

The NCAA & College: What You Need to Know About Playing Competitive Sports in College



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So you want to be a college athlete. That's great! Now you have to learn the process to actually be a college athlete... and it's not too early to start figuring out what you need to do. The National College Athletic Association (NCAA) has developed a process that ensures that all participating colleges and universities and their student-athletes are competing on a "level playing field," and that all prospective athletes are academically eligible to participate.

WHAT EVERY HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RECRUITING

When a high school athlete daydreams about playing sports at college, does she see herself sitting humbly on the bench waiting for the coach to send her in? Probably not. Instead, she sees herself acknowledging the cheers of the fans, granting an interview in the locker room after the game, and weighing the merits of an attractive offer to go professional. In short, she has the same fantasies that thousands of other young women have: that college will be the springboard to fortune and the big leagues.

Here are some things to consider:

- ◆ Less than 5% of all high school athletes will go on to play intercollegiate sports.
- ◆ Less than 3% of all college athletes will turn pro.

These realities indicate that the college-bound athlete must think ahead to when the cheering stops. Careers in sports can end abruptly. Starting spots can evaporate after only one year. More often, college athletes have problems with eligibility. Practice schedules are hard on grades. Some players spend more than four years trying to graduate and eventually their eligibility expires.

If you are a high school athlete who wants to play college-level sports, keep two priorities in mind: ***COLLEGE FIRST, SPORTS SECOND***. Avoid situations that might leave you without a degree or even a team to play on.

STUDENT-ATHLETE'S HIGH SCHOOL PLAN

Freshman Year

- Talk to your guidance counselor about NCAA core class requirements
- Keep your grades high and work on your study habits
- Get to know all the coaches in your sport
- Attend sports camps
- Realistically analyze your ability
- Start thinking about academic and career goals

Sophomore Year

- Keep up your grades
- Take the PSAT test (October)
- Talk to your coaches about your ability and ambitions
- Make preliminary inquiries to colleges that interest you (a brief letter/email to the college coach might be appropriate)

Junior Year

- Talk with your counselor/college counselor about career goals and, again, about the NCAA core course requirements
- Talk with your coach about a realistic assessment of which college level you can play
- Take the PSAT (October), ACT, and/or SAT
- Refine your list of possible college choices; understand their admission requirements
- Create a sports resume
- Write letters/emails to college coaches expressing your interest
- Obtain letters of recommendation from teachers
- Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center
- Attend sports camps in the summer, if appropriate

Senior Year

- Meet again with your college counselor to ensure that you are meeting all graduation and NCAA requirements
- Attend college fairs and financial aid workshops
- Retake the SAT and/or ACT, if appropriate
 - Send scores from all tests directly to the NCAA Eligibility Center
- Refine your college list and apply for admission—pay attention to all deadlines
- Be aware of recruiting rules regarding campus visits
- Complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) after January 1
- Sit down with your parents and coach to list the pros and cons of each school you are considering
- Be sure of your final choice before signing any papers
- Let coaches know when their school is no longer in the running; thank them for considering you
- Make your final college decision based on a meaningful education, excellent career preparation, and a satisfying athletic experience—IN THAT ORDER!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR RECRUITER/COACH

- ◆ What is the recruiter's relationship to the school? Is he or she the head coach, assistant coach, an alumnus, or an admission representative? (Assurances carry different weight depending on who they come from.)
- ◆ Keep your education foremost in your mind by asking about academic programs that interest you. A good recruiter is as informed about programs as an admissions person is. Fire away with specific questions about majors and courses in your field.
- ◆ At what level does your sport compete? NCAA Division I schools offer athletic scholarships; most Division II schools offer scholarships; no Division III schools offer athletic scholarships.
- ◆ Ask for details about athletic scholarships—any strings? Typically, athletic scholarships (or grants, as they are sometimes called) are for one year, renewable at the coach's discretion. If you get benched, do you start paying your own way from then on?
- ◆ How many athletes were kept on scholarship after their eligibility had expired? What is the college's graduation rate for athletes? Because of heavy demands on their time, some college athletes take five years to graduate; by their final year, they are usually ineligible to play.
- ◆ Is tutoring or counseling available? Beware of remarks like, "Don't worry. We haven't lost a player yet because of academics," which could imply that your education will be allowed to suffer before your value to the team will.
- ◆ What will happen if you are placed on academic probation? Do you lose part or all of your benefits?
- ◆ Ask the coach what he/she expects of his/her players: time commitment, behavior, appearance, etc., and decide whether you can work with her or him.
- ◆ What is expected of players during the off-season?
- ◆ Has drug use been an issue at your school or in your athletic program?
- ◆ Most importantly, ask yourself if the school would be right for you even if you weren't competing in athletics.

