

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ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

There's an important concept in educational psychology that relates to goal-setting and motivation. It comes from the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). He was interested in how teachers should balance their students' skill level with the difficulty of the material they are trying to master. He discovered that the greatest success takes place within what he called the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**. You can see it represented in the diagram to the right.

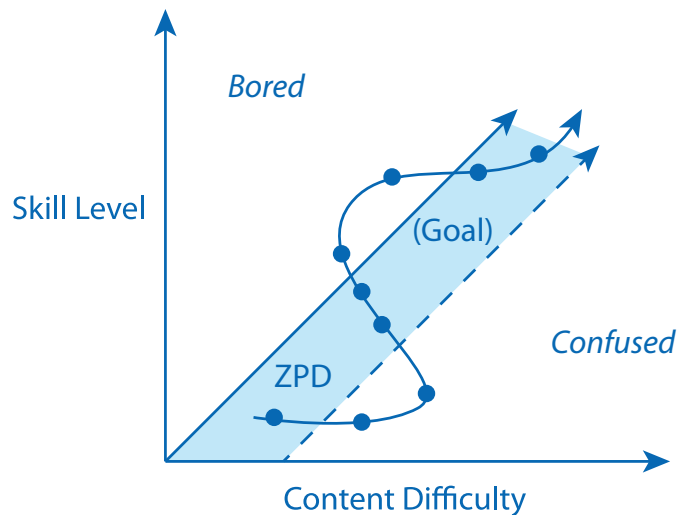
Look at the upper left of the diagram. Students get bored when their skill level increases but the difficulty of the content they are learning does not increase accordingly.

The opposite occurs in the lower right of the diagram. Students get confused when the difficulty of the content they are learning increases too quickly for their skill level.

The goal of teaching is to nudge students back into the Zone of Proximal Development, the "sweet spot" that balances the challenge level of the content with the skill level of the student.

What This Means to You

Here's how this relates to goal-setting. If you set your goals too low for your skill level, you may become bored and disinterested. On the flip side, if you set your goals too high, you may become frustrated, anxious, and overwhelmed.



It's important to notice that the line that runs toward the goal isn't a straight line. Learning is like that, and so is achieving a goal. Expect ups and downs and times of struggle, but also times when you excel and meeting the goal becomes almost too easy.

As you think about your future — as a college athlete and as a student — consider goals (and steps toward those goals) that challenge you but don't overwhelm you. Goals that meet these criteria will be within your Zone of Proximal Development.

PUTTING YOUR GOALS IN WRITING

People who have specific goals are more likely to reach those goals if they put them in writing and are held accountable for them. Those who merely think about their goals are less likely to achieve them.



One researcher, Dr. Gail Matthews at Dominican University, actually put numbers to it. Matthews found that those who put their goals in writing and shared them with a friend completed 76 percent of their goals. Those who only thought about their goals without putting anything in writing accomplished fewer than 43 percent of their goals.

Take note that the greatest success in the Matthews study was achieved by those who shared their goals with someone else. We do not usually accomplish the biggest goals we set for ourselves all by ourselves. We sometimes need help.

This is as true for prospective college athletes as for anyone else. If they don't ask for help, a parent, coach, or mentor may need to offer it. This becomes very hard to do if the goals are not shared. So write them down, and talk about them with people you trust.

One way that others can help is with the Zone of Proximal Development. Just as a teacher can prod a student to stay in the academic ZPD, coaches, parents, and other adults can help you to stay in the ZPD with all your goals. If you find yourself above or below your ZPD, this is a sign to ask for assistance.

Here's how to think about goals:

- **Decide what you want to accomplish**, whether it's in the classroom, on the practice field, in game situations, with college recruiters, or in whatever matters most to you.
- **Make sure your goals are SMART:** specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. If not, adjust them.
- **Each goal should include mini-goals.** A mini-goal is a smaller goal on the path to the larger one. These are the milestones you will reach as you proceed. These mini-goals will likely involve the measurable and time-bound parts of the SMART goal ideal. Without them, it's hard to measure your progress and know whether you're on the right track.
- **Plan for adversity.** If your goals are challenging enough, you're guaranteed to run into something down the road that will make them hard to achieve. There's a saying coaches and athletes sometimes use: Adversity will cause some people in a locker room to break and cause others to break records.

As you work on your goals, think about — and write down — potential roadblocks that are likely to come up along the way. Then think about how you could overcome these roadblocks. It's not always easy to know how adversity will strike or how to fight back when it does, but that's OK. Do the best you can now, and be ready for what's coming later.

Goal-setting should be an ongoing, collaborative process between athletes and parents. Talk about your goals, and keep talking. Communication helps everyone stay on the same page. A breakdown in communication is not what you want when the stakes involve your future and what is most important to you.

Use these goal-setting strategies to navigate your way to a promising future. Along the way, adjust your goals as necessary to stay within that Zone of Proximal Development, where you feel the appropriate level of challenge in relation to your skill level. Don't be afraid to raise the bar when you are ready.

To access more of our resources for student athletes, visit www.doorwaytocollege.com/studentathletes.

“
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Digital Education Specialist at Doorway to College. As a University of Iowa faculty member, Clint has published research on the topic of intercollegiate student-athletes and leadership development. He received a bachelor's degree in communication studies, a master's degree in recreation sports management, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Iowa. As an undergraduate, Huntrods was a full-ride scholarship athlete on the Hawkeye football team, becoming a two-time varsity letter winner, a participant in four bowl games, and a member of the 2004 Big Ten championship team. A versatile athlete, Huntrods also earned three letters on the Hawkeye track team.

ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including college admissions support and test prep, visit us at www.doorwaytocollege.com.



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THE ROAD TO PLAYING
COLLEGE SPORTS
YEAR-BY-YEAR ADVICE FOR THE
PROSPECTIVE COLLEGE ATHLETE



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INTRODUCTION

This book is written for middle-school and high-school athletes who hope to play the sport they love once they reach college. Becoming a college athlete is an admirable goal, yet it's one without a clear path for most students.



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When I was a high-school student, I had the same goal. I learned a lot along the way to becoming a college athlete that I'd like to share with you to make your journey easier. Very few prospective college athletes and parents know this information, and because they don't know it, the college recruiting process feels more like riding a roller coaster than taking a scenic and enjoyable drive. It doesn't have to be that way.

This book offers advice to help make the road ahead clear — both for you and for your parents. From athletic development to the recruitment process, from investigating colleges to taking college entrance exams, this information should go a long way toward demystifying the pursuit of your academic and athletic goals.

Ready? Let's get started.



MIDDLE SCHOOL

What? Are you kidding? The process starts in middle school?

To a certain degree, yes.

HAVE FUN AND BE PREPARED FOR CHANGES

In middle school, the most important thing for athletes is to have fun playing a variety of sports while also increasing involvement in the sport they enjoy most and at which they are most successful. If you're still in middle school or junior high, get involved with clubs or traveling teams. The more you play, the more you'll improve.

As a middle-school athlete's body begins to grow and mature, it becomes more apparent what kind of athlete he or she will be. Yet keep in mind that a lot could still change before college. When I was in eighth grade, I wanted to be a middle-distance runner. I was pretty good at running 800s; I was undefeated in 800-meter races as an eighth grader. But then I started growing. How many middle distance runners do you know who are six feet, five inches tall and weigh more than 200 pounds?

Your body *will* change as it grows — possibly so much that the sport you love today isn't right for you anymore. Yet, if you're a dedicated athlete, you can turn your attention to other sports more suited to your new body type and very likely excel there, too.

STRENGTH TRAINING

One of the first things an athlete can do to prepare for the future is strength training. Parents are often concerned about this. "If I start my athlete too soon, will strength training stunt her growth or cause physical damage?"

My recommendation, as a former athlete with some experience in personal training, is not to push strength training too hard, too soon. For younger athletes, weight should be

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Don't push strength training too hard, too soon.

”

light, and athletes should take a year to build their muscle memory before really pushing heavy weight. Even then, don't max out with weight training — that should be done only by advanced, upperclass athletes under close, professional supervision.

The fact is, even most high school athletes lack the balance, stabilizer muscles, and core strength to excel at strength training. As a high-school senior, I wasn't a functionally strong athlete. I had strengthened my lower and upper body, but I had not really done enough work on my core. I *thought* I had, but I eventually had to deal with back injuries and a groin pull, which let me know that a strong lower and upper body really isn't that important if they aren't connected. So start with core work and body-weight exercises in middle school, and make the progression to strength training in high school.

CAMPS

Many athletes and parents ask about the value of camps for middle school students. Attending camps to improve athletic skills is a good idea, particularly in your sport of choice.

Learn as much as you can. Take notes on the drills you do so you can practice them on your own after camp is over. If you're afraid you won't be able to remember what you learn, have a mentor or parent come along to take notes. You'll learn more about camps later in this book.

THE NCAA ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

The most important thing to do before freshman year is to map out your high-school coursework. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is extremely transparent about what it expects in terms of coursework that leads to NCAA eligibility. There is no excuse for graduating and *then* realizing that your school's graduation requirements were not as stringent as the NCAA's requirements.

Let me repeat that so you get it: You can meet *all* of your school's graduation requirements and *still fail to academically qualify for the NCAA*. Make sure the courses you are taking meet the NCAA's requirements. If you plan to attend a Division I or Division II school, be sure to register with the [NCAA's Eligibility Center](http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA_EMS/NCAA.jsp) (http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA_EMS/NCAA.jsp). The data in the following table is accurate at the time of this writing; be sure to check the NCAA website if you have any questions.

INITIAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Division I: 16 core courses	Division II: 16 core courses
4 years of English	3 years of English
3 years of math (Algebra I or higher)	2 years of math (Algebra I or higher)
2 years of natural/physical science (1 year of lab if offered by high school)	2 years of natural/physical science (1 year of lab if offered by high school)
1 year of additional English, math, or natural/physical science	3 years of additional English, math, or natural/physical science
2 years of social science	2 years of social science
4 years of additional courses (from any area above, foreign language, or comparative religion/philosophy)	4 years of additional courses (from any area above, foreign language, or comparative religion/philosophy)

Source: NCAA Eligibility Center Quick Reference Guide,
http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Quick_Reference_Sheet.pdf



The NCAA's website will help you determine whether the courses at your school will count. Simply enter your school's NCAA code, if you know it, or search by state, city, and school name. You'll get a list of all the NCAA-approved courses offered at your school.

Work with a parent or guardian to map out your course plan before freshman year. Then spend a little bit of time each year double-checking to make sure that the courses at your school and the approval status of those courses have not changed.

If you are unsure about anything you see on the list, consult with a guidance counselor immediately. Your counselor may be busy, but he or she is there to help you map out your future and get on the right track.

If you are planning to attend a Division III school, you do not have to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center. But check with the school or schools you are considering to see what their academic requirements are, and make sure you are on track to qualify.

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Your counselor may be busy, but he or she is there to help you map out your future and get on the right track.

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FRESHMAN YEAR

In your freshman year, your grades really begin to count. Yet grades aren't the only things you need to be conscious of.

