

By Buddy Custer, Underclassmen Exclusive Program Director at Baseball Factory and former college coach

The name of the game in collegiate athletics is recruiting. As a college coach, if you are unable to recruit good players it really does not matter what type of coach you are or the type of assistants you have--it will be very difficult to be competitive and have a chance to win championships. Coaches must be able to bring in talented players to fill their roster needs. Team needs exist as players graduate, sign professional contracts, and transfer to other schools, thereby vacating roster spots. Baseball coaches do not want to put themselves in positions where they have six first-basemen and zero catchers on the roster. Obviously, it is very important for coaches to recruit the best players they can find--players who fill their needs and also fit into their specific baseball program.

Prospective student-athletes must recruit the school just as much as the school is recruiting them. It is essential to find the school that has a need for you and at the same time, provides the right fit for you academically, socially, and athletically.

The recruiting process is just that--a "process." Consider all the factors that go into bringing a prospective student-athlete to a college: academic high school grades and core GPA; SAT/ACT scores; NCAA Clearinghouse; letters and emails; phone calls; campus visits (both official and unofficial); in-person evaluations; roster-spot and scholarship offers; and National Letter of Intent. College coaches want to find the best players possible, but they need to make sure they are finding players that have the right kind of academics and personality for their team. Only by covering each step of the recruiting process will they be able to find out which players they want in their program.

The main areas of the recruiting process that players need to take special interest in are:

- Letter-writing
- Phone calls
- Un-official visits

By excelling in these areas, prospective student-athletes can help college coaches evaluate their needs and thereby provide specific and useful information to the player. Stay in contact with the colleges that confirm an interest in you. If a school no longer has an interest in you, cross it off your list and move on. Coaches will ultimately let you know their intentions if you communicate effectively.

Contact schools beginning in your junior year, preferably during the winter when coaches are in their off-season and have more time to respond to potential recruits. First, make a broad list of colleges--the list will be updated gradually throughout your junior year and the summer before your senior year.

A broad list can look something like this:

- 25-30 total schools
- 4-6 schools within four hours of where you live
- 2-4 Division-I schools
- 2-4 Division-II schools
- 2-4 Division-III schools
- 2-4 NAIA schools
- 2-4 NJCAA schools
- 4-8 others (can be schools from any of the areas above)

It is very important to contact schools from all different levels and sizes. This will allow you to receive information from many different types of programs, making it easy to compare and contrast. You will be able to see what type of school will provide the right fit for you.

LETTER-WRITING:

Letters to college coaches need to be precise and to the point. It is important to provide the following information when communicating with a coach for the first time:

- Introductions - provide information where you introduce yourself: name, high school, graduation year, position you play.
- Express desire - provide information that lets the coach know you have an interest in his program and have a desire to play at the school in the future.
- Request information - be sure to ask for information about the program and school.

The second or third time you write to a school, you should include copies of high school and summer-league playing schedules in order to give the coach opportunities to see you play in-person. Be sure to include information on all baseball showcases, tournaments, camps, etc. that you will be participating in. Provide as complete a schedule as possible.

PHONE CALLS:

NCAA rules do not allow college coaches to speak to prospective student-athletes specifically about their baseball program until July 1, prior to the start of their senior year in high school. Once this date comes, coaches and players are able to speak on the phone and in-person. A college coach is allowed, under NCAA guidelines, to contact a prospective student-athlete on the phone once a week. However, a player is able to call the coach as many times as he likes. It is not advisable to call a coach more times per week than is necessary, but do not be afraid to keep attempting contact if you have been unable to get in touch with a coach.

Remember, it is important for the student-athlete to "recruit the school" - so, making telephone calls to coaches is imperative in order to obtain information. Also, college coaches respect players that are mature enough to handle this responsibility and also show the ability to communicate and express themselves properly on the phone and in-person. Recruiting mature individuals that display confidence off the field is very important for coaches.

When placing calls to coaches, here are a few things to remember:

1. Be prepared – rehearse some of the questions you want to make sure you get answered. Also, be ready to answer questions from the coach in a clear and coherent manner.
2. Have a notepad with you so you may take notes on your conversation. Be organized.
3. When speaking with a coach the first time, be sure to cover these areas:
 - Introduce yourself, and let the coach know that you have sent him information in the mail prior to the conversation.
 - Find out if the coach received the information you sent to him
 - Inquire about where the coach stands in his recruiting process. What are his specific needs for this year? Is he still actively recruiting players that play the same position as you?
 - If a phone call results in the coach having a possible need for you, definitely let the coach know that you would like the opportunity to visit the school and be able to meet with him in-person.

UNOFFICIAL VISITS:

(Official visits will not be discussed here as they are typically set up by the college coach. An official visit indicates that the college pays for the trip.) Unofficial visits can be made during the athlete's junior year. The only part of the trip that will be different than a senior-year visit is that the student-athlete will be unable to speak with any of the coaches about their specific program. Despite this, a lot of valuable information can be gathered on a trip during your junior year:

- Campus tour with the admissions office staff:
 - View a college academic class
 - View college life in the dormitories
 - View campus life – cafeterias, book stores, etc...
- Meet with an admissions staff office member to discuss academic requirements.
- View baseball team workout, practice, or game
- Meet with a team-member of the baseball program to get first-hand information about the program. This should be arranged prior to the trip.

Unofficial visits made during the senior year will cover the same areas with the addition of meeting with the coaching staff to discuss specific information about the school's baseball program, your individual abilities, the school's specific recruiting needs etc. It is important to meet with as many of the current baseball players at the school as possible. Ask the players questions about practices, off-season workouts, and coaching philosophies.

Too many times, high school baseball players sit back and wait for college coaches to contact them. The college baseball recruiting process is proactive--prospective student-athletes need to be aggressive in their approach with college coaches by putting themselves in front of coaches and letting them know of their intentions and interests. Once the coach and player establish a line of communication, the coach will reveal his level of interest. If the interest is positive, the coach will take over the process and provide information to the player in an attempt to obtain a commitment. Obviously, if the staff is not interested, the player can cross that school off of his list and move on to the next school.

By gathering information the player will be able to see what schools have an interest; he will be able to see what schools have a specific need for him; he will be able to see what schools provide a solid fit for him. Gathering all of this information, continuing to make telephone calls, making visits, and communicating with the people involved in their program will present the player with the school that provides him with everything he is looking for.

The player should look for a school to attend that he will want to remain at if his baseball career ends because of injury, lack of ability, etc. If baseball does not work out, it is important he has still chosen the best fit academically and socially--the education will still be there.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions about this article or, let me know if you have any other questions regarding the college baseball recruiting process. Contact me at bcuster@baseballfactory.com or at 800.641.4487.