

Recruiting U: Lessons from Signing Day

by Paul Krome | Lacrosse Magazine Online Staff

It's the end of recruiting for one group and the start, in earnest, for another.

November saw the first signing period for high school seniors bound for NCAA Divisions I and II colleges, an effective "whew, glad that's over" to a sometimes topsy-turvy recruiting road. Not long before that, September began the initial communication period for juniors, when they began receiving information from college coaches about playing at the next level, just a few months in advance of an important season on the field.

As the recruiting cycle takes another spin, LM surveyed the scene for some useful lessons from Signing Day.

Signatures Matter Most

The National Letter of Intent (NLI) program is a voluntary program used by over 600 D-I and D-II schools across many sports. Institutions and recruits that sign an NLI enter into a binding one-year agreement that requires the prospect to attend the college selected and the college selected to provide an athletic scholarship (partial or full) to the prospect. NLI rules mandate that other schools stop recruiting a prospect once he or she signs an NLI for a given school. In lacrosse, high school seniors can sign during a one-week period in November or during an extended period the following April.



Kristen Cousins of Glen Ridge, N.J., is the school's first Division I lacrosse signee. She'll play at Notre Dame.

Regardless of anything that happens during a recruiting process that can last upwards of 18 months, for high school prospects hoping to play D-I, what matters most will always be the signatures on the NLI.

Take, for example, the tales of the Thompson cousins in Upstate New York. Miles Thompson and his cousin Ty, who is a year older, signed NLIs with Albany in November after some on-again, off-again mutual interest in other D-I powers, as chronicled by Dan Cassavaugh of The Watertown (N.Y.) Daily Times.

Miles Thompson is the younger brother of Jeremy Thompson, a Syracuse midfielder who transferred there after spending the 2007 and 2009 seasons at Onondaga Community College. Miles had interest in Syracuse and vice versa, and the lure of playing with his older brother for the two-time defending champions presumably meant the LaFayette (N.Y.) senior, and their younger brother Lyle, would be bound for the Orange.

Ty Thompson graduated from Salmon River (N.Y.) in 2008 and had high hopes of becoming a Georgetown Hoya. He enrolled at Salisbury Prep (Conn.) for the 2008-09 academic year to boost the chances of that happening, but after not hearing what he wanted to hear from Georgetown, Ty visited the Albany campus. Soon after, he sold Miles and Lyle on the Great Danes.

Miles and Ty signed their NLIs for Albany in November, and Lyle, about four months prior to his junior season at LaFayette, has verbally committed to join them there.

Verbal Schmerbal?

LM's November 2008 edition of "Recruiting U" tackled the verbal commitments prospects often make to the coach of the college they want to play for — at that time. For a variety of reasons, the last few years have seen an acceleration of when blue chippers pledge to a college. Traditionally in lacrosse, opposing college coaches have respected that verbal commitment and ceased recruitment of a verbally-committed prospect. That may be changing.

After initially communicating with Syracuse about enrolling there in the fall of 2010, Miles said communication from Syracuse decreased, which led him to make a verbal commitment to Albany in the summer of 2009.

After that commitment, Syracuse re-engaged in the recruiting process, according to Miles, asking him to complete some paperwork related to scholarships, which he did.

Miles may have been open to reconsidering the Orange, but according to him, Syracuse again went silent after he had returned the paperwork.

"That's when I decided," he said. "SU didn't seem like they were that interested."

Syracuse does not stand alone in recruiting prospects that have verbally pledged to another school, a practice that is quite common in D-I football and basketball. In those sports, some recruiting "wars" include multiple commitments and decommitments that ultimately leave information-starved fans wearing out the refresh button on Web browsers on NLI signing days.

Just a Formality

While the case of the Thompsons' recruiting provided some twists and turns, other prospects' signatures in November simply made formal decisions they had made as early as the spring.

Springside (Pa.) School senior midfielder Courtney Caputo signed her NLI for Georgetown in November. A three-sport athlete, she gave the Hoyas verbal acceptance of a scholarship offer June 1.

"I think it just hit me. It feels more real now than when I verbally committed," Caputo told montgomerynews.com's Joe Turkos after a signing ceremony at the school that included students, fans and cakes.

She credited Springfield coach Liz Harris with guidance in helping her make that decision at the tail end of her junior year.

"She told me everything I was supposed to do and helped me to get everything organized," Caputo said.

Never Know Who's Watching

College coaches' emphasis on evaluating prospects at offseason camps and club tournaments has been well documented, but the spring high school season remains an integral part of the recruiting process. You never know who's watching you from the bleachers, nor what they're thinking.

Kristen Cousins caused 32 turnovers and scooped 49 ground balls last season as a 5-foot-11 defender at Glen Ridge (N.J.). But during a particular game with the Notre Dame coaching staff in attendance, Cousins spent considerable time in the midfield. She ultimately tallied 19 goals, 23 assists and 43 draw controls on the season. Though the Fighting Irish announced her as a defender in its November signee press release, coaches have told her the possibility to play midfield remains, according to Matt Choquette of northjersey.com.