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## Wall Street Journal

### Competing for Scholarships on the Field and Online

By HEIDI MITCHELL



Aleah MacKay, 16, of Bedford, N.H., left, plays in a lacrosse tournament in Lake Placid, N.Y. Part of her dedication to the sport is the potential to earn a college scholarship.

(Caleb Kenna for the Wall Street Journal)

**August 8, 2012** -- Aleah MacKay loves playing lacrosse at her high school in Nashua, N.H. But the 16-year-old junior admits that "the driving force" behind her dedication to the sport is "to earn a scholarship to a top Division I school."

To boost her skills and get the attention of college recruiters and coaches, her parents say they spent about \$4,000 sending her to six intensive summer sports camps and one clinic at a Division I school, which is generally a big-name university with millions of dollars in sports funding and televised sports teams. Aleah also used an online service that promises to match high-school athletes with college coaches.

With tuition for a four-year private university topping \$250,000, families are eager to tap some of the \$2 billion that the National Collegiate Athletic Association estimates is granted in athletic scholarships for the 23 NCAA sports each year.

Families are hiring private coaches with specialties—like linear speed tutors to perfect a child's gait. Others are enlisting recruitment consultants and seeking out videographers to make professional-looking highlights reels. Many college-athlete hopefuls attend summer training camps, some that include the chance to network with college coaches—a rare opportunity since it isn't allowed by NCAA rules until a student's junior year.

Some students, like Aleah, register with websites that promise to connect them with college recruiters and coaches.

Even with such preparations, an athletic scholarship is, statistically, unlikely. For men, 59.2% of sports scholarships are given just to football and basketball players, according to Patrick O'Rourke, founder of the data website Scholarship Stats.

In 2010, a student who played high-school sports had a 6% chance of playing any college varsity sport, in any division, according to Scholarship Stats, which bases its numbers on U.S. Department of Education data. For Division I schools, chances were only 3.7%.



Aleah MacKay, left, used an online recruiting service to increase her chances for a sports scholarship. Her parents also spent about \$4,000 for sports camps and a clinic.

(Caleb Kenna for the Wall Street Journal)

College coaches say that in many instances, such as when there are no individual rankings, they often rely on the online services to find the superstar athlete in the haystack.

Other times the student profiles just take up space in a coach's inbox. "I have not seen any useful data for fencing with regard to recruiting services," said Michael Aufrichtig, head coach of Columbia University's fencing team, in an email. "If they were to...tell me how many five-touch bouts they won, along with scores and percentage of wins in overtime situations, that could help. Now I just get an email with a name and some results," he said.

Even if athletic prowess doesn't lead to a scholarship, it may make an athlete more attractive to a selective schools, which can then entice the student to attend and play by offering other types of financial aid.

At the recruiting service beRecruited.com, student athletes can register a free profile and create a digital résumé with their athletic and academic stats, videos and photos. They can bookmark schools and programs, which automatically notifies coaches of their interest.

"If you're in the top 100 football and basketball players in the country, you'll get recruited on your own, says Vishwas Prabhakara, chief executive of the San Francisco-based company. "We're for the other 99% of student athletes across all sports."

The service is free for coaches, who can register and search for athletes across a variety of criteria, and receive alerts when new users join or existing users add updates. Students who pay \$60 for a Deluxe membership can see which coaches are viewing their profiles in order to follow up with them.

BeRecruited.com has signed up 800,000 students since 2010. It has about 30,000 coaches registered to the site, Mr. Prabhakara says.

The company makes around one million "connections"—when a coach views a profile, bookmarks an athlete, or reaches out to an athlete, or when a student does the same to a coach—across 31 sports per month. That is an increase of 33% over the same period last year, Mr. Prabhakara says.

Once a connection is made, all communication happens outside of beRecruited's walls, at which point coaches and students are responsible for complying with NCAA rules of engagement, Mr. Prabhakara says.

Since 2008, more than 20,000 of the service's student-athletes have self-reported that they have committed to a college or university and received some sort of scholarship, says Mr. Prabhakara.

Another service, the Chicago-based National Collegiate Scouting Association, launched in 2000, says its network has about 600,000 student-athletes. In May, 1,600 colleges asked NCSA for specific types of athletes for scholarship placement, says its founder Chris Krause.

NCSA's fees range from \$300 to \$1,995, which can include virtual one-on-one training on how to talk to coaches, how to set up unofficial and official visits and which schools to target. Mr. Krause says his service has found scholarships or walk-on opportunities for 90% of his clients.

Certain sports offer better scholarship odds than others. Nonrevenue sports, which at some schools are called "club sports," such as water polo and rowing, have grown recently, says Mr. Krause. Ice hockey, sand volleyball, softball, equestrian sports, and women's rugby also have seen a surge in the number of collegiate teams recently. Men's track teams have grown considerably, with an average of \$23,000 a year given in scholarships to individual athletes, compared with the typical \$8,000 to \$17,000 for other sports, says NCSA.

Sue Enquist, who worked as a women's softball coach at University of California, Los Angeles for 27 years and is now a recruiter-consultant for athletes and coaches, says parents shouldn't push students toward a particular sport, as success requires passion and dedication—and sometimes a third party's assistance. "Don't rely on just your local club coach and his three college connections," she says. She says Web-based services

can be helpful. She suggests "an unbiased, honest assessment of the student-athlete's potential by a third party in the beginning of the college-application process."

Some third parties specialize by sport. Rowed2College, a small San Francisco-based company run by former college rower and coach Dave Hinshaw, offers consulting for \$200 per hour, plus services that range from \$1,500 to \$5,000. The company says it has placed 50 rowers since it launched two years ago.

Aleah, the lacrosse player, has two more years of high school, and under NCAA rules, she isn't permitted to speak to college coaches, other than at summer clinics, until Sept. 1, 2013. Still, Aleah has verbally committed to attend Syracuse University, in New York, a Division 1 school.

There are 12 full athletic scholarships for a Division 1 women's lacrosse program, which are often split into partial scholarships among the 25 or so players. Aleah hopes to receive some of that money. Her father, David MacKay, an optometrist in Bedford, N.H., says he is "thrilled Aleah's hard work on and off the field is helping her achieve her goals of playing lacrosse at a top Division 1 college while earning a high-quality education."