QUESTIONS TO ASK OF OTHER PLAYERS AT THE SCHOOL:

- ◆ What does your typical daily schedule look like? In-season? Off-season?
- ◆ How rigorous is your travel schedule?
- ◆ Approximately how many hours a night do you study?
- ◆ How do you like the living arrangements?
- ◆ What assistance is available if you have academic problems?
- ◆ Were changes made to any promises once you committed/enrolled? Is the program what you expected based on your recruiting experience?

QUESTIONS TO ASK SCHOOL OFFICIALS/ADMISSION OFFICERS:

- ◆ What are the different graduation rates for athletes? In your sport?
- ◆ How long does it take someone in your sport to earn a degree from this school?
- ◆ What is the placement rate and average starting salary for graduates in your field of study?
- ◆ What financial aid is available?
- ◆ Can I participate in internships/cooperative education/etc. if I am a student athlete?

MAKING INITIAL CONTACT WITH COLLEGE COACHES

STEP 1

Research the colleges that fit your academic *and* athletic needs. College reference books and search engines on the Internet, as well as Family Connection, can assist you. Establish a tentative list of colleges that you'd like to contact. Make sure you are academically eligible for admission to each school on the list, though it's ok to have a stretch school or two on your list. Also make sure that your grades, SAT/ACT scores, and class rank will allow you to be eligible athletically, as well. Your high school counselor, the college counselor, or the worksheet in this booklet can help you if you are not sure.

STEP 2

Show your list to your coach(es) and ask for feedback on how realistic your chances would be to play for each school. Ask if he/she would be willing to make/receive contacts on your behalf. If the answer is yes, provide your coach with the following information:

- ♦ A list of the colleges you plan to contact with each college's coach, phone number, e-mail address, and mailing address
- ♦ Copies of the documents you're sending to each college
- ♦ A copy of your current high school grades (final report cards) and resume

STEP 3

Send an introduction letter—either from yourself or your coach—and your athletic resume to each college coach. (The samples that follow are designed to serve as guides. You should provide statistics that are appropriate to your sport.) Spring of junior year or fall of senior year can be good times to send these. You can also send a skills tape and game tape with this initial information, or you can offer to send them "upon request."

STEP 4

Make sure to take the SAT and/or ACT in the spring of your junior year. Most college coaches will insist on knowing your scores before considering you; they also need some scores on file before you make an official visit to campus.

STEP 5

If you are pursuing NCAA Division I or II programs, file a completed NCAA Eligibility Center release form at the end of your junior year or beginning of senior year. You can find the release form at <http://bit.ly/NCAArelease>. This form should be submitted to College Counseling before you leave for summer break.

STEP 6

Colleges will often respond by asking you or your coach to complete an athletic questionnaire. If you receive a questionnaire from a random school, take the time to fill it out! You never know when an unexpected opportunity might come your way.

STEP 7

Keep in mind that summer sports camps and tournaments provide excellent opportunities for networking with college coaches. Just be sure that you are familiar with the rules that regulate such contact. Your coaches or counselors can provide information booklets from the various athletic associations to assist you. Not knowing the rules will not be an excuse for a recruiting violation. Information can also be found in the Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete.

**SAMPLE LETTER FROM HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE
TO COLLEGE COACH**

Date

Coach's Name
College/University
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Coach So & So:

I would like to introduce myself. I am currently a sophomore/junior/senior at the Academy of the Holy Cross. I have played high school volleyball for four years, starting as a setter for the last three. I am 5'8" and weigh 145 pounds. I have been All-Conference for the past two years and All-State this year. I was also selected for the WCAC All Star Team this year.

My coach's name is Mary Jones. Her contact information is included on the attached information page. She has indicated to me that she would welcome your calls; e-mail is also a reliable way to reach her (susiesmithlax@hotmail.com is her address).

My cumulative weighted GPA is a 3.7 on a 4.0 scale, and although my high school does not rank, I have taken a challenging course load. My highest combined SAT score (1600) was 1210 and I intend to retake it in October. I am interested in pursuing a four-year degree in biology. I also hope to continue playing volleyball on the college level. Your program especially interests me. I have followed your team's season in *The Washington Post* and have attended two games.

