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Recruiting **U**: The Series

See it in D

Rewarding experiences await NCAA Division III prospects, although costs in non-scholarship world a factor for families

By Nelson Coffin

There is one major difference between scholarship and non-scholarship recruiting — about 12 months.

In Division I, elite recruits begin to be seriously courted between their sophomore and junior years of high school, putting younger and younger players in a position to make a possibly life-altering decision midway through high school.

For Division III, add a year — the time between junior and senior years — and you get the idea of how the process works.

“Typically, Division I commitments begin during August after a player’s sophomore year,” said lacrosse.com co-founder Chris Meade, whose company is the official recruiting tool of US Lacrosse. “The commitments will continue through the fall and spring of their junior year, but many programs save spots for players who are late developers.”

“Division III commitments will start at the end of their junior year and will continue through the summer and fall of their senior year. Similar to Division I, the top-tier programs will be able to get commitments from top players first.”

However, even elite DIII programs leave wiggle room for certain recruits.

“We don’t put pressure on anyone,” said Jim Nestor, coach of women’s NCAA champion Salisbury. “We recruit all year because we might find some kids that looked at DI schools and it didn’t work out for them.”

The process really blooms at summer tournaments and camps where potential recruits begin being scrutinized in earnest by DI coaches as rising juniors: Rising seniors receive the same treatment from DIII coaches.

It is not a timetable that thrills all coaches, including Mike Daly of men’s DIII champion Tufts.

“The recruiting time frame is out of control,” Daly said. “First and foremost, predicting 16-, 17-year-old boys is an inexact science at best. Anyone who thinks he can do it with any mathematical certainty is way smarter than I am. Lost in all of this early commit business is the kids and them finding the right fit for college. Academics are still and should remain our first priority.”



Division III lacrosse offers rewarding opportunities, but athletic scholarships are prohibited.

III!

Besides academic considerations, economic ones also must be considered. While grants, financial aid and academic scholarships are available, athletic scholarships are forbidden in DIII — all noteworthy to parents footing the bill.

Charley Mitchell told his son, Alec, a top-notch longstick for MIAA champ St. Paul's (Md.), not to factor finances in choosing a school.

"I told him we'd take out a loan if we had to," he said.

Alec had seen his sister Abbie go through the recruiting ordeal a few years earlier. After garnering some interest from Stanford, Penn and Northwestern while at Roland Park Country School (Md.), Abbie never received an offer.

She then found her way to NESCAC member Bowdoin, which turned out to be the perfect fit for her.

"Alec saw what his sister went through and then looked at DIII schools," Charley Mitchell said. "He never wavered. He saw that he could go to a good school (he committed to Gettysburg) and play right away. If he went to Virginia or North Carolina, he might not see the field until he was a junior."

Besides, Mitchell said that some of Alec's friends told him that playing at the DI level was "like having a job."

Limitations on DIII offseason practice time help keep programs in check. Nestor said teams are allowed only 16 official sessions in a five-week period in the fall. Stevenson women's coach and compliance officer Kathy Railey said one offseason date of competition is allowed.

The NESCAC is more restrictive in that regard, banning all out-of-season practices and mandating a maximum number of in-season games and practices. Franklin & Marshall women's coach Lauren Paul, whose school is in the Centennial

Conference, believes the NESCAC is the only conference that does not allow organized offseason lacrosse practices.

"The biggest difference between DI and DIII is focus," Daly said. "In the NESCAC, with no organized fall practice, our young men are out there because they love lacrosse and are gym rats."

Despite an emphasis on a prospect's athletic evaluation, academics remain paramount. And that's why parents like Mitchell research the type of oversight coaches have over a player's grades.

"It depends on the school," Nestor said, noting some institutions have the funding to have academic advisers for players. "During the season, it's up to the coaches. We send out progress reports to professors and 99 percent of them get back to us."

Academic eligibility requirements are strictly the purview of F&M's admissions department, according to Paul.

"We don't have 'exceptions' at our school and we're not going to get kids into the school who don't belong," she said. "But they [admissions administrators] might be a little more lenient with a kid who is our top recruit. Out of 11 recruits last year, we only had two who were on the bubble."

Once recruits are admitted, there are other academic logistics to consider, such as if professors will work with athletes who miss class because of travel.

Charley Mitchell said Bowdoin was accommodating in that regard, and that Gettysburg did not flinch when Alec asked if he could be an exchange student at some point.

"All seemed supportive of that as part of the college experience," he said. "Paraphrasing [Gettysburg men's coach] Hank Janzcyk, he said, 'You can run and play wall ball in Copenhagen, too.'" **LM**

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