ESTABLISHING GOOD HABITS

Upon entering your freshman year of high school, you must be prepared to succeed academically. If you have a low GPA after your first year, raising it will be difficult. So now is the time to develop the habits that will serve you well over the next four years of high school and into college. If you don't develop good habits now, you will be forced to later on. It's much harder to break bad habits once they are long established.

For example, some high-school athletes can get by without studying very much. Then college comes, coursework is more difficult, and study habits are hard to change and relearn, especially with all the responsibilities that come with being a college athlete. I have seen a lot of athletes in this situation, and most are unable to change on their own. (Not all, but most.) They need required study hours and tutors to do so.

The same is true with athletic workouts and practice. Some gifted high-school athletes can get by without working hard in practice, in the weight room, or on conditioning. Then when they get on a college campus, they are unable to perform at the level required day in and day out. Some will flip the switch and change their habits; others won't. Those who don't will see their athletic dreams die pretty quickly. If you develop and maintain good practice and workout habits in high school, this won't be an issue for you.

“
Now is the time to develop the habits that will serve you well over the next four years of high school and into college.
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MAILBOX FULL?

Colleges spend thousands of dollars sending information packets to prospective students, whether or not they are athletes. You may start getting these during your freshman year.

It's fun to get unsolicited mail enticing you to enroll at a particular school, but it's critical to understand that these mailings are mostly advertising. They don't guarantee you *anything* — not even a chance to meet the coach — and certainly not a shot at playing.

Coaches officially recruit only a fraction of the students who receive these mailings. So if you make contact with a coach, it's appropriate to ask if they plan to actually recruit you. If not, ask why not and what you will need to do to join their list of recruited athletes.



BEGINNING THE COLLEGE SEARCH

During your freshman year, you should also begin researching colleges. At this point, it's okay to have a long list of schools you're interested in. If you make a connection with coaches at some of these schools, now is a good time to ask them what you need to do to make their team. What are they looking for now, and what would they like to see you do over the next few years?

This next point will apply to only a small fraction of athletes, but it's worth noting for the few to whom it does apply. If you are already playing at a high level as a freshman, ask coaches if they have seen you play. If not, ask if they would be interested in taking a look.

Let me be clear: If you are dominating freshman games, don't bother asking if a coach wants to see the film. But if you are playing against varsity-level competition and looking impressive, it's worth mentioning. When you're excelling against athletes three and four years older than you, letting coaches know about that is a great way to get on their radar, which will allow you to build relationships from there.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA WISELY

Be smart about the decisions you are making, especially with social media. Almost everyone these days has a cell phone that takes pictures. Consider that a college coach might see every picture of you that shows up on social media outlets, such as Instagram and Twitter.



Also keep in mind that even though someone is your friend now, and you're okay with them having a picture of you in a potentially compromising situation, that may not always be the case. What if you have a falling-out with that person or he/she becomes jealous of your athletic opportunities? Could that photo bring you down?

Don't let somebody else have that kind of power over you. Be aware that some social media sites are *always* public and others are public *unless you change the settings to "private."* Make sure you know what the settings are before you post on those sites.

Many people misunderstand this. *Anybody* may be able to see what you say and what you post, not just the people who follow you. Racist or sexist remarks, bullying, illegal alcohol or drug use, crude jokes, insults, a generally bad attitude — if you don't want that kind of content associated with you, don't create or share it, and don't put it on the Internet.

And don't think you can delete a post to make it vanish. You may be able to delete something from your own page, but once anyone else has seen it on their page, it's out of your control. You may not be able to completely reel it back in.

You're human, and you'll make mistakes in your youth, but don't compound them by making them public and permanent through unwise use of social media. Do everything you can to ensure that your social media use reflects positively on you, because your collegiate future (and possibly your future employment) may depend on it. Take a look from an outside perspective and decide whether social media is helping you join an athletic team or is hurting your chances.

This point is included in the Freshman Year chapter because coaches may start looking you up on social media in the near future. Yet this issue is truly ongoing starting as soon as you (or your friends with photos of you) use social media. Social media can help you build a reputation. Use it to generate a positive image of yourself similar to how a public relations or marketing firm would help manage the career of a professional athlete.



Use social media to generate a positive image of yourself.





SOPHOMORE YEAR

Sophomore year is when the recruiting process really starts to move. Without taking your focus off of excelling in your sport and in the classroom, you'll still have a lot of other things to do.

- **Follow up with college coaches.** If you have communicated with any coaches, this is the time to follow up with them. Your goal is to find out from coaches how you can progress toward joining their team.

It's entirely reasonable and appropriate to make a list of questions to ask. Most of us have been on awkward phone calls, and no one really looks good in such situations. If you can handle yourself well on the phone and ask the right questions, you'll appear mature, which can make a coach believe you are able to handle the recruiting process and college athletics. Avoid coming off as immature or unprofessional. Practice the calls with your parents if needed.

- **Make unofficial visits to colleges.** Start close to home and with smaller schools. For most students and parents, this is not the time to visit high-profile schools halfway across the country. You simply might not be ready to handle yourself in places where the facilities are imposing and the athletes and coaches are people you see on TV all the time.

Get to know a local athlete who has gone on to play college sports. He or she can support you through the process by helping you develop the questions you should be asking and advising you on the conversations you should — and should not — have with coaches.

- **Talk to your guidance counselors.** Precisely whom you should talk to varies from school to school. You may have been assigned a counselor for freshman year and a different one for sophomore year, or you may have been assigned a counselor who will stay with you all four years. Some schools don't assign counselors for college and career planning until junior year.

Nevertheless, you should already have a relationship with *someone* in the guidance office by this time. Talk to that person, or find out from him or her exactly whom you should be talking to.

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You should already
have a relationship with
someone in the guidance
office by this time.
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Bottom line: Make sure somebody in the guidance office knows who you are, and talk to that person regularly about your academic and athletic future. Also understand that just because this tip is listed in the Sophomore Year chapter doesn't mean you can't do this as a freshman.

- **Build your reputation** at your school as someone who is serious, mature, and driven to succeed in all areas. College coaches will often stop by administration and guidance offices before the athletic offices to get a feel for what others in the building think of you. Do not underestimate the importance of your reputation with everyone at your school and in your community — not just the coaches. (See the Freshman Year chapter for social media information, which ties in directly with this bullet.)
- **Talk to your high school coaches and mentors.** If you're on the varsity team for the first time as a sophomore, you most likely have some new coaches. Talk to them, because they're the ones who will help you the most over the rest of your high school career. Be sure they know what your goals are, academically and athletically.

- **Take a predictor test.** The ACT Aspire tests and the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) can give you a feel for how you'll do in a year or so, when you take the ACT or SAT, which are the entrance exams used for college admission. Take both, if offered at your school, to get an idea of which one best matches your academic strengths.

Some students want to take the ACT or SAT during their sophomore year, but the ACT Aspire tests and PSAT are sufficient at this point. They're shorter, and either will serve as a good indicator of where you are now academically and where you need to go in the next year. ACT Aspire and the PSAT are administered through the high school. Talk to your guidance counselor for more details.

- **Volunteer.** What's this doing here? In high school, you are building a resume of accomplishments to sell yourself to colleges. In addition to helping you grow as a person, community service shows you have interests and involvement beyond the field or court. It shows that you're a well-rounded person, which is attractive to colleges, whether or not you end up as a college athlete.

Being able to handle volunteer work in addition to academics and athletics shows coaches that you're a good time manager who can take on the extra responsibilities that come with college athletics. Be smart about it, though — don't let volunteer work interfere with academics, which must be your primary focus.

- **Take stock of your goals.** Are you where you need to be academically? Athletically? Be honest with yourself about your progress. Talk to your teachers and your coaches. Where do they see you, and what do they recommend for you going forward?

You have prepared yourself for roadblocks, but perhaps new ones have come up. How can you overcome these issues? Reset your goals if necessary. If you think you need to drive harder to become your best self, this is the time to recommit.

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and involvement beyond
the field or court.
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JUNIOR YEAR

Whether you have evaluated and reset your goals, as suggested earlier, or you are continuing to work your original plan, you should enter your junior year pushing harder than ever before. At this point, you should have a better understanding of your potential and what you need to do to reach your goals. Do not take your foot off the gas, either athletically or academically.

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

As you head into your junior year, start thinking about the college entrance exams, the ACT (www.actstudent.org) and the SAT (www.collegeboard.com). The differences between the two tests are growing less pronounced than they used to be, but significant differences still remain. The ACT tests you on English, math, reading, and science reasoning. There's also a short essay component that is optional — some colleges require it, some recommend it, and some don't care whether you take it or not. The SAT currently tests you on critical reading, math, and writing, including a short essay component that is required.

Generally, questions on the ACT are fairly close to the sort of work you have done in school. Historically, SAT questions have been a bit more abstract, especially in math, and the SAT has used fairly high-level vocabulary in its critical reading questions. Beginning with the 2015–2016 school year, the new SAT will adjust its math section to more closely reflect what high school students know and can do, and the vocabulary will be more practical and less obscure. The SAT essay also will be made optional.

Stay informed about changes to the ACT and SAT by signing up for e-mail updates from Doorway to College at www.doorwaytocollege.com, and follow us on social media. We also recommend that you sign up for updates on the SAT at www.collegeboard.org and on the ACT at www.actstudent.org.



Performing well in your high school courses is the most important thing you can do to master the *content* of these tests. What your classes probably don't teach, however, are the *strategies* specific to each subtest of the ACT or SAT. This is where an excellent test prep program with targeted strategy instruction will benefit you. Look for a proven test prep solution with a track record of success with other juniors like you — and don't just take their own word for it; ask to see independent school studies that demonstrate their effectiveness. Otherwise, you might just be wasting your or your parents' money.

One more thing to consider is the time commitment a test prep program demands of you. As a high school student athlete, time is already a limited commodity. Don't blow hundreds of your parents' hard-earned dollars by signing up for a program that you won't have time to attend — no matter how big its name. Look for a focused test prep program that will give you great value in a limited amount of time.

If you want to go to college — as an athlete or not — in most cases you will need a certain minimum score on one of the two entrance exams to qualify for admission. (To learn about the more than 800 colleges and universities that do not use the ACT or SAT to admit a substantial number of applicants, visit www.fairtest.org/university/optional.) Yet college entrance exams are only one part of your college application.

The SAT and ACT exams are intended to predict your success during your first year of college, but your high-school grades are an even better predictor. So get good grades first, and take the ACT or SAT when you reach your junior year.

Test day is a critical time to value academics over athletics. In my junior year, I ended up at a track meet way too late on the night before I took the ACT. With a lot less sleep than we were used to, many of my teammates and I ended up with scores much lower than our potential. This led to a lot of retakes in a day when retakes were rare (which is certainly no longer the case, as students today often take both the ACT and SAT multiple times).

Investing in preparation for the test you choose to take is time and money well-spent. Test prep can help raise your score, and Doorway to College offers programs that can help. Learn more about our test-preparation resources at www.doorwaytocollege.com.