I have included a skills tape and a game tape. My jersey number is #1 in the light-colored uniforms. Also included is a schedule of our 2008-09 volleyball season. Please let me know if there is additional information that my coach or I can provide.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Athlete's Name

SAMPLE STUDENT-ATHLETE RESUME

ANN ATHLETE Volleyball Information

*1225 Any Street Any Town, Any State 81234
Telephone: (500) 111-1111 or (500) 222-2222
Annathlete@aol.com*

Coach: Mary Jones
1010 Training Avenue
Any Town, Any State 81234
Telephone: (500) 111-1212
E-mail: annathlete@hotmail.com

High School: Academy of the Holy Cross
4920 Strathmore Avenue
Kensington, MD 20895
(301) 929-6453 (college counseling office)
(301) 929-6446 (athletics office)

Volleyball Division: Class 4A (Highest level within the State)

Position: Setter

Jersey: #1 Dark/#10 Light

Offense Used: 5-1 Offense

Years Starting Varsity: 3 years

Awards/Honors: Best Setter (2003, 2004, 2005)
Most Valuable Player (2004)
All Conference (2003, 2004)
All State (2005)
WCAC All Star Team (2005)

Experience: AAU Volleyball (2004, 2005)
Coed Power Outdoor & Indoor Tournaments (2004-05)
Aspen Volleyball Camp (2003, 2004)
Any University Summer Camp (2003)

Height: 5'8"
Weight: 145 lbs.
Vertical: 23"
GPA & Rank: 3.74 on 4.0 scale (weighted)
Graduation Date: May 2009

For general information on:

- ♦ Academic Eligibility for Divisions I, II, and III
- ♦ Recruiting Policies for Divisions I, II, and III
- ♦ Information on Approved Core Courses
- ♦ Information on Initial-Eligibility Center
- ♦ And much more!

1. Go to <http://eligibilitycenter.org>
2. Click on "Perspective Student-Athletes"
3. Click on "Information and Resources for Perspective Student-Athletes" in left-hand column
4. Click on "Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete." This is a PDF file, which requires Adobe Acrobat Reader, which you can download from web page.
5. We recommend that you print out the Guide for future reference.

For the most up-to-date list of AHC's Approved Core Courses:

1. Go to <http://eligibilitycenter.org>
2. Log in OR click on "resources," then "US Students"
3. Click on "List of NCAA Courses"
4. Enter AHC's 6-digit code (210678) in box and click on "Submit" below
5. You may select a specific core area or "All Subject Areas" and click on "Submit" below. (Courses are listed by subject area: English, Social Science, Mathematics, Natural/Physical Science, and Additional Core Courses, which includes Foreign Language, Computer Science, and select Social Studies courses.)

To find information on what schools sponsor your sport, as well as access athletic contacts at individual schools:

1. Go to <http://web1.ncaa.org/onlineDir/exec/sponsorship>
2. Find your sport on the drop-down menu.
3. Select the NCAA Division in which you are interested
4. Sort your list alphabetically by school name, by conference, division, state, or region.

TO APPLY FOR NCAA ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY:

1. Go to <http://eligibilitycenter.org> & follow the on-screen prompts to create your account.
2. Complete the registration form. Be prepared for the following:
 - a) You must have a Social Security Number.
 - b) You will need to create a Personal Identification Number (PIN).
 - c) Our school code is "210678".
 - d) You have the option to receive communication from the NCAA Eligibility Center either by the email/web option, which requires a valid email address, or the paper option, which can delay notification up to two weeks.
 - e) You will need a MasterCard or Visa debit or credit card or check to pay the processing fee. Do not send cash.
 - f) If you qualify for a fee waiver, please see your college counselor.
 - g) Both student and parent (if student is less than 18 years old) must check box certifying that they have read and understood NCAA agreement.

IMPORTANT! After you have submitted your form, be sure to print out the *NCAA Student Release Form* (also available on the AHC website). Once signed, please bring it to the College Counseling Office and we will send your transcript to the NCAA Eligibility Center upon receipt of the release at the end of junior year—the transcript must show 6 semesters worth of grades in order to be sent. Your account must be cleared in the Business Office in order to mail out your transcript.

RECENT CHANGES TO NCAA ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Students who wish to participate in collegiate athletics at the Division I or II level must apply for certification with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center after their junior year in high school. The college counselor or your coach or parents can assist students in completing the paperwork necessary in this process.

