

show me the money

How To Get The Coach's Attention

By Linda Kotzor



Melody Cope's college recruiting consulting service focuses exclusively on helping female high school athletes positively market themselves in the tough college sports market. She focuses on the individual - rather than a mass marketing approach - to getting the coaches' attention. You can contact Cope at (203) 846-2220 or e-mail her at mcscore1@aol.com.

Face it, everyone isn't a Chamique Holdscraw, wanted by every college coach in the country. So how do all the other athletes get noticed by college coaches with scholarship money?

Not by sitting back and waiting for the call, according to a former coach who helps students get recruited. Students should approach the scholarship process like they're applying for a job or running for student-council office. Let the coach know you are the best candidate, and then carefully campaign for the position.

"The world of college recruiting has become much more sophisticated over the years," said Melody Cope, who runs Play Ball, a Connecticut-based consulting firm that helps high school girls understand the scholarship process. "It is a sales and marketing business where the coaches are selling their program, and you are marketing yourself to them."

Figure out what you want from a school and its athletic program. Make sure the college you pursue is the right one for you athletically and academically. Is the school strong in your major? Do you want a program where you can play immediately? If so don't choose one where all of the starters are returning. Or do you want to work on your skills against talented upperclassmen?

"Educate yourself," Cope said. "Ask

intelligent questions. Be a good interviewer and a good interviewee, and make good decisions."

Cope is a former softball coach at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and now makes it her business to help female students understand the hectic recruitment process. She works with students to help them decide what college program is best for them, then devises a plan with the athlete to help them get noticed.

There are four effective ways, Cope said, that students can make themselves stand out to a coaching staff: Write a personal letter to the coach; make a videotape profile; visit the school and coaching staff and write a resume recounting athletic performances and accomplishments - even on teams outside of high school.

Coaches at big schools with nationally ranked programs are swamped with demands from prospective recruits. Santa Clara University's Jerry Smith, coach of the top five women's NCAA soccer team, gets nearly 2,000 inquiries a year from potential players. He looks for the few who are truly interested in his program. A personal letter helps.

"It doesn't matter how great her writing skills are," said Smith, who doesn't want students to feel shy about writing. "If she takes the time to write a letter, I can tell there is genuine interest."

TOP LEFT © JOHN BELL, TOP RIGHT ANNA MARIE DO'S REFINOS, BOTTOM RIGHT © ALAN SCRUOR

The letter should describe an athlete's successes on and off the field. Tell the coach about upcoming events or tournaments. Emphasize strengths. Do you have the best fast-pitch in your league? Are your grades and SAT scores good? Have you shown leadership by working at camps or by participating in extracurricular school activities?

After the letter, make a visit. It will give you a chance to ask the coach questions about coaching philosophy and academics. Tell the coach what you like about the university and its sports program. A personal visit also allows the coach to gauge your interest and your potential. If an athlete is truly interested, Smith said he's more likely to spend time helping her fit into his program.

If a personal visit is geographically impossible, a videotape can help. A highlight video may show the coach that the student has the potential to play on the team, and it helps remind him who's who during the hectic recruitment process. On the videotape, showcase your best moves and how you perform under pressure. Talk about yourself and why you are interested in that college's program.

Stay in touch by phone. Cope suggests calling or e-mailing once a week to ask if the coach needs more information. It's OK to leave a quick message on voice mail to stay on the coach's mind.

Remember that formal, professional communication, according to Cope, is the best way to show a coach that you are a responsible, organized player.

Finally, don't wait until your senior year to get started. Pat Summitt hears about potential basketball recruits when they are in junior high. Annie Feller, women's volleyball coach at Santa Clara University, targets high school sophomores who play on club teams or Junior Olympics. When recruiters are watching, show them your best moves. Hustle. Recover quickly when you make a mistake. Be enthusiastic on the bench. College coaches watch everything – especially how you interact with your coach.

"There can be lots a coach can get (from watching you handle your own coach): not just how you swing the bat," Cope said.

There is a lot of scholarship money available for talented female athletes – full and partial ones are available. Look at Division I and Division II schools, but don't limit yourself. A variety of scholarships are available at junior and community colleges, and while Division III schools do not give direct athletic scholarships, academic, leadership, and need-based scholarships are offered. Participating in athletics in college is a real possibility in today's market: assess your skills and go for it! 🏆

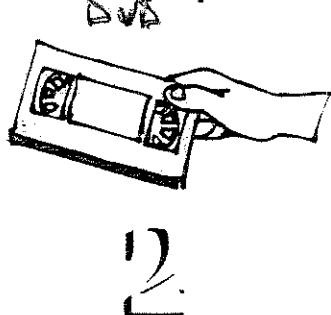


Santa Clara's Jerry Smith encourages his players, top. College coaches often attend high school events, like this field hockey match, above to see how potential recruits interact with their teams.

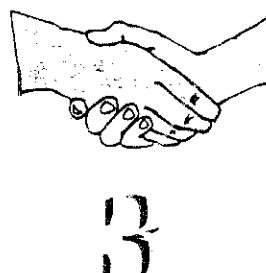
Letter to coach



Videotape profile



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Write a resume