RECRUITMENT

Recruiting should start to heat up during your junior year. You should be hearing from coaches who are interested in having you play for them. If not, you need to do something different.

Now may be the time to consider creating an online profile through your high school, if possible, or else through a recruiting service. Most high school athletic programs are using some sort of social media, and video clips are now easier than ever to show through programs such as Hudl (www.hudl.com). This is one way college coaches and their staff search for prospects.

If high school coaches are not listing your name on their evaluations for college coaches, you probably need to pick it up in some area. Maybe you need more skill development. Ask your high school coaches what you need and how to get it.

INVESTIGATING COLLEGES

It's time to make more unofficial visits to potential schools. You may have to drive things ahead yourself. Narrow your college list, and get the attention of the coaches on your list. E-mail, write letters, make calls, and ask if you can come for unofficial visits. Visit schools at which you can see yourself playing, and build relationships there. Keep asking questions, and keep working to sell yourself as a worthy investment. Ask to meet with academic representatives on campus. Learn more about possible majors and whether they are right for you.

As you investigate colleges, it's critical to look at them as academic institutions, not just places to play. For one reason, you never know when your athletic career might unexpectedly end. Many stories can be told about athletes who suffered some sort of injury that ended their athletic careers — student athletes who became just students and who needed to be in the right place to continue their academic career.



As you investigate colleges, it's critical to look at them as academic institutions, not just places to play.



CHARLIE'S STORY

Consider a former player I'll call Charlie.* During the routine physical that all incoming freshman football players are given, the doctor discovered that Charlie had heart palpitations. Due to a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or HCM, his heart was a ticking time bomb just waiting to go off. (When you hear of a young athlete in prime physical condition dying on the court or the field, it's often due to HCM, which is rarely diagnosed before it becomes a major issue.)

Because of his heart condition, Charlie would never play college football, even though he had a scholarship and an unbelievable amount of talent. He was retained on a medical hardship scholarship until he graduated, but what turned out to be most important for him was that he had chosen his college based on athletics *and* academics, not just athletics. This ensured a valuable college experience even after his athletic career ended.

*Names of student athletes have been changed to protect their privacy.

MAKE A VIDEO

Junior year is the time to think about creating an athletic performance video. Coaches want to see you in action, but they usually don't want to spend hours watching a game tape. Your video should run no more than 15 minutes, and it should contain your top clips. Don't expect a coach to know who you are, what your position is, what jersey number you wear, or whether your jersey in a particular game is dark or light. Include a note that provides all of the information that will allow a coach to immediately identify who and where you are on the field or court.

“
Spending a lot of money
on video production
really doesn't help.”

With the video-editing capabilities available to nonprofessionals today, you, your parents, a friend, or your coaches can put together a video that rivals a professional production at a fraction of the cost. Spending a lot of money on video production really doesn't help. If you can spotlight yourself on certain plays, that's all you need.

Coaches won't be impressed by shooting stars or fancy backgrounds; they want to see you as an athlete playing the sport they coach. Consider using a program such as [Hudl](#), and ask your high school coaches for advice. They want to help their students succeed and have probably worked with an athlete like you before.

Put your best foot forward on your video. If you do more than one thing well (for example, if you are a wide receiver who also returns punts), make sure the footage shows your versatility.

Do not overlook the little things when it comes to putting your best plays out there on your highlight video. I used to long snap in high school, but I never thought it was important until I got to college and started to realize I had a unique skill set that made me a valuable commodity, as special teams win and lose football games. Looking back to high school, this is an item I never mentioned in evaluations or in game clips. Yet that's the position I played on my Big Ten university's team.



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CAMPS

You will probably have attended camps before your junior year, but this is when they become very important. Camps give you the chance to compete against the top athletes in your sport who are at the same stage of development. They allow coaches who may be interested in recruiting you to see you in action. Some coaches will tell you that they believe you are close to earning a scholarship, but they want to see you in person at their camp before offering one to you. Many, many athletes are offered scholarships right out of camp.

My advice about camps is simple: Work hard, learn, and compete. Even if you are undersized or lack the total skills package, you can still work hard and outcompete those around you. Coaches will take note of that. Camps offer great opportunities to learn and to prove that you're coachable. Soak up what the coaches teach you. Ask questions, and then ask for more

coaching. This shows you care about improving and being your best.

Learn from your mistakes, and be honest about your weaknesses. If you don't know what your weaknesses are, ask a coach. It's hard to hear about ways in which we don't measure up, but asking shows coaches that you want to improve, which is what you will do as an athlete as long as you play.

As a junior, you are still growing and developing. Camps show where you stack up against others at one specific moment. With the right attitude, you still have time to improve.

“
With the right attitude, you
still have time to improve.”

THINK LIKE A SALES REP

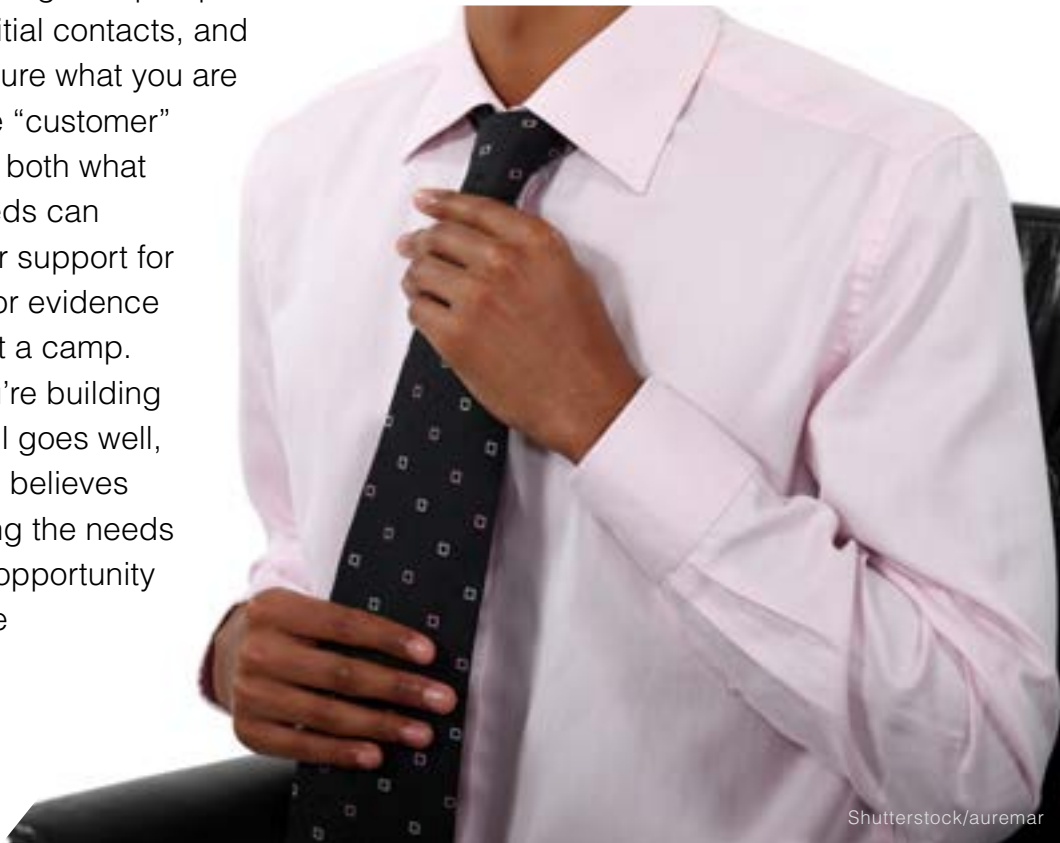
What you have been doing since middle school — what we have been discussing in this book so far — has all pointed toward the actual process of being recruited to play a college sport. The word *recruiting* makes it sound like a college is trying to sell you on signing with them. But unless you are a five-star, blue-chip, can't-miss prospect, you are also trying to sell the college on signing you. (And even five-star recruits have to do some selling.)

The sales analogy is a pretty good one. A sales representative makes initial contact with a potential customer. There's an exchange of information, during which the potential customer explains what she needs and the rep explains what he has to offer. There's usually a follow-up, during which the sales rep checks with the customer on the status of the sale and finds out if the customer's needs or wants have changed.

Somewhere in this process, the sales rep may provide support for the value of his product, which he hopes will offer the customer reasons why she should buy the product. Throughout the entire process, a relationship is built. If and when the customer trusts the sales rep to deliver what he's promising and believes the product is the best choice for meeting her needs, a sale is made.

This is pretty much what you're doing as a prospective college athlete. You make your initial contacts, and you follow up over time to make sure what you are offering matches the needs of the "customer" (the coach), keeping in mind that both what you offer and what the coach needs can change as time goes by. You offer support for your value in the form of a video or evidence of your skills and "coachability" at a camp. While all of this is happening, you're building a relationship with the coach. If all goes well, you make "the sale" — the coach believes you are the best option for meeting the needs he or she has and offers you the opportunity to play. Both of you sign off on the paperwork, and the deal is done.

We'll discuss official visits and commitments — "signing off on the paperwork" — shortly.



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“
If a coach is breaking a
contact rule, take note.
”

RECRUITING PERIODS

The rules surrounding recruiting contact between players, parents, and coaches are complex, and they frequently change. I'll sketch them here in very broad terms. Be sure to check the NCAA website for updates during your junior year.

Over the course of the year, there are **contact periods**, when face-to-face contact is allowed. You and the coach can talk on the phone and exchange texts, e-mails, or letters. Coaches are also allowed to go to games or meets and watch you play in person during these periods.

Certain times of the year are considered **evaluation periods**, during which coaches can watch you compete but cannot have face-to-face contact with you or your parents off-campus. (If you visit a school unofficially during an evaluation period, coaches can talk to you and your parents.)

