

Parent Handbook

Supporting your Child Through the College Search

The intent of the parent handbook is to provide parents of High School soccer athlete's practical advice that will help you support your child in exploring college soccer opportunities. Your job is to provide direction and support; it is not your role to find your child a college placement. Your child will be more confident of the final outcome if they have been the active participant in the process.

Freshman Year. Relax...let your child adjust to high school without making soccer their sole focus. Help your student choose courses that are both interesting and challenging. Establishing strong time management skills now in terms of balancing soccer, school and friends will pay huge dividends in the future. Remember that academics should always be the #1 priority- don't let them use soccer as an excuse for not getting their schoolwork done. Good grades are important from the beginning and if your child is struggling, seek out help before they see themselves as unsuccessful.

Expect and accept the distractions that surround your child at this age...learner's permit, homecoming, prom, relationships with friends and homework. Establish and encourage good nutritional habits and sleep patterns. All of the changes that surround your child as a high school freshman require a tremendous expenditure of energy and calories. Keep your eyes open to what your child is eating- if you hear the word "diet" in their vocabulary, look and listen to what they are eating and why they believe they need to diet.

Review your child's club schedule and upcoming tournaments for the year. Will your child have the opportunity to play in at least one college showcase type event this year? These tournaments provide exposure of your child to college coaches and recruiters. If they are not planning to attend any, explore having your child guest play on another team in your own club or an outside club; your team coach or club coaches can help you explore some options.

Sophomore Year. Buy a large, clear storage box from Target or Wal Mart to organize all the college mail that will begin to arrive this fall. File the college packets alphabetically. This box will be a major focal point for your child over the next three years! On the outside of each packet, your child can jot down what they saw as strong positives or negatives about the school after they have reviewed the information.

Purchase a resource book such as "Sports Source" at a local bookstore or check-it out at your local library. This type of book will list colleges throughout the United States and will provide information on the soccer program, academics and admission requirements and contacts. Your child now needs to draft a cover letter to send to prospective coaches. The letter should briefly introduce themselves and state their interest in the program. It should include upcoming tournaments that they will be competing in and their email address. Your child also needs to write a resume that they will send out with the cover letter. The resume should look polished and should be correct both grammatically and in content. It should include pertinent information such as full name, address, phone and email contact information, height, weight, position, GPA and significant academic and athletic accomplishments. They should also scan a recent picture onto the resume. The coach is not interested in a lengthy dissertation listing every activity in which your child is involved. Refer to the attached handouts for samples of a cover letter and resume.

Class grades are now increasingly important as is class rank. Make sure that the classes your child is taking will meet the NCAA Clearinghouse requirements. This information

can be obtained through the high school guidance counselor office. If your child is struggling with juggling homework and soccer, ask them what they see as possible solutions, but do not solve these conflicts for them. The demands on their time will only increase with time and your job is to help your child recognize that they have the skills to problem solve and be successful. Your child should take the PSAT and ACT this year. Encourage them to obtain and complete the necessary registration forms for the exams that are available through their school guidance counselor office or on-line.

Begin to objectively consider the type of college that would be most suited to your child. First, consider the different areas of the country and the climate. If your child hates cold weather, that may influence where they would want to spend the next four years. Next, consider the size of the school that you think would be most conducive to your child's style of learning. In general, a large enrollment will translate into large classrooms as well. Does your child do well in the classroom without individual attention or is having a one on one relationship with a professor important? As the analogy goes, are you okay with being a little fish in a big pond or do you want to be a big fish in a little pond? Third, do your research on the history of the soccer program. A great resource is www.ncaa.com/scoreboard.html. Is your child set on playing only Division 1 soccer or are they a better fit with a Division 11 or 111 program? Do they want to play in a particular conference? Is your child independent and confident enough to move across the country or do they prefer being close to family? Always ask yourself this question: if they had a soccer ending injury their freshman year, would they still want to be at that school? Now, make a list of 10-20 schools that meet your criteria and send your cover letter and resume to the coach.

Junior Year. Coaches can email your child beginning September 1st of their junior year. Nerves start to play a big role now, for both you and your child. The mail and email can be your best friend or biggest concern. Take a deep breath! This year is reality check time and you need to take the time to really listen to your child's verbal and non-verbal language. Are your child's grades in sync with the admission requirements at the types of schools they are most interested in pursuing? Are the mail and email correspondences that your child is receiving consistent with the type of program to which they are attracted? How are your child's SAT/ACT scores and GPA/class rank? Are you financially dependent on a scholarship for your child to be able to attend a particular school? Remember that Division 111 schools are not able to offer any athletic monies but often have a bigger source of academic monies available to them. Be sure to ask yourself if you are supporting what your child wants and not what you want for them.

