

Common Mistakes Parents Make In The Recruiting Process

by Tom Fakehany

Thinking they understand what is happening.

"Every parent I ever asked about recruiting stood there nodding their head, 'Yes, yes, yes,'" said future hall of fame USC Volleyball coach Pat Powers. "Recruiting is like someone who buys a new car once in a lifetime from someone who sells cars 50 weeks a year and has been doing it for 15 years. One doesn't know anything, the other knows everything. Who is going to get the best of the deal?" he asks.

Rather than acting knowledgeable, parents must become knowledgeable, by asking questions, evaluating answers, seeking information and asking more questions.

Ohio State quarterback Joe Germaine was 1997 Rose Bowl MVP for leading the Buckeyes over Arizona State. He grew up 10 minutes away from the ASU campus, attended games as a boy but was not recruited by his favorite school because Jake Plummer was their quarterback of the future. Plummer had a great career, but only because Stanford did not want him. Then Cardinal coach Bill Walsh, renowned for his ability to develop quarterback talent, chose to recruit Scott Frost from Nebraska instead. But when Frost got to Stanford, Walsh turned him into a defensive safety. Frost transferred to his home state to play quarterback for the Cornhuskers.

That is the way recruiting works. When athletes are in high school, no one knows who will be selected and who will be rejected, who will play and who will sit.

Thinking they can evaluate their child's athletic talent.

Howard Garfinkel, founder of the famous Five Star basketball camp, tells athletes to "seek a college one level below what you think you are and two levels below what your father thinks you are." College coaches talk about parents of high school sophomores wondering if their child can play at our level, then two years later wanting to dictate playing time."

Everyone who attempts to project the ability of high school athletes to compete in college sports makes mistakes. Penn State's Joe Paterno thought NFL running back Eddie George should play linebacker. North Carolina's Dean Smith rejected NBA star Joe Smith, and Paterno and Smith are at the top of their respective professions. Imagine how often the regular coaches are wrong!

Still, the best assessment of an athlete's ability will come from people who are very familiar with college play. Few high school coaches, and far fewer parents, have that familiarity. When they do, a love of the athlete still can cloud the evaluation.

Losing track of the importance of a college education and a college degree.

"In choosing a college, education should be the first consideration, then athletics second, not the reverse as is so often the case," said legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. "The college education will be the important part, because it can be of great service throughout life. He or she will be an athlete for only a comparatively short time. A limited few play after college, even though they all think they will.

"Young people have difficulty thinking about the future," Wooden continued. "Parents can help them, but to do that parents have to separate themselves from the thrill of being recruited." "Will my son start early?" was, and is, asked more frequently than "Will my son get a good education?"

Believing "if a college wants my child, they will find a way to get him/her into school."

"The academics of the athlete has been taken out of the hands of the college coaches; 100 percent of the responsibility is on the athlete and the parent," said LSU men's and women's track coach Pat Henry. Athletes have three basic responsibilities before they can receive a scholarship: to pass designated courses with a certain average; achieve a certain score on a standardized test; and report both results to the NCAA Clearinghouse. Parents can help their children by overseeing this process, which begins with calling 1-800-638-3731 and ordering a copy of The NCAA Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete. Read the guide at least twice, discuss it with the high school coach and guidance counselor, then read it a third time.

Thinking that a letter means a college scholarship.

"We've got garbage bags full of letters," said the father of a Big Ten recruit. "They mean nothing, burn

them. They don't mean a school wants you, they just mean you are on a list." A Texas high school coach adds, "You are not being recruited until someone walks down your sidewalk, sits in your living room and starts showing you shiny brochures and videotapes."

Yet every year parents call colleges after the signing period and tell the secretary, "We thought our child was going to receive a scholarship here." Such stories are sad, but they can be avoided by understanding the process. The reality is that football schools have a mailing list of more than 1,000 names per class, and award 25 scholarships or less; women's volleyball schools have nearly as many names and usually sign two to four athletes a year. A letter is only an introduction, not an offer.