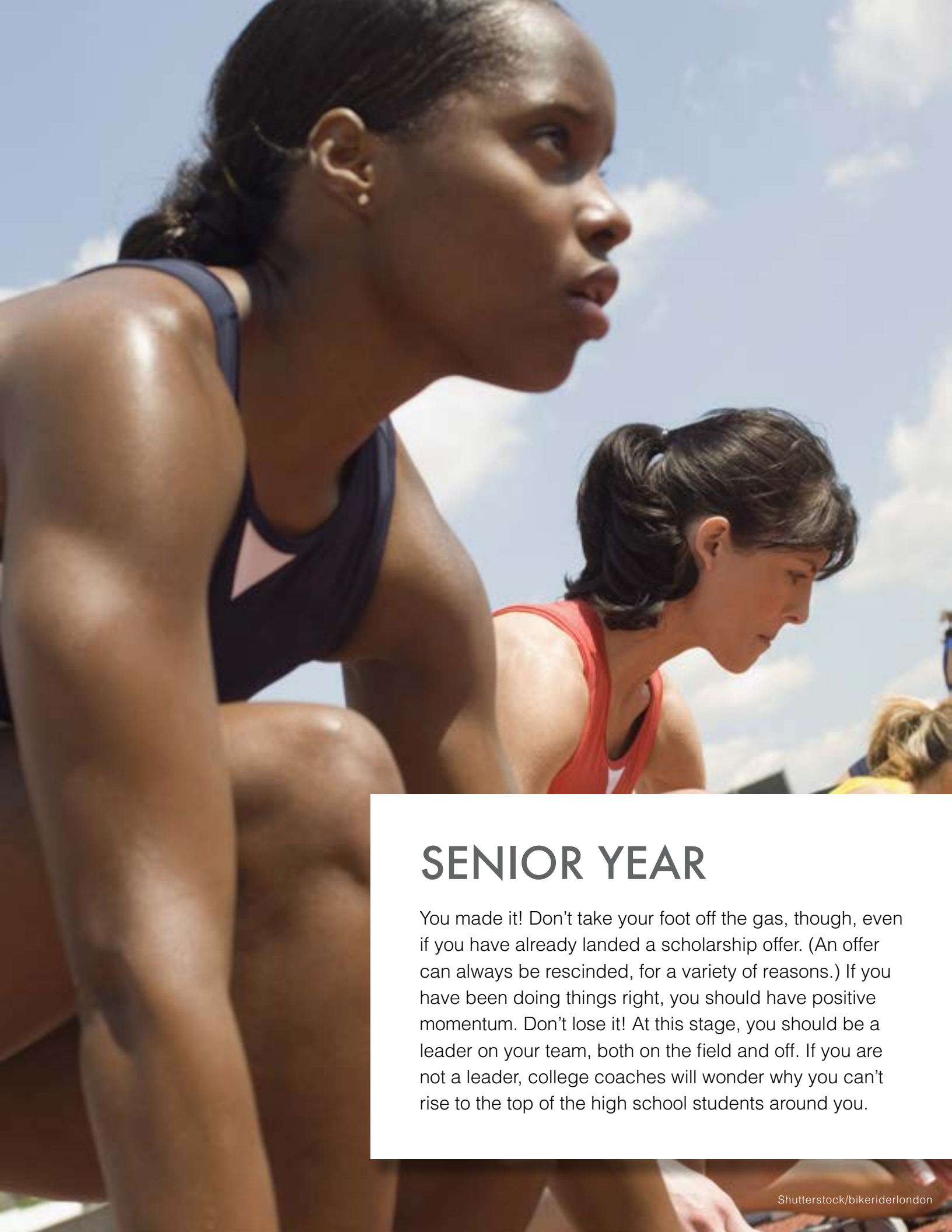
Still other times of the year are so-called **dead periods**, where face-to-face contact and visits to your school by coaches are not permitted.

Understand that at certain times, if you are unable to reach a particular coach, it might not

be because he or she has lost interest in you. It may be a function of the calendar. If you are not sure when you can visit coaches or when they can visit you, ask them. They can always answer your call. Coaches are supposed to know the calendar.

This is important: If you feel that a coach is breaking a contact rule, take note. It may seem great that the coach is willing to bend the rules for you, but if he or she is bending rules too much, you may end up locked into an institution facing NCAA sanctions, including potentially limited post-season opportunities. Sometimes coaches get fired over these infractions, and you could end up committed to playing for a school with a new coach, one who didn't recruit you and is under no obligation to honor commitments made by the previous coaching staff.

There's widespread agreement that these rules are somewhat arbitrary, and many people look forward to the day when they're either simplified or thrown out altogether. But the fact is that right now, today, the NCAA enforces the rules, and when colleges break them, it makes life harder for everyone.



SENIOR YEAR

You made it! Don't take your foot off the gas, though, even if you have already landed a scholarship offer. (An offer can always be rescinded, for a variety of reasons.) If you have been doing things right, you should have positive momentum. Don't lose it! At this stage, you should be a leader on your team, both on the field and off. If you are not a leader, college coaches will wonder why you can't rise to the top of the high school students around you.



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Make sure you are familiar with the college application process. If you don't know how to proceed, ask someone! Don't make a mistake that hurts your chances of attendance. [Doorway to College](#) offers everything you need to know about applying to college and making the transition to college. Go to doorwaytocollege.com for more information or to talk to a college admissions specialist if you are uncertain during this process.

In the classroom, stay with the course plan you created. But take another look at the plan before your senior year, so if anything has changed, there is still time to correct the issue. Don't forget that you can graduate from your high school but not be NCAA eligible. Countless stories of this occurring have been told over the years, and it can happen even to standout students who take advanced coursework.



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OFFICIAL VISITS

If a college has offered you a scholarship or is about to, it's time to schedule and make an official campus visit. Treat an official visit like a job interview — dress well, be polite, answer questions honestly, and ask your own intelligent questions. You can have fun with it, but not too much fun. This is no time to come off as arrogant or immature.

You will meet and talk with players on the team, but be aware that the coaches will quiz them for information about you following your visit. (This is also true of your tour guide, if one is assigned to you.) Expect that they will share everything you tell them and everything you do. Be yourself, but be at your best. Don't give the coaches any reason to stop recruiting you.

If possible, ask to meet with an academic representative during your visit. This has two good purposes: First, it shows the coaches that you are dedicated to academics, and second, you can find out about possible majors you might be interested in.

The college will pay for everything involved with an official visit. You should expect to be on campus for up to 48 hours. That's the timeframe for you to convince the college coaches you are worthy of an offer or to solidly lock down the offer you already have.

MAKING A COMMITMENT

Does an offer and your indication that you will accept it create a binding commitment? No — not for you or for the school. When all you have made is a verbal commitment, you can change your mind and go somewhere else without penalty. Once you sign a National Letter of Intent on National Signing Day, however, then you have entered into a formal agreement. Think of it as a contract. It will be very hard to get out of, so be very sure about the school you are signing with.

If you are under 18, a parent or guardian will need to sign the National Letter of Intent along with you. It's like buying a car with a parent cosigning the loan; it's a binding agreement, and you can be held to it even though you are still legally a minor.

Occasionally an athlete and a parent will disagree about the athlete's destination — the athlete wants to attend one school, but Mom and/or Dad wants the athlete to go somewhere else. If this happens in your family, take it seriously. Support from parents or guardians is critical during the journey you're about to take. If your parent or guardian doesn't support your decision, figure out why and work through

it. Coaches and mentors can be helpful in arbitrating the situation, so talk with them, too.

The specific date of National Signing Day differs depending on the sport you play. You can find the date for your sport at www.nationalletter.org.

Some top prospects have press conferences to announce where they're attending. The odds are that your signing will be a lot less dramatic. Ask the college coaches and your high school coaches what they normally do on signing day.

If you're going to have a press conference, plan it in advance, especially if you want high school coaches to speak and perhaps make a phone call to your future college coach. Your athletic director and high school coaches should be consulted about whether or not they would like to invite news reporters.

Keep in mind that athletes and schools change their minds around National Signing Day. You may have one school firmly in mind, but you need a backup plan (maybe more than one) just in case something changes or an unexpected opportunity comes your way.



TRAVIS'S STORY

Travis was planning to go to a Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) school in the Midwest, a school that is quite competitive in football and basketball. Just before National Signing Day, he was offered a scholarship to a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) school. He was able to make an unexpected move to a larger FBS school at the last minute.

This wasn't a lightning strike out of a blue sky. Travis had been considering attending the larger school and walking onto the football team, so he already had a strong relationship with the coaching staff. The time he had spent building that relationship paid off.

Travis went on to be a starting tight end at the FBS school and played in the National Football League (NFL). Would he have made it if he had gone to the FCS school? Maybe. He's a freakishly good athlete, but playing at a larger school with more exposure and better player development certainly didn't hurt.

This story has two lessons: First, even an incredibly good athlete isn't necessarily a shoo-in for a Division I or FBS football scholarship. Travis was undervalued because he came from a small high school. He was also a phenomenal basketball player, and some coaches feared he would rather play basketball than football.

Second, it helps to be flexible and prepared to seize an opportunity if it comes along. Make a plan (or two), but don't marry it. Like Travis, you may need to jump at the last second to grab the best opportunity.

COLLEGE TRANSITION

Ask your college coaches what their plan is for you during the summer before your freshman year of college. They may want you to be in their area for “optional” summer workouts or may encourage you to stay at home and continue working out with your high school coaches and friends. Don’t rush off to college; make sure you are ready and have put yourself in the best possible shape for a higher level of academics, as well as athletic competition and training.





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REALIZE YOUR DREAM

The next four to five years of your life are going to be an incredible time to meet new people, make memories, and push yourself as a person and as an athlete. Enjoy the journey as you walk through the door you have opened to the college of your dreams.

To learn more about how to succeed as a student athlete, visit
www.doorwaytocollege.com/studentathletes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clint Huntrods is the Director of the University of Iowa's Des Moines Sport and Recreation Management program and former Director of Prospective College Athlete Programs/



Digital Education Specialist at Doorway to College. As a University of Iowa faculty member, Clint has published research on the topic of intercollegiate student-athletes and leadership development. He received a bachelor's degree in communication studies, a master's degree in recreation sports management, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Iowa. As an undergraduate, Huntrods was a full-ride scholarship athlete on the Hawkeye football team, becoming a two-time varsity letter winner, a participant in four bowl games, and a member of the 2004 Big Ten championship team. A versatile athlete, Huntrods also earned three letters on the Hawkeye track team.

ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including college admissions support and test prep, visit us at www.doorwaytocollege.com.



