



## EARLY RECRUITING

**Impact of Coronavirus on College Recruiting:** The NCAA recruiting rules are now different for each division level. **NCAA D1 has suspended all in-person recruiting through April 15, 2021.** As of September 1, 2020, NCAA D2 and D3 have resumed the regular recruiting rules. Stay on top of the latest news involving the **extra year of eligibility for college athletes and how it impacts recruiting.** The NCAA has removed the SAT/ACT requirement from their initial academic eligibility requirements. Schools might still require you take the SAT/ACT.

Every year, it seems like there are more and more stories about middle school athletes receiving college scholarship offers. Some athletes have made the news by receiving offers when they are **as young as 9 years old!** Early recruiting is a controversial topic, but it's important to understand why and how it works.

**NCAA Rules Update:** New rules passed by the NCAA in 2017, 2018 and most recently 2019 have made it illegal for college coaches to offer scholarships to recruits before August 1 or September 1 of their junior year. These new rules apply to all sports except football, W/M basketball and baseball.

While making verbal scholarship offers to recruits in 8th, 9th and 10th grade is illegal, you can expect college coaches to be recruiting and evaluating prospects. Here is how that process works.

### **What exactly is early recruiting?**

Early recruiting refers to the trend of college coaches recruiting athletes before the NCAA rules allow them to initiate communication with those recruits. For most Division I and Division II sports, coaches can start proactively reaching out to recruits June 15 after sophomore year or September 1 of junior year. Division I and some top-tier Division II schools will make offers to athletes as young as 8th grade.



## **Early recruiting in sports where coaches can make scholarships offers**

When coaches get word of a young, stellar athlete, they reach out to that athlete's high school or club coach. They get additional information from those coaches. Colleges will encourage them to set up a phone call with the athlete.

**RECRUITING LOOPHOLE:** if a recruit calls a college coach, the coach can **ALWAYS** pick up, regardless of the athlete's age. From there, the coach might ask the recruit to send more videos, transcripts, etc., in order to make a more detailed evaluation. The athlete can send the coach as many emails as they want; the coach is just prohibited from responding to them until the athlete hits the right age, according to the NCAA rules.

If the coach is truly interested in that recruit, they can extend a verbal scholarship offer. A verbal offer is a **non-legally binding** scholarship offer. It's essentially a way for the coach to say, "I'm reserving a spot on my team for you." However, because verbal offers aren't legally binding, coaches and athletes can back out of them at any point.

## **Early recruiting in sports where coaches can't make scholarship offers**

Recent updates to the NCAA rules, in all sports except football, M/W basketball and baseball, college coaches will no longer be allowed to extend verbal scholarship offers to student-athletes before June 15 after their sophomore year or September 1 of their Junior year. In addition, many of the loopholes that allowed coaches and recruits to communicate have been closed. Despite these new rules, coaches will still be "recruiting" elite prospects early in high school.

College coaches are still going to be evaluating prospects at combines, local/national tournaments, showcases, and their own college camps. In addition, they will be communicating with prospects' club and high school coaches. A college coach can tell a prospect's coach "we are recruiting them" which will send a strong signal of interest to the prospect. For recruits, this means that being at events where coaches are watching prospects and attending college camps is going to play a critical role.



## **Why are some people against early recruiting?**

Early recruiting has put a lot of pressure on coaches, athletes, and parents to push the recruiting timeline forward. This means athletes need to start competing at a high level sooner, coaches need to start thinking about recruiting classes years out and parents are trying to help their young athletes make very mature decisions. This change in the recruiting process has significantly altered competitive youth sports:

- Youth sports now focus less on skills development and more on showcasing the athletes' talent. When athletes are in middle school, their focus should be working on developing skills and cultivating a love of the game. The rise in early recruiting pressure student-athletes to work tirelessly to attract the attention of college coaches, **oftentimes accruing overuse injuries** in the process.
- Young and immature athletes are forced to make major life decisions sooner. Most middle school students don't know what they want to major in or how to choose a college. Nevertheless, athletic programs press these middle school athletes to make these types of life-changing decisions before they are ready.
- Moving the recruiting timeline up has cranked up the intensity in youth sports. Early recruiting breeds hyper-focused athletes and parents. To snag an offer by the time athletes reach high school, parents pull out all the stops to help their athlete succeed.
- Athletes who excelled academically in middle school may not be academically eligible when they get to high school. Eligibility is a huge component of the recruiting process, and an 8th grade 3.8 GPA is a lot different from a junior year 3.8 GPA. This could mean committed athletes lose offers at the last minute because coaches incorrectly projected their academic qualifications.

