

TIPS FOR SELECTING THE RIGHT COLLEGE & FOR GETTING A SCHOLARSHIP

First and foremost – the most important thing to ask is: does this person really want a scholarship (and everything that entails) or do the parents want it? Playing college sports while going to college takes a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication and unless it's something that the athlete really wants for themselves, they won't put in the time or effort and will end up flunking out of school and possibly resenting the parents in the process.

If the athlete does want to play college ball – getting a scholarship might not happen. Each sport is only allowed so many scholarships and they may run out of those before they run out of positions on the team, so don't assume that you're going to get one.

But, if she does want one and want to work hard enough you'll find the right one for your daughter and player.

Here are some ways to go about it:

Try and attend as many college camps in your sport at as many different schools as possible. This not only helps get you experience that particular school and coaching staff, but also lets the college have exposure with you as well. All schools have camps and you can find them out on their websites.

You also need to make sure you're playing on a summer team to gain more experience and exposure. I'd also pull your high school and summer ball team coach aside, and ask them to be completely honest with you – and find out what level of college ball they feel you could play.

There are 5 levels of college softball:

1. NCAA Division 1 – this is the hardest and the most competitive. It's all the major schools you've heard about. Everyone wants to play at this level but not everyone is talented enough.
2. NCAA Division 2 – this is the next step down but is still VERY competitive. This level various colleges throughout the country.
3. NCAA Division 3 – this level is the least competitive because they don't offer softball scholarships. The players at this level are far more serious about education and they get academic scholarships. These schools offer some of the best education in the country and will typically be smaller schools. The Ivy League schools are all Division I but do not offer athletic scholarships, only academic ones.
4. NAIA – Oklahoma City University is an NAIA school. This is totally different from NCAA, but most of these schools are transferring over to NCAA. These are good schools with good softball programs. They are usually smaller schools and will often play NCAA Division II in addition to NAIA.
5. Junior College – this is a great option for the player that either needs more playing time in the first 2 years of schools or they need to work on their grades. Many JC's offer scholarships.

Now here are some important questions to answer in order to help narrow down where you should start looking for a school:

These are the things that will really matter when making your 5 choices of which schools to visit (you only can have 5 paid visits - where the school pays for everything - but you can visit as many schools as you want where you pay everything), and your final choice of where you want to go:

1. What role does she want softball and academics to play in her college life? She might think she loves softball right now, and she might. But if she goes to a major Division I school

softball will take up 80% of his day - everyday, for 4 years! Does she like it that much? If so, then consider a major division I school, if not, and softball is cool, but so is having friends outside of softball, having a social life and academics - then steer towards a Division II or III school or an NAIA school or Junior College.

2. How far away from home will she be comfortable going and can you afford her to go?

This is a big one that most people don't really consider until it's too late. Will she be OK really far away from home where she won't get to see her family much at all, where you won't get to watch her play, AND where it will cost you at least 2 plane tickets per year (Christmas and to school each year) just for him to come home???? These are REALLY important questions to ask. How much you will be able to see her play (and want to see her play) enter into this greatly. Maybe she's comfortable going far away from home, and while the school is far away it might be in a conference that plays some games close enough each year that you can see some games - this might be OK for you guys. Just really consider this whole issue. Then determine the absolute farthest she'd want to go away (1 state, 3 states, across the country...) and get a map out and make a circle that far - then only consider schools within that range.

3. How big of a school will she be comfortable going to? She might be OK at a huge school, but if you're from a small town environment maybe the big schools will be too big. Keep in mind that most of the Big 12 and Big 10 and bigger conference schools have over 35,000 students going there. That's bigger than some towns. If that is too big for her then look at smaller schools.

4. What kind of weather can she deal with? Can she handle snow during softball season? Or, maybe it doesn't snow during softball but it's cold during softball season - is she OK with that??? Just figure out how important this issue is.

5. The type of coach/program/players? This won't be known right up front but she'll have to uncover as she goes along through the process. But, she can decide things like - does she want a screamer or a calm coach, or she doesn't care. How important is it that the team gets along or that the players really like it there??