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to College™**
Foundation

STUDENT ATHLETE SERIES

THE DIVISION DECISION

WHICH NCAA DIVISION
IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

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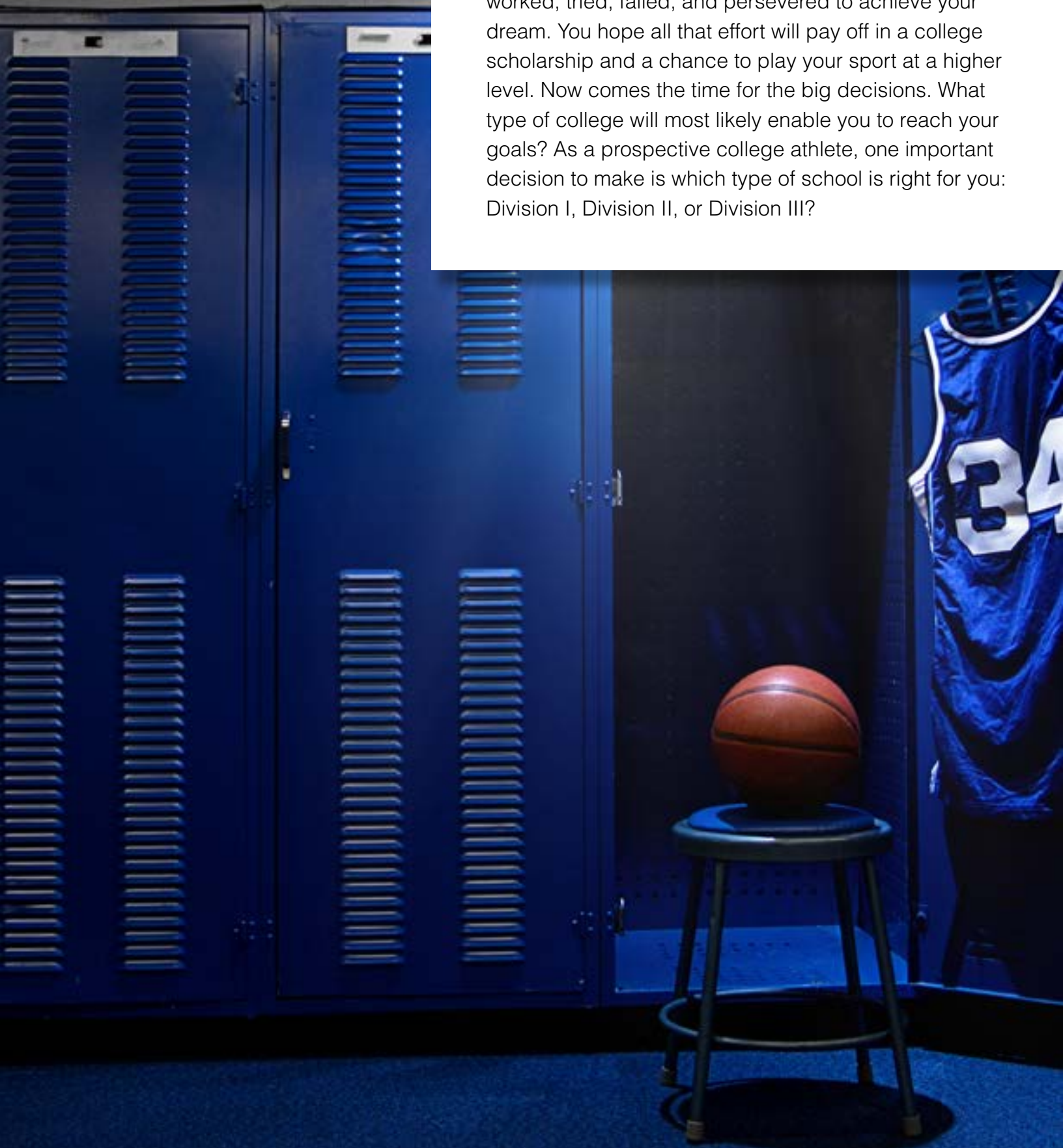
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You dream of being a college athlete. You've planned, worked, tried, failed, and persevered to achieve your dream. You hope all that effort will pay off in a college scholarship and a chance to play your sport at a higher level. Now comes the time for the big decisions. What type of college will most likely enable you to reach your goals? As a prospective college athlete, one important decision to make is which type of school is right for you: Division I, Division II, or Division III?





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WHICH DIVISION WILL GET YOU TO YOUR GOAL?

Why do you want to participate in intercollegiate athletics? To continue involvement in a sport you're passionate about? To satisfy your thirst for competition? To enjoy relationships with your teammates, coaches, and mentors? To go pro? Your answer to the “why” question can have a big influence on which division — and school — you choose.

In a perfect world, we'd all play Division I sports at big schools with standing-room-only crowds, national TV exposure, and first-class athletic facilities. If your goal is to become a professional athlete, getting there will probably be easiest from a Division I program. But as the NCAA itself reminds us, most college athletes turn pro in something other than sports. So when you choose a college, be as realistic as possible. Divisions II and III offer some impressive options. They may not be the big state schools

we see on television, but they can be just as affordable and might even offer a better educational experience.

The academic impact of your college choice will linger long after your days of athletic competition are over. Many college transition professionals today mention that where you go to college is not a 4- or 5-year choice but rather a 40- or 50-year choice. This is why it is so important to make the decision that is best for you and why we recommend that you choose a school based on the intersection between athletics and academics.

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The academic impact of your college choice will linger long after your days of athletic competition are over.

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CONSIDER THE NUMBERS

You have a lot of numbers to consider when deciding on a college. These numbers are available for schools at any level — Division I, II, or III. If you don't see them on the school's website or in their marketing materials, ask the admissions office. You have the right to know all of these *before* you apply.

- **Graduation rate.** Since your ultimate goal is to graduate, this number is critical. How many athletes who enroll at a particular college receive their degrees from that institution within their four or five years of eligibility?
- **First-year retention rate.** This is the percentage of students who return for their second year at the same school, and in some ways it's just as important as the school's graduation rate. It reflects how satisfied and supported students are once they're on campus. You can compare retention rates for the same types of institutions to see how well each serves their newest students' needs and expectations during the first year.
- **Student-to-faculty ratio.** How close a relationship do you want with faculty members? Many students hope to work closely with professors in their area of study and want to know about undergraduate opportunities to participate in special research projects. For these students, a small student-to-faculty ratio is ideal. Others prefer a larger setting in which they feel more anonymous.

Either way, you may need to reach out to your professors from time to time — to clarify assignments, get extra assistance, or request a written recommendation for employment or graduate study. So another important question to ask is whether the faculty at the colleges you are considering seem approachable and welcoming to undergraduates.





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KNOW YOUR Ds

Students often want to play Division I (DI) because it represents “the minor leagues,” so to speak, for many professional sports. Division I schools usually have a higher profile and greater resources than Division II (DII) and Division III (DIII) institutions. They can also offer athletic scholarships.

Division II schools are often smaller than Division I schools, and their sports teams do not compete on the largest stage. Don’t overlook these schools, however. They may not be “name brand,” but they can offer exceptional opportunities for participation, and they offer scholarships, too.

To learn more about the three NCAA divisions and about becoming a collegiate student athlete, visit www.ncaa.org.

DI AND DII: SCHOLARSHIP FACT AND FICTION

Let’s deal right away with a misconception some athletes and parents have. A true “full-ride” scholarship is not awarded for the duration of an athlete’s eligibility — or until graduation. It is for *one year*. This is a hot button issue, as recently the University of Southern California (USC) was the first school to begin offering four-year athletic scholarships. The Big Ten also has mentioned pursuing the same measure, so this is potentially a growing trend. Currently, however, an athlete’s scholarship is renewed — or not — at the end of each school year.



SPLITTING THE BOUNTY

Full-ride scholarships are awarded mainly in football, men's and women's basketball, and volleyball. Athletes in those sports do not receive partial scholarships. In other sports, coaches get creative. They might provide only books to one athlete and only meals to another, while giving a full scholarship to still another.

Track and field coaches have it really rough because they have precisely 12.6 scholarships to give out each year in fully funded DI and DII men's programs, and 18 in women's programs. That's 12.6 or 18 scholarships for an entire track team. Think about all the track events: high jump, long jump, javelin, pole vault, discus, shot put, hammer throw, short sprints, and mid-distance. That's nine events before even starting to fill a relay team or signing up distance runners. A track team can have as many as 50 athletes — and that's why a student might run at a school and receive a scholarship only for books.

Not every sport is this tough, but it's important to understand the situation as you look at playing college sports. Sometimes the reality of receiving a scholarship is not as rosy as the picture in our minds.

Some coaches will want you to “earn” more scholarship money during your career as you improve and play a more important role on the team. First semester, you might start out with a



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20 percent scholarship, but as you start scoring points and playing a larger role on the team, maybe placing in a conference event or earning conference recognition as a sophomore, you might be able to get up to 85 percent of your tuition covered by junior year. If you qualify for nationals or are nationally recognized as a junior, the reward might be a full scholarship for your senior year.

SELECT COMPANY

Imagine a Division I school with 140 athletes on the football team. Division I football teams can offer 85 scholarships, and those scholarships are not split, as we mentioned before. So, on this team, 55 athletes go to school and to practice every day in search of a scholarship, walking on with the hope and dream that they will one day earn one. But very few keep playing until their senior year, and very few find that scholarship they are hoping to earn.

About seven million athletes participate in high school sports every year. Only about two percent each year are fortunate enough to earn an athletic scholarship. It's very select company. That's another argument for why academics should be at the forefront when considering how to grow during your high school career.

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Only about two percent
each year are fortunate
enough to earn an
athletic scholarship.
”

DIII: NO SCHOLARSHIPS, BUT . . .

Division III is the largest division in the NCAA. Most of the schools playing Division III sports are small liberal-arts colleges. Some are public and some are private. Most have smaller class sizes than Division I schools and are often famous for their academic programs.

Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships, but they do offer merit-based grant packages to prospective students. When you start to look at the possibilities for merit-based grants, the argument can be

made that if a DIII school wants you badly enough, they will cut your cost of attendance so it's competitive with that of a larger state school.

Consider a student we'll call Jordan. Jordan is focusing on two schools: the University of Minnesota and Augustana College. Jordan lives in Iowa, and out-of-state tuition at Minnesota would be somewhere around \$20,000 per year. Augustana has a sticker price of \$47,000 per year. If Augustana discounts its attendance package for Jordan and gets the cost down to \$20,000 per year, which school would be the better deal?

Most people would probably say that because Augustana's original price was higher, their deal would be better without question. But what Jordan needs to weigh is how much difference there really is between the University of Minnesota and Augustana, considering the value of the degree and the educational experience.

To a certain degree, tuition can be negotiated. Private colleges compete for students. If you want to go to one, be sure they make you an attractive offer. And, as in many other negotiations, it may not be smart to take the first offer they make to you. You may be able to get a better one.

TUITION DISCOUNTING

It's common knowledge that college tuition costs have been rising in recent years. But tuition discounting has also been on the rise along with tuition. Very few students will pay full freight to attend college. In 2010–2011, private colleges showed an average tuition and fee price of \$27,290, but the average net price paid was only \$11,320. Public institutions are not immune to this trend either; with average in-state tuition at \$7,610, the average price paid was only \$1,540 (Association of Governing Bodies of Colleges and Universities, 2014).

To understand how to determine the value of your education, you have to be very careful not to get lost in the tuition

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Very few students
will pay full freight
to attend college.
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discounting game. High sticker prices are used to get you to believe that you are looking at a school of elite-level quality. In theory, a school could charge \$150,000 per year in tuition, which would most likely lead you to believe that it is an incredible school if others are paying that much each year to attend there. What you do not see on the surface is that the school's average institutional grant package may be \$130,000.

Because of this trend, colleges must now make accurate cost information available to allow the public to do research during the college application process. Otherwise, you won't know the real cost of attendance unless you apply. To access this information, dig into the online net price calculators found at <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator> as you look at potential schools. It is your job to be an informed consumer in what is very much a buyer's market.

BUT WILL YOU GET TO PLAY?

Although elite schools, such as the Ivies, turn down far more students than they accept, some higher-priced schools have struggled to maintain enrollment since the recession. They have had to

work harder to keep their dorms and classroom seats filled. As you consider where to attend college, keep in mind that some Division III schools are using athletics as a means to boost enrollment and diversify their student body.

Using athletic participation as a recruiting tool is a great way for an institution to keep high quality students coming in each year. This can be used to your advantage in the Division III market, especially when a school wants you to come play for them; they may get aggressive with institutional grants to make that happen for a star athlete.