## **Is anything being done to delay the rise in early recruiting?**

The NCAA has made it a goal to slow down or stop early recruiting. Since 2017, new rules have been passed annually to prevent college coaches from extending scholarship offers before a prospect's junior year of high school.



In an effort to cut back on early scholarship offers, the [NCAA also approved a new set of rules](#) in 2019 that change the way all Division I college coaches (except football, W/M basketball and baseball) can recruit athletes. Softball and W/M lacrosse were not included in these rules updates as they already passed legislation.

Here's a quick breakdown of the changes:

- **Official visits:** Recruits can now start taking official visits starting August 1st or September 1 of their junior year of high school, depending on the sport. In the past, official visits weren't permitted until the athlete's senior year of high school, so this rule is actually bumping them up!
- **College camps and clinics:** Recruits and college coaches are not allowed to have any recruiting conversations during camps prior to September 1 of the athlete's junior year of high school. Previously, there weren't really any rules that prevented coaches from talking about recruiting to underclassmen during camps. It had become common for college coaches to extend verbal scholarship offers to top recruits during camps and clinics.
- **Unofficial visits:** College athletic departments are not allowed to be involved in a recruit's unofficial visits. A quick refresher: Unofficial visits are any campus visits paid for entirely by the recruit's family. Before the rule change, unofficial visits were an easy way for underclassmen to visit a college camps, meet with the coach and get an early verbal offer. However, if athletes want to take unofficial visits now, they cannot schedule them with the coach. They must treat the unofficial visit just like any other student would. If the recruit happens to bump into the coach on campus, they can't have any recruiting conversations at that time.
- **No communications between prospects and coaches:** While the NCAA rules have always prevented college coaches from initiating contact with recruits until junior or senior year, there were well understood loopholes that allowed coaches and recruits to communicate. For example, if a recruit called a coach and the coach picked up the phone, they could discuss whatever they wanted.



The new rules now prevent any communication, regardless of who initiated it, to happen between a recruit and a coach outside of a college campus.

With the early recruiting rules, proponents hope that athletes will have the opportunity to focus on skill development at an early age and take more time to determine what they want out of their college experience. They will be able to go on unofficial visits and decide on their future course of study as high school upperclassmen.

### **How do the new early recruiting rules impact families?**

The new rules impact all Division I sports except football, M/W basketball, and baseball. High school juniors will now be allowed to take official visits beginning August 1 before their junior year. Under the old rule, athletes needed to wait until September 1 of their junior year.

These rule changes will likely put more emphasis on athletes and families needing to be proactive early in the recruiting process. With top prospects beginning offered official visits their junior year, this means even more schools can lock down their recruiting classes early. If you want to compete in a top tier program, you **MUST** start the process of discussing schools and understanding the recruiting journey during a prospect's freshman year.

Early recruiting doesn't just affect Division I and upper-level Division II schools. Lower-level Division II, Division III and NAIA schools usually wait to see who doesn't get picked up by the top-tier programs and start recruiting there. The quicker Division I recruiting classes fill up, the faster the other division levels can start their processes.

The best way to stay on top of recruiting in the current climate is to do your research and get started as soon as possible. Every recruiting journey is different, so your family may not be ready to commit to the recruiting process as a middle schooler. Make academics a priority and start pulling together your highlight/skills videos.

Contact the Recruiting Director for the Hit Factory Baseball and Softball Academy for assistance with the process and to better explain the process.