To be certified by the Eligibility Center, you must:

- ♦ **Graduate from high school.**
You should apply for certification after your junior year in high school if you are sure you wish to participate in intercollegiate athletics as a freshman at a Division I or II institution. The Eligibility Center will issue a preliminary certification report after you have had all your materials submitted. After you graduate, if a member institution requests your eligibility status, the Eligibility Center will review your final transcript to make a final certification decision according to NCAA standards.
- ♦ **Complete the core courses listed below:**

Core Course Units Required for NCAA Certification

	Division I	Division II
English	4 years	3 years
Mathematics (Algebra I or higher)	3 years	2 years
Science (including at least 1 year of lab science)*	2 years	2 years
Social Science	2 years	2 years
Additional English, Math, or Science	1 year	2 years
Additional Courses (from any area above or foreign language, or non-doctrinal religion/philosophy)	4 years	3 years
TOTAL CORE UNITS REQUIRED	16	14**

**All AHC science courses are lab science courses.*

*** Division II minimum core requirements will increase to 16 on August 1, 2013*

- ♦ Earn a minimum required grade point average in your core courses. Only courses that are on the AHC "List of NCAA Approved Core Courses" (see page 7 on how to access this list) can be used to calculate your NCAA Core GPA. No special values are allowed for "+" or "-" grades (e.g. B+ computes the same as B-)
- ♦ Earn a combined SAT or ACT sum score that matches your core-course grade point average in the sliding scale index listed on the following page (Division I). For Division II, earn a combined SAT score of 820 or an ACT sum of 68; there is no sliding scale; students must also earn a minimum 2.0 core course GPA for Division II eligibility.

Remember that meeting the NCAA academic rules does not guarantee your admission to college; you must *still* apply to the institution AND be admitted by the admissions office.

Division I Core Course GPA & Test Score Sliding Scale

Division I Core GPA and Test Score Sliding Scale

Core GPA	SAT	ACT
3.550 & above	400	37
3.525	410	38
3.500	420	39
3.475	430	40
3.450	440	41
3.425	450	41
3.400	460	42
3.375	470	42
3.350	480	43
3.325	490	44
3.300	500	44
3.275	510	45
3.250	520	46
3.225	530	46
3.200	540	47
3.175	550	47
3.150	560	48
3.125	570	49
3.100	580	49
3.075	590	50
3.050	600	50
3.025	610	51
3.000	620	52
2.975	630	52
2.950	640	53
2.925	650	53
2.900	660	54
2.875	670	55
2.850	680	56
2.825	690	56
2.800	700	57
2.775	710	58
2.750	720	59
2.725	730	59
2.700	730	60
2.675	740-750	61
2.650	760	62
2.625	770	63
2.600	780	64
2.575	790	65
2.550	800	66
2.525	810	67
2.500	820	68
2.475	830	69
2.450	840-850	70
2.425	860	70
2.400	860	71
2.375	870	72
2.350	880	73
2.325	890	74
2.300	900	75
2.275	910	76
2.250	920	77
2.225	930	78
2.200	940	79
2.175	950	80
2.150	960	80
2.125	960	81
2.100	970	82
2.075	980	83
2.050	990	84
2.025	1000	85
2.000	1010	86

QUALIFIER STATUS

You are a “qualifier” if you meet the academic requirements listed above for Division II. As a qualifier you can practice or compete for your school during your first year of college, can receive an athletics scholarship during your first year of college and can play in four seasons in your sport if you maintain your eligibility from year to year.

PARTIAL QUALIFIER STATUS

A “partial qualifier” is eligible to practice with a team at its home facility and receive an athletics scholarship during her first year at a Division II school, and then has four seasons of competition remaining, assuming you maintain your eligibility from year to year.

You will be classified a “partial qualifier” if you have not met the requirements for a qualifier, but you have graduated from high school and met one of the following:

- ◆ Combined SAT score of 820 or ACT sum score of 68; OR
- ◆ Successful completion of a required core curriculum consisting of 14 core courses with a 2.0 core GPA.

NONQUALIFIER STATUS

You are considered a nonqualifier if you do not graduate from high school, or if you graduated and are missing both the core-course GPA or minimum number of core courses and the required SAT or ACT scores. As a nonqualifier you cannot practice or compete during your first year of college and you cannot receive athletics scholarships during your first year of college (although you can receive need-based financial aid). You can play four seasons in your sport if you maintain your eligibility.

WALK-ON ATHLETES

A high school athlete who has not received a scholarship but wants to play a sport in college may be given the opportunity to “walk on” at one or more schools. “Walking on” means that she becomes an unscholarshipped member of the team, is allowed to try to earn a position on the team, and is given the opportunity to earn a scholarship at some time in the future. Walking on can be an excellent opportunity for a good athlete who is serious about his or her sport, but it requires careful planning with your counselor and your coach. If you are interested in walking on, follow this advice:

With your guidance/college counselor:

- ◆ Be sure you satisfy the eligibility requirements of the NCAA. Walk-on athletes are subject to the same rules and regulations as scholarshiped athletes.