Division III football programs have been known to have 120 or more athletes on their football teams. Obviously, not every athlete will have an opportunity to play with such a large team, as only 11 football players can be on the field at a given time. Other sports may also have a large number of athletes who see little, if any, game time. So be realistic about your expectations; competing for a spot on the field or court is likely to be a lot more challenging than it was in high school.

FAMILY FINANCES MATTER

Income can play a role in all divisions. I know a high-school athlete who was sold on playing for a particular Division II school and had no intention of going elsewhere. The coach knew this student's family would not have trouble paying for college if the athlete didn't get a scholarship. So when it became necessary to cut the recruiting class by one, it was easy for the coach to decide whom to cut. It was likely that the athlete we're talking about would still come to play as a walk-on, so he didn't get the last scholarship available. This is just one example, but coaches today know a great deal about athletes and their families, and this personal knowledge can make a difference when it comes to who walks on and who gets a scholarship.

At Division III schools, need-based aid is the most common method of tuition discounting. This is why it's essential to fill out the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#), available at <https://fafsa.ed.gov>, while you're considering potential college opportunities. Not filling out the FAFSA is a critical mistake, because that is how colleges will prepare their offer to you when the time comes. Not completing the form will delay the process and keep you from getting the best possible information from colleges — and might keep them from making the best possible offer to you. Check the [FAFSA deadlines for your state](#) at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/deadlines.htm>, but remember that your very best shot is to turn in your FAFSA form on or shortly after January 1. (You can fill out an estimated FAFSA before you and your parents do taxes, then adjust the FAFSA when you've completed your tax forms.)

BORROWING FOR COLLEGE

No matter what type of school you attend — DI, DII, or DIII, public or private — you may end up having to borrow some money to help pay your way. Experts recommend that your total borrowing should not exceed what you expect to make in salary during your first year after college. So if you expect your first job to pay \$40,000 per year, that's the upper limit of how much you should borrow for your education.

You'll have to pay interest on the amount you borrow, so you'll pay back more than \$40,000. If your total obligation (loan amount plus interest) is \$55,000, at payments of \$400 a month (which is not an unreasonable figure), you'll need more than 11 years to pay it back. Paying off your college loans becomes your first significant obligation once you're out in the working world. Overborrowing can delay the purchase of your first home and many other major life decisions.

To learn about current average starting salaries for various career fields, check the [2013–2013 PayScale College Salary Report](#) or the [Bureau of Labor Statistics "Overview of Wage Data by Area and Occupation."](#)

“
Your total borrowing should not exceed what you expect to make in salary during your first year after college.

”



PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE

Don't let the desire to play college athletics at a certain level force you into making a bad decision for your long-term future. Scholarships are harder to win than you may think and than the media may lead you to believe. Prepare for several different scenarios as you consider where you will go to college; your favorite school may not work out the way you want it to.

The academic opportunities at Division III schools can be just as strong, if not stronger, than those in Division I. While schools in Division III do not offer scholarships, you can capitalize on their desire to get you to enroll at their institution through institutional grants. This can bring a \$50,000-per-year school down to a level comparable with a state school.

Once again, consider the intersection of athletics and academics when making your college choice. You should not feel that you need to immediately transfer to a different school if you suffer a career-ending injury. Your focus on preparing yourself for your future after college should begin now, not when your athletic career ends, for whatever reason. Even an NFL career averages only about three years. So keep in mind that your athletic career will end, and use athletics as a means to prepare for that, not as the end itself.

To learn more, check out the other publications in our Student Athlete Series at www.doorwaytocollege.com/studentathletes.

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Your focus on preparing yourself for your future after college should begin now.
”

CITATIONS

"Tuition Discounting," Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Web, 30 June 2014, <http://agb.org/knowledge-center/briefs/tuition-discounting>.

All hyperlinks are accurate and all referenced resources are free at the time of publication. If you find a broken link or learn that the resource is no longer free, please report it to us at answers@doorwaytocollege.com. Thank you.

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ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including college admissions support and test prep, visit us at www.doorwaytocollege.com.



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HOW TO SUCCEED AS A COLLEGE ATHLETE

MANAGING YOUR TIME, GRADES, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL LIFE, AND GETTING TO GRADUATION



**Doorway
to College**TM
Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Since you are reading this book, you likely have had some success as a high school athlete and are getting ready to make the jump to college. Most important in your journey to that new level will be adjusting to change. As almost everything in your life changes when you go to college, you must be certain that these changes do not disrupt the focus and habits that have led you to where you are today.

Chances are that you have developed patterns of behavior that have contributed greatly to your success thus far. You also probably have a group of people around you who serve as a support system to help you improve and stay grounded through the process of living as a high-profile athlete. As you transition to college, you must work extra hard to establish your athletic and academic habits early so you can continue to find the success you desire.

Many athletes get distracted by the new experiences and people on campus, and they soon become someone other than the person they were in high school. More often than not, that person is not as engaged in school, not as dedicated to sports, and not displaying the high character values that got him or her a spot on a college team.

As you enter college, stay true to yourself and to the habits that led to your success in high school. Talk with your college coaches and successful teammates about how to establish those habits in your new setting. Don't let college life distract you and prevent you from achieving your dreams.

Your habits in high school added up to you performing better than your opponents. The margin for error is smaller and the level of competition is even higher in college. Apply all that you learned in high school about setting goals and mapping out your plan for success. Your consistency will help you do your best and give you the greatest opportunity to both stay on your team and, even more important, stay in college until you graduate.

Student athletes have unique benefits and challenges that other college students don't experience. If you want to succeed, you'll need to be aware of these and be prepared to make wise decisions. In the following pages, we'll talk about some aspects of college life as they pertain to student athletes.



As you enter college, stay true to yourself and to the habits that led to your success in high school.



DECLARING A MAJOR AND MAKING ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Many students enter college without a clue about what they want to be “when they grow up.” If this describes you, you’re probably feeling a bit concerned about how to choose a major. After all, it’s the question everyone asks, right after they ask where you’re going to school.





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For both athletes and nonathletes, deciding on a major is not necessarily easy. Ideally, you have some sense of what you want to do for your career beyond sports, and maybe you have even met with a professor or two.

Nonathletes can take their time choosing a major and can switch majors along the way as often as they like (though keep in mind that changing majors can cost a lot of money in additional courses). Athletes do not have this luxury. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) requires student athletes to make steady progress toward a degree. If you are not making sufficient progress, you will become ineligible to play. The NCAA expects you to be 40 percent of the way toward a degree at the end of your second year, 60 percent at the end of your third, and 80 percent at the end of your fourth year in school. This is known as the 40-60-80 rule.

Your choice of a major is best made at the beginning of your collegiate athletic career. If you aren't yet sure where you are headed in a career, begin exploring your interests, preferences, and aptitudes — along with related careers — using self-assessment tools such as the ASVAB Career Exploration Program (www.asvabprogram.com). When you arrive on campus, make an appointment with the career center or academic advising office. They will have more tools to help you.

“
If you are not making
sufficient progress
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”

STAYING ON TRACK ... AND THEN SOME

When I was in college, I majored in communications. After a couple of years, I decided to take some classes in health and sports studies. I believed I was more likely to pursue a career in that field than in communications, so I thought I would add a health and sports studies minor. This turned out to be a big problem: So many people wanted into the program that there was a waiting list for each class. The first people off the waiting list were those who had declared health and sports studies as a major, and nonmajors were pretty much out of luck. As a nonmajor, I'd never get into a class! I thought the next-best option was to add this program as a major, so I did.

That August, I got a call from my academic advisor telling me I would be ineligible for the upcoming football season. I didn't know what I'd done wrong, but you can probably see where this is going. By adding a health and sports studies major, I was no longer on track with the 40-60-80 rule about progress. Even though I explained it was a second major and I had added it only to get into the classes I wanted to take, he told me it didn't matter. I had to switch back to a minor in health and sports studies immediately — which meant I was once again locked out of the classes I wanted to take. The rule wasn't designed to punish me — it was designed to make sure athletes stay on-track to graduate during their collegiate athletic years — but it felt like punishment at the time.

So here's what I did (and if you're planning on redshirting, you should consider this, too). I graduated at the end of four years with a bachelor's degree in communication studies and then started on a master's degree in sports management. I had another season of football eligibility because I had redshirted in my first year, so I used that extra year — paid for by my athletic scholarship — to complete half of my master's degree. A friend of mine did the same thing with pharmacy school.

To adhere to the 40-60-80 rule, choose your major early. Inform your coaches and academic advisors of the path you plan to take, and be sure to check with them if you are thinking of making any changes.

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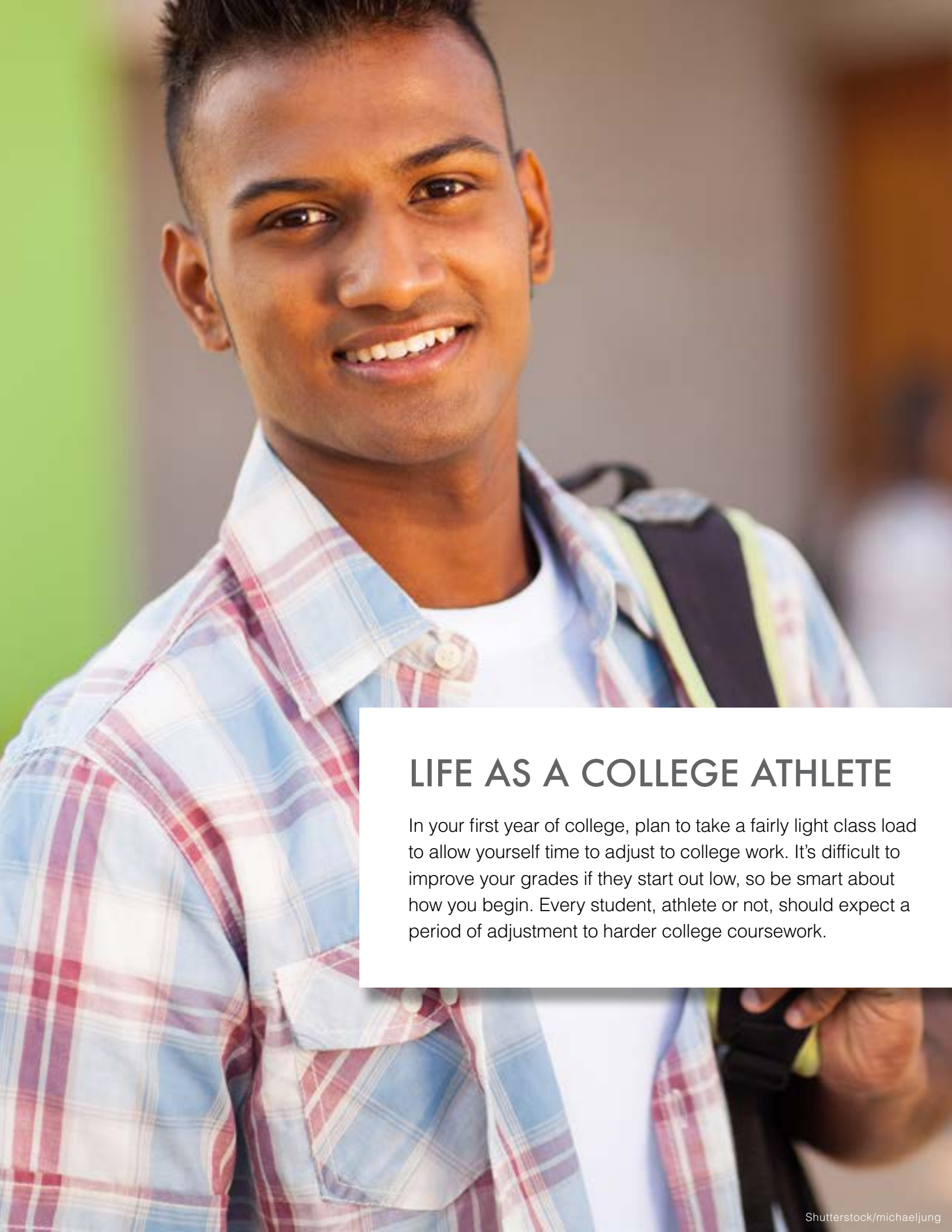
A steady path to a degree will help advance your career long after your playing days are over.