Exposure in front of prospective college coaches and recruiters is increasingly important this year. Coaches may email you and therefore, your child needs to keep them updated in a timely manner regarding upcoming tournaments and their game schedule. It is your child's responsibility to make sure the person in charge of the "player profile" booklet for the tournament has accurate and current information. If you are not confident in the amount of exposure your child will receive, explore other opportunities with your club coaching staff, such as guest playing or attending a summer camp at a college they are interested in attending. Camps can be a great venue for your player to gain increased visibility at a particular school and to have the opportunity to interact with the coaching staff. Be sure to check the dates of the camp and to look at who they list as instructor's to make sure that the coach will be in attendance. Staying on the college campus will also provide a first hand look at what living in the dorm will be like and what the campus and community are like.

If your child is interested in playing at a college near your home or a location where you are traveling to for a tournament or on vacation, take advantage of the opportunity to

do an “unofficial” visit. An unofficial visit is one that you arrange on your own and you cover all of your child’s expenses. You may go on as many unofficial visits as you like. You can still tour the campus and meet with the coach. Remember, your child cannot be expected to know what they have not been exposed to and visiting a campus will provide them with a point of reference for all other visits to come. Even if your child is not interested in attending an in-state school, take advantage of the chance to tour the campus, observe the students and familiarize them with the college atmosphere. This experience in itself will raise questions for them to ask when they go to other campuses.

Senior Year. Whew...you’re in the home stretch! Remember, this is what your child has worked for. Keep it in perspective and ENJOY this crazy time in their life. It is stressful but can be so rewarding too! As of July 1st entering their senior year, college coaches may call your child. There are a lot of nerves and excitement surrounding the July 1 date, so help your child be prepared. Have a log book available so that they can keep track of who called and any specifics they need to remember. In general, coaches will most actively pursue those players who they have been following over the past year and whom they believe will fill a particular niche on their team. So remember, it is not a slight of your child’s talent as a player if you don’t hear from a coach from a particular school- perhaps they do not have a need for the specific position that your child plays. Both you and your child need to be open minded about both schools and playing positions. Coaches may have their recruits listed in tiers and may focus on the upper tier initially and then make subsequent calls to other players depending on the slots they still have open. Coaches may have gotten an early verbal commitment from a player, only to find out that they have changed their mind. Limited or no phone calls in the immediate days following July 1st does not translate into no scholarship or college playing opportunities. Many scholarships are offered as late as the spring. Be patient!

Your child may schedule up to 5 official college visits, per NCAA rules. They may stay on campus for a maximum of 48 hours. The visit will be arranged and paid for by the college. Your child will stay in the dorm and generally, the coaches will have designated an upperclassman for the “recruit” to shadow during their stay. It can be very beneficial to request that the visit include a Friday stay so that your child can attend at least one class. It is also helpful to have it include a home game, so that your child can observe the team’s style of play, the team chemistry and the coaches sideline decorum. Your child cannot be on the sideline with the team during the game but can observe from the stands. Is there much school and community support at the games? How many freshman are on the team and how much playing time do they get? Is your child interested in an established program with a winning tradition or an up and coming program? Where are the recruits from last year from and how much playing time do they receive? How many seniors are on the team? Official visits are HUGE and are probably the number one thing that sways a prospective athlete towards a particular school. Players tend to come away with a strong gut reaction about the school, coach and players.

Some coaches or recruiters may ask to do a home visit, where they come to your home to meet with your family and to “sell” you on their program. They may not accept any payment from you (ie. if you go out to lunch, you may not pay for their meal, nor they for yours). They may bring things with them that depict the future of your child (ie. a tenn picture with your child’s image projected onto it in their college uniform), but they may not leave it with you. Write down questions that you want to cover before they arrive. Coaches may make your child an offer at any time now, but you should not feel pressured to respond by a deadline. The prospective coach should want your child to be confident in their decision and should be receptive to having your child take all of their other official visits. If a student commits to a college prematurely, it may result in a soccer career cut short by a disillusioned or homesick child and everyone loses.

If your phone is not ringing on or after July 1st, you and/or your child should solicit help from your child's club coach. The coach and their staff can be instrumental in phoning college contacts and generating interest in your child. Be honest with your child and yourself if the interest just doesn't seem to be what you expected. There is more to life than soccer and your child has amazing gifts outside of the soccer field. It may be that you need to shift the focus off soccer a bit and remember that your child is a talented and successful person first and an athlete second!