- ♦ Do all the preliminary planning needed to identify a possible career. You may not settle on one, but look into it anyway. The experience is helpful.
- ♦ Find the colleges that provide programs in your area of interest. Develop a list of them. If you are undecided, identify schools that provide a broad range of programs.
- ♦ Discuss the list with your counselor and parents.
- ♦ Select your top three or four schools from the list.

With your high school/club coach:

- ♦ Discuss your ability to participate on the college level. Be open-minded during this meeting. Remember that your coach has only your best interests in mind.
- ♦ Identify any additional schools at which you may have the chance to play. Be sure they, too, satisfy your career and educational goals.
- ♦ Contact the school(s) to secure the college coach's permission to "walk on."
- ♦ Mail applications, being sure to follow the admission procedures specified by the college coach.

HOW TO CONTACT THE NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

NCAA Eligibility Center
1802 Alonzo Watford Sr. Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46202
FAX: (319) 968-5100
<http://eligibilitycenter.org>

Eligibility Center Customer Service: (877) 262-1492 (toll-free)
Representatives are available from 8am - 6pm, EST Monday through Friday

24-hour Voice Response System is available to check the status of your file using a touch-tone phone by calling (877) 861-3003. To access this system, you must give your PIN, which you created when completing your "Student Release Form" online.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ELIGIBILITY WORKSHEETS

The following two worksheets have been provided to assist you with monitoring your progress in meeting the NCAA initial-eligibility standards. You may want to consult with your parents, guardians, and counselor if you have questions. NOTE: These worksheets are for your personal use and should not be sent to the Eligibility Center.

STEP 1 Obtain AHC's List of NCAA-Approved Core Courses (see page 7 for instructions on downloading our list from the Internet) and gather your final report cards from 9th, 10th & 11th (as appropriate).

STEP 2 Using AHC's List of NCAA-Approved Core Courses and your report cards, write the course title, amount of credit earned and grade in the spaces provided on the worksheet. Only include courses on the list of approved core courses. Generally, you will receive the same credit from the Eligibility Center as you received from AHC (e.g., a $\frac{1}{2}$ credit course at AHC = $\frac{1}{2}$ credit/year from the Eligibility Center).

STEP 3 Determine the quality points for each course. Multiply the quality points for the grade by the amount of credit earned. Use the following grading scale:

A - 4 points

C - 2 points

B - 3 points

D - 1 point

NOTE: The Eligibility Center does not use plus or minus grades when calculating your core-course grade point average. For example, grades of "B+", "B", and "B-" will be calculated as "B" and each will earn 3 quality points. The Eligibility Center will provide a yearly grade by averaging grades achieved during terms within the academic year if the high school has awarded one full unit of credit for the course.

Example:

- 1 semester with an "A" equals 2.00 quality points
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ credit x 4 quality points
- 1 year with an "A" equals 4.00 quality points
 - 1 credit x 4 quality points

STEP 4 To calculate your estimated core-course grade point average, simply divide the total number of quality points for all core courses by the total number of core course units completed.

NOTE: *This is for your personal use. The Eligibility Center will calculate your actual core course grade point average once it has received your final transcript(s).*

Example: 45 quality points and 13 core-course units
 $45 \div 13 = 3.462$ core-course GPA

42 quality points and 14 core-course units

$42 \div 14 = 3.000$ core-course GPA

28 quality points and 12.5 core-course units

$28 \div 12.5 = 2.24$ core-course GPA

STEP 5 Refer to pages 11 & 12 in this booklet to determine if your core-course GPA and test scores meet the NCAA eligibility requirements.

STEP 6 To monitor your current eligibility status, use the appropriate standards for Division I or II to determine if you are projected to meet the NCAA initial-eligibility requirements for grade point average and core-course units.

***NOTE:** If you are deficient in meeting all core-course units, which is probable if you have not completed high school, plan to enroll and complete core courses in the areas where you are deficient. Review your four-year plan with your guidance or college counselor to ensure you meet not only NCAA core course requirements but also AHC graduation requirements.*

***NOTE:** In the event you complete more core-course units, the Eligibility Center will select the highest grades that satisfy the initial-eligibility requirements to calculate your core-course grade point average. Please note that it is still necessary to complete the required number of core-course units in each discipline. Students can repeat courses in which they earned a low grade during summer school provided this is the same course (eg. Chemistry at AHC; Chemistry at Wheaton HS) and have this grade appear on their AHC transcript. This can help boost your Core Course GPA. Students should consider this option each summer if necessary—only one course can be taken after graduation to count toward your Core Course GPA; no NEW credit will be granted by AHC—only replacement credit. See your guidance or college counselor if you have any questions about this.*