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Once you have decided on a career path, be sure to let those around you — your coaches and advisors — know your plan. The NCAA policies are set up to make sure players graduate. If graduate school is something that you aspire to, plan above and beyond what most of your teammates are doing. Don't be afraid to ask for help with this important decision.

If you can progress through your major faster than the 40-60-80 pace described earlier, do it. A steady path to a degree will help advance your career long after your playing days are over. Such progress also reflects well on the athletic department at your school.

Once you enroll as a freshman, the clock starts ticking on the five-year limit of your eligibility. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, that's how long you'll have to compete as an athlete before moving on to whatever comes next in your life.



LIFE AS A COLLEGE ATHLETE

In your first year of college, plan to take a fairly light class load to allow yourself time to adjust to college work. It's difficult to improve your grades if they start out low, so be smart about how you begin. Every student, athlete or not, should expect a period of adjustment to harder college coursework.

Student athletes have a second adjustment to make: getting used to a way of life that is far different from high school. Everyone adjusts on a different schedule. Some will adjust right away, while others might need a year before they feel comfortable. Some will *never* completely adjust; if they didn't develop good study habits in high school, they may need mandatory study hours and tutors for their entire college career. This is fine, as long as they graduate.

YOUR GPA

Your grade point average (GPA) is important, both to your success as a student and as a requirement to participate in athletics. Each school has a different way of measuring GPA and different rules regarding how GPA affects eligibility. As you read earlier, the NCAA wants to see student athletes make steady progress toward a degree each year of their career so that they meet the requirements to graduate.

Some conferences and schools have more stringent rules about GPA and eligibility than others do. Be aware of this, and be sure to ask about it as you move through the recruiting process. The Big Ten, for example, used to require students to earn more credit hours per semester than the NCAA mandated to ensure students were actually making progress toward their degree and would be in a position to graduate at the end of their athletic eligibility. Here's another example: The Big Ten Conference and the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) differ on the number of hours that can be transferred into a school (which made for an important change in policy when the University of Maryland transitioned from the ACC to the Big Ten).



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Every student, athlete or not, should expect a period of adjustment.

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A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Some students feel isolated on campus in their first year away from home. Athletes typically do not, because they are starting college with a built-in “family” of sorts: the team. Use that connection for help and support for your coursework or for any other issues of adjusting to collegiate life. Ask for help when you need it; you’ll get it if you ask the right people.

REGISTRATION

As an athlete, you will most likely be allowed to register early for classes. This is necessary so that you can schedule your classes around practices and remain eligible within the 40-60-80 rule. Take advantage of this benefit, and be ready to register the first chance you get. This will make it easier to get the courses you need to keep progressing toward your degree.

Most colleges will firmly map out a four-year plan for athletes. It’s okay to deviate from that plan, but only with proper guidance. If you need or want to make a change, let your advisors know. Just be sure the change keeps you eligible and on track to graduate.

“
**Ask for help when
you need it.**
”

STRUCTURING YOUR DAYS

When you were in high school, your days were highly structured. The looser structure of college is one of the hardest adjustments freshmen have to make, and nonathletes often struggle with it. When you are competing as a college athlete, your days will have more structure than most. Workouts will be at a certain time, practice will be at a certain time, study hall will be at a certain time, meals will be at a certain time, and you will know all of the times in advance. This structure is a benefit for you if you take advantage of it.

Many athletes find that scheduling classes in the morning frees them for athletics in the afternoon. Don't be afraid of morning classes. Often athletes have early-morning practice anyway, so it's easy to go right to class afterward, assuming you've gotten enough sleep the night before.

A college campus is bigger than your high school and takes time to get around. When you choose your classes, be sure to account for travel time between classes and facilities. If class ends at 3:30 p.m. and practice starts at 3:35 two miles away, that's going to be a problem for you.





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HEALTH

As most students adjust to college, they typically don't eat very well. They either miss meals, eat poorly and at odd times, or overeat and gain weight too quickly. You've probably heard of the "freshman 15," which is commonly considered the typical amount of weight students put on in their first year of college.

As an athlete, you most likely know the value of good nutrition. Athletes are usually offered meals at a time established by their team. The NCAA has recently opened the door to schools paying for unlimited meals for both scholarship and nonscholarship athletes, but if you get that perk, be smart about it. If you're not used to buffets at every meal, your weight can get out of control quickly.

You may need to gain weight for your sport, but that should always be accomplished with the guidance of a trainer and not by eating several desserts at every meal.

If you or your parents are concerned about the physical changes demanded of you, consider the changes between your freshman and senior years in high school. People typically continue to grow and develop until they reach their early 20s, so it's not unreasonable to expect natural changes over the course of your college career. Hefty meal plans and state-of-the-art training can lead to major body changes.

IMPORTANT HEALTH QUESTIONS

Make sure to get answers to the following questions from your coaches:

- What is your plan for developing me in the safest and healthiest way possible?
- What do you expect to see in terms of my growth and weight gain?
- How do you deal with athletes after their college career is over to help them return to a healthy weight they can maintain?



SENSIBLE WEIGHT GAIN – AND LOSS

I was an offensive lineman, and one of my mom's greatest concerns was the weight that I needed to gain. I was an undersized high school student, and my college coaches wanted me to bulk up. Division I linemen are not small. Every school I visited had coaches who boasted that they'd be able to bulk me up, but sometimes they didn't have very good answers about how and why. My mom is a bit of a health nut, and she didn't like that one bit.

Then we met the strength coach at the University of Iowa. He was able to explain how I could gain a specific number of pounds per year to end up somewhere in the 285- to 300-pound range through science-based training plans. He was able to show us numbers for other athletes who entered at a weight the same as or similar to mine and how they were able to grow and develop over time. He was also able to show that these athletes made progress in strength, speed, and agility while they were gaining weight. While they were getting larger, they were also becoming better athletes all around.

What impressed us was that many of these athletes were actually decreasing their body-fat percentage at the same time they were gaining weight. While the coach was certainly hoping some of his athletes would go on to play professional sports, he emphasized that if an athlete puts on weight in a safe way, and doesn't just add weight for the sake of adding weight, the pounds come off very easily and naturally when the athlete's career is over.

Without question, he was right, and he continues to be one of the best in the business of developing college athletes. Sure enough, when the time came for me to lose the weight, it came off very naturally. All I had to do was continue cardio work and learn to control my portions. I had to eat a lot to stay around 300 pounds, and once my football career ended, I had to train myself to eat much less.

As you visit colleges and talk with coaches, ask them how they will help you meet the physical challenges that will be demanded of you in your sport. Make sure your overall health is their top priority.

INJURIES

When you interview the college coaches to whom you may be entrusting your health and safety for several years to come, don't forget to ask about injuries.

As an athlete, you will face a variety of injury risks, depending on your sport. You need to know ahead of time what will happen if you are hurt.

Injury policies could affect your playing time and immediate recuperation; of course, you expect that. But how an injury — such as a concussion — is treated or even ignored can also affect your health for years to come.

Ask coaches and trainers how they deal with injuries. Ask how concussions are tested and treated, and about the timetable for allowing a concussed athlete back on the field or court. Coaches should have a defined procedure and baseline tests, and they should be willing to explain them in detail and answer your questions.

Find out about the athletic department's injury policy regarding scholarship and nonscholarship athletes, depending on which you may be. Ask what could happen with your scholarship in case of injury. An injury that causes you to miss one game may not have an effect, but what if you miss a whole season, or worse, what if you suffer a career-ending — or life-altering — injury?



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“SHAKING IT OFF ”

When Brad* wrestled at a Division I school as a junior, he injured his lower back during practice. He was pressured by his team, his father, and his coach to “shake it off.” His friends told him, “Be a man.” His dad told him, “Suck it up.” His coach said, “Get back out on the mat. We need you out there.”

No one told him to take time off to heal. And, frankly, he didn’t want an injury to keep him from being part of his college team. So he didn’t admit to anyone just how badly he was hurt.

He got back out on the mat and competed in the next meet. But his injury only got worse. Before long, he had to quit the team for good.

Twenty years later, Brad has frequent back pain. He can’t safely lift more than 10 pounds. He sleeps poorly and wakes most mornings with a bad backache. “If I had just listened to my body instead of bending to my desire to stay on the team, I’m pretty sure I’d have had an entirely different outcome from my injury. And I probably wouldn’t have been in pain for the past 20 years,” he says.

Learning about the college’s injury policies beforehand is essential. If an injury does occur, review those policies to make sure they are followed. But most important, listen to your body and to the advice of independent health care professionals. The decisions you make about your health today can have effects that last a lifetime.

* Names used in examples in this e-book have been changed to protect the athletes’ privacy.

TIME MANAGEMENT

If you were to ask any coach to name the important skills an athlete needs to succeed, you can rest assured that time management would be high on the list. You must learn to prioritize, use a planner (either paper or electronic), and maximize the hours in your day.

I've mentioned this previously and will do so again: *Athletics* should not be your number-one priority, except for the way it affects your daily schedule. Instead, make *academics* your number-one priority; athletics can be a close second. If you fall behind in the classroom, catching up is very challenging. Fall too far behind and you jeopardize both your spot on the team and your status as a student.

Your social life should be third on the priority list, in terms of both its importance and the time you spend on it. If number three becomes too high a priority, you will struggle with numbers one and two. In all life areas, moderation is key, especially as you make the transition from high school to college life.

Eventually, you may find time for community service work. Volunteerism helps make you a well-rounded person, but don't take it on until you have found the formula for successfully balancing the athletic, academic, and social areas of your life.



TOP THREE PRIORITIES FOR THE COLLEGE ATHLETE

1. Academics
2. Athletics
3. Social life

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WHEN LOVE COMES KNOCKING

Kim played DII collegiate basketball at a school a couple of hours away from home. Sports had always been a driving force in her life, and she worked hard to hone her skills and stay at the top of her game, even during summer breaks. She also did a great job of balancing her sports involvement with academics, graduating from high school with honors. She continued these habits into her first semester of college, earning a starting position on the team and making the Dean's List.