6. Playing Time? DO NOT assume that you're the only player being recruited at your position and that you're being recruited to start or be a starter...find out how many other players at your same position this coach is looking at, where they see you fitting into the team, what's your role going to be - AND - more importantly - are you being recruited as a main choice recruit or as a potential backup in case their #1 or #2 go someplace else? These are tough questions but ones that you have every right to ask. They'll startle many coaches - it will be good for them.

7. LOOK AT A MAP - Get a map out and find all the schools you think you're interested in. See just how close or how far they are from where you live...don't let all of that be a surprise.

8. What's their policy on 5th year aid? The NCAA allows schools to pay for a student's 5th year as a way of helping students complete their degrees since most cannot do it in 4 years and play major college softball. Now, the question to ask yourself is - if the school doesn't pay 5th year aid or won't commit to do so for Joe, and it's an out-of-state school, and you keep him on your taxes while she's going to school - then, in order for her to complete his degree from this school you'll have to pay out-of-state tuition for her 5th year...YIKES!!!! Just check it all out ahead of time!

Then - after you answer all these questions the remaining schools that fit into all of these categories and are interested in her will be smaller and the choices much clearer.

Once you narrow down the schools that a) are interested in you, and then b) that you are also interested in, you can then begin to come up with some important questions that will

help you determine which program will best fit your needs and the things you like about softball and school.

Those questions are as follows:

- 1. What Position Are You Recruiting Me to Play?** Don't assume that you are being recruited to play the same position that you are currently playing on your high school or summerball team. While the coach might be looking at you for that same position, in most cases coaches look for good athletes who can hit well and then they teach them to play the positions they need. Just be clear on this before you go there and then find out the hard way.
- 2. How Many Others Are You Also Recruiting for My Same Position?** Again, don't assume that you're the only player being recruited for your position. Coaches have to plan on players they're recruiting going to another school so they usually recruit 2-5 players for the same position and scholarship.
- 3. Where Do I Fall in the Order?** This follows up on the previous answer – once you realize that coaches recruit multiple players for the same position and scholarship then you will want to find out where you (or your daughter or player) falls in their line of priority. If you aren't the #1 then you will be dropped if their #1 commits – so have a backup plan since anyone but the schools #1 is already their backup plan. This is probably the biggest change in recruiting within the past 6 years, and it's also the GREATEST area of surprise and disappointment when players and parents go to tell a school they are taking their offer and the offer isn't there because they were never their #1...
- 4. What Do You See My Role Being On The Team for the Next 4 Years?** Again, know as much as possible upfront so there are no surprises once you decide to play for that school. You might be recruited to play a backup role – that's something you want to know before going there...
- 5. What Do You Like Best About Me?** Always good to hear what the coach thinks about your strong points – might not be what you think they are...
- 6. What Things Will You Want Me to Change?** The more you have to change the harder it will be to adjust and the more frustrating it will be – so know this ahead of time too if you can.
- 7. How Many Players Did You Lose Last Year and at What Positions?** This answer can help you figure out how much or little scholarship money the

coach has this year to work with. Here's how the scholarship money works in college softball:

HOW THE SCHOLARSHIP MONEY WORKS IN COLLEGE SOFTBALL

In the NCAA programs Softball is what is called an “equivalency program”, meaning that softball coaches can break up their pool of scholarship money to cover the equivalent of x amount of full-ride scholarships”. The x amount is based upon the Division of play (Division I, II, or III) and on the amount of money that school can give the softball program.

- Division I is allowed 13 full rides (or the financial equivalent)
- Division II is allowed ?? full rides (less than D-I)
- Division III is not allowed to give athletic scholarships (players at Division III schools must get academic scholarship aid)

So, what this means is that a Division I Softball coach that plans to carry 18 players must make their pool of scholarship money that's equivalent to 13 full rides spread out over as many of their players as possible.

Now, that means that most players get something but very few can get everything. Most coaches will offer pitchers a full-ride because if they don't then another school will, but every full-ride means that much less for all the other players.

***NOTE:** And that's only if their school full funds their scholarships. Many do not give softball the money for 13, they might only give them money for 6 or 9 which really hurts the coaches ability to offer recruits good scholarship packages)*

This is opposed to sports like football and men's and women's basketball which are fully funded sports so that every player who gets a scholarship gets a full ride. Softball isn't like that.

So, if you know how many players the coach is recruiting to replace, then you will have a much better idea of the scholarship money they might be able to offer you – based upon where you fall in their depth chart.