Then Kim met Marc.

Marc was a great guy, and they really hit it off. They had a lot in common and enjoyed spending time together. A *lot* of time. Pretty soon date night was every night. They were staying out too late, and her performance both in the classroom and on the court began to slip.

Kim wanted to spend all her time with Marc, but she also wanted to succeed as an athlete and as a student. She'd practiced hard and dreamed of playing college ball since she was a little kid. Besides, her scholarship depended on her staying on the team.

Before long, her coach gave her an ultimatum: "Get your priorities straight, or make room on the team for someone who will."

Dating is a normal part of college life. It's important to keep it in perspective, though. Your academic and athletic commitments should come first. It helps to seek out dating partners who also are focused on academics and career, and who will encourage, not distract, you in following your dreams.



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Get Organized

How do you begin with time management? You can choose among any number of day-planning tools available online, but you don't need anything fancy. You can use a spreadsheet, an electronic calendar, an app on your phone, or even simple pen and paper to block out the hours in a day and fill in what you will do with each of them. Careful scheduling of your day ensures that you will be able to accomplish everything you need to without overlooking any upcoming deadlines.

In many college classes, professors will map out the entire semester in advance, so you will know what you have to do and when you have to do it. You can pencil in exams and due dates for papers or projects months before those dates arrive. Don't expect special treatment because you are an athlete; deadlines won't be extended for you just because your schedule is full.

Team Travel

Travel dates are a big issue for many professors — and a real annoyance to some. Even if the athletic department notifies your professors of the team's travel dates (as some athletic departments do), take the initiative to talk to the professors yourself — *well ahead of time*. Be proactive: Don't just ask them what you will miss. Go to the course outline, determine on your own what you will miss, then ask how you can make it up.

This shows maturity, responsibility, and initiative. It can't hurt to make a good impression on the person who's going to give you a grade at the end of the course. If you miss a class, the worst thing you can do is contact the professor afterward and ask, "Did I miss anything?" as if there might be a class date for which she prepared nothing.

Seek Balance

Good time-management skills will allow you to maximize your productivity during the time you spend on each segment of your day. This involves more than just making sure your class schedule doesn't conflict with practice times. If planning every hour of your day seems hard or uncomfortable, think of it like this: Anything new you're trying to learn is hard and uncomfortable at the start. Some of the things you do to compete in your sport were hard or uncomfortable once, but you got used to them. You'll get used to time management, too.

If time starts to get away from you — if you have trouble meeting all of your responsibilities over the course of the day — talk to somebody about it. Professors, academic staff, tutors, and coaches are all willing to help, and if you keep them informed, they can do just that. If you find yourself having to devote too much time to one thing, it will most likely affect your performance in other areas. When you find the right balance, you will be successful.

“

Good time-management skills will allow you to maximize your productivity.

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HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Justine was super involved in high school. Not only was she a standout athlete in volleyball and track, she was also in the orchestra, on the yearbook staff, and on the student council. In fact, during her four years of high school, there were few extracurricular activities Justine hadn't tried. An outgoing person, she also had an active social life. And she managed all this while keeping her grades up.

When Justine reached college, she assumed she would continue her role as Big Woman on Campus. But college was a whole new ball game. She had earned a spot on the volleyball team, and the level of competition was higher and the practice demands much more intense. Her classes also were more challenging than in high school. She met new people easily, though, and was soon elected to represent her dorm floor in the student senate. The next thing she knew, she was in the environmental club and had joined a band. What's more, the other students on her dorm floor seemed to go out every night, and of course they invited her to come along.

Justine's commitments were getting out of hand. When she wasn't pulling all-nighters studying, she was losing sleep worrying about how she would get everything else done. Her performance on the court was lackluster, at best. She was running out of steam. By the end of the semester, as all the stress accumulated, her health began to suffer. She caught a cold that lingered, making it hard to get through final exams, and her grades took a big hit.

Over winter break, Justine realized she needed to reassess. The things that made her happy in high school were not making her happy in college. It was time to dial back and focus her time and energy on the things she really cared about, the things that really mattered to her.

It is better to do a few things well than to do a lot of things hectically — stressing yourself out in the process. Keep your focus on academics and athletics at first. Wait until you have adjusted to college life before adding more to your plate. If you decide to pick up an extracurricular activity, make sure it is one you really care about and have time for, and don't hesitate to drop it if your grades start to suffer.



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STRIVING FOR SUCCESS

To be successful in college, you need a good understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. This is the only way you can evaluate what is going well and what is not. Know what has allowed you to be successful in the past and what has limited you.

Build on your strengths, and work to limit your weaknesses (and improve them as best you can). This should be an ongoing project from the very beginning. Don't let yourself get so far behind in a class that you have to drop it or that you get a failing grade at the end of the semester. By then, it's too late.

College allows you a tremendous amount of independence, which can be an advantage or a detriment. Some of the forces that keep you grounded right now — such as your family and others who know and care about you — may not be as available to you in college. Use your independence to grow as a person, but don't allow that independence to cause you problems and get you into trouble.



THE COLOR OF YOUR SHIRT

You have probably heard of the various “shirts” an athlete can wear as he or she joins the ranks of college athletics. Let’s briefly go through the various options, what they mean, and how they can affect you.

- **Redshirt** is the most common term you'll hear. Red means "stop," so a redshirt means you aren't going to play — at least not right away. When an athlete arrives on campus and sits out his or her first year of competition, that's called "redshirting."

The athlete will still practice with the team and be on scholarship, if applicable, but he or she is not allowed to play in games. Technically, an athlete can play in up to 20 percent of a team's games in a season and still take a redshirt, but in most cases, if you're redshirted, you should expect not to play at all and use the first year as a developmental year.

- A **medical redshirt** is a little different. Regular redshirted athletes are usually freshmen, but an athlete at any level can take a medical redshirt if he or she plays a portion of the season (usually up to 20 percent) then suffers a season-ending injury. For the remainder of the year, the injured athlete rehabs accordingly before the next season. Schools apply to the NCAA for medical redshirt permission. If permission is granted, the NCAA may also grant the athlete an extra year of eligibility to make up for the season lost to injury.
- **Grayshirt** is a relatively new term. A grayshirted athlete delays enrollment in school and participation with the team until the middle of what would be his freshman year. He will take classes either at a community college or part-time at a four-year institution of his choosing. It is important that he not enroll full-time, as this would start the clock on his five years of athletic eligibility.

Grayshirting helps the athlete gain a little more time to grow and develop. It also allows schools to over-sign recruiting classes without finding themselves over the maximum number of scholarships. (Some athletes will graduate after the first semester of the school year, freeing up scholarships for the grayshirts.)

Grayshirting has been used in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) for several years, but other schools around the country recently have begun using it a bit more. It's most commonly done in football at the highest levels. The athlete must pay his own way during the first semester, and he's not allowed to eat or work out with the team during his grayshirt period. After his grayshirt period, the athlete becomes a full member of the team and participates with everyone else.

Some schools push the limits a little when it comes to the finer points of training during the grayshirt period. But because the NCAA does not recognize grayshirting as a way to get athletes to college, grayshirt athletes should not participate in team functions.



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- **Greenshirting** is even newer than grayshirting, and it's commonly seen in Division I football programs. A high school athlete graduates in December of his senior year, then enrolls in college in January, one semester earlier than he normally would. This allows the athlete to get a jump-start on academics and participate in spring football practice, instead of joining the team in August and beginning to play right away in September.

Greenshirting is a good option only for athletes who expect to compete for playing time during their freshman year. It's not for everybody. Freshman athletes are already competing against many athletes much older than they are; greenshirting exaggerates the difference a little bit more.

Weigh Your Options Carefully

The position you play and your future plans should be weighed carefully when you are deciding to grayshirt, greenshirt, or redshirt. Coaches will be able to advise you accordingly, but keep in mind that they may use one of the shirts in their own self-interest, as a way to gain some breathing room in their signing class.

Imagine one school wants you to grayshirt — to stay away for a semester before you begin to participate. Now imagine that another wants you to come right away and redshirt. The school that wants you to redshirt might value you more than the one that wants you to grayshirt.



TRANSFERRING

What if you go to a school, decide you don't like it there, and want to transfer to another? Transfers usually happen for two main reasons: either because the athlete wants more playing time or because he or she wants to be closer to home.

SID'S STORY

Consider Sid. He transferred from a Division I school to a Division III school for more playing time. His dad warned him that he should be 100 percent sure that, if athletics didn't work out, he would still be happy at that school. Sid was, and the transfer turned out to be a wise choice.

He played only a couple of games during his first season at the new school and was eventually diagnosed with broken vertebrae in his neck. The injury required him to have a plate fused into the back of his neck, which ended his football career and turned his focus to academics. Because Sid made his college choice based mainly on academics, the school was still the right one for him even after his competitive football days were over.

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Be sure the transfer school is a place you want to attend for academic reasons.

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Choosing where to transfer involves a decision-making process similar to the one you went through when choosing your first school. What's most important is to be sure the transfer school is a place you want to attend for academic reasons.

If you want to transfer, start the process by talking with people at your current school. It might feel awkward, but athletes transfer all the time, so the coaches will know what to do. They might be able to map out the transfer process based on the school or division you want to transfer to. Your coaches can talk about your athletic future and what they recommend for you, but it's more important to figure out what your academic future looks like.

Talk to your advisor or a member of the athletic department staff to get answers regarding whether the credits you have already earned will be accepted at your new school and what a transfer will do to your graduation date. In most cases, it will delay your graduation. You might also find limitations on your scholarship (if you are getting one at the new school), and you may have to sit out a year based on where you want to go.

One new option at the Division I level is attractive to some athletes. If you get your degree and you still have eligibility remaining, you can transfer to another school, enroll in graduate school there, and play one more year without having to sit out. (The most famous recent example of this involved Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson, who got his degree from North Carolina State but played a final year of eligibility at the University of Wisconsin.) Check the rules in the conference to which you'd like to transfer, because some limitations still exist.



THE LAST WORD

One of the greatest benefits that come from a career as a college athlete is the relationships you create. You will develop many strong, positive relationships as an athlete, and you can use them to network with other people and develop still more relationships.

Merton Hanks, a former NFL star with the San Francisco 49ers, is now vice-president of operations for the National Football League. He recommends that athletes seek out such relationships and networks while they're playing, because the opportunities then for doing so are vast. Such connections serve athletes very well after their playing days are over. Merton says that fellow athletes are future stars in a variety of fields — not only in sports but also in medicine, business, education, and others. Because athletes are competitive and driven to succeed, they're good people to know on and off the field or court. They — and you — can use athletics as a springboard to a life of purpose and success.

That's what I want for you, and I wish you nothing but the best as you pursue it.

To learn more about how to succeed as a student athlete, visit
www.doorwaytocollege.com/studentathletes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including college admissions support and test prep, visit us at www.doorwaytocollege.com.



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