

Information for Athletes

About College Sports

If you're hoping to play college sports, it's important to fully understand the "world" you are entering. It's not enough to have been a star in high school and, the fact is, it isn't even only about your skills. Navigating the process takes more than that. We'll provide you with some tips, but your own research will be essential.

What is the Difference between Divisions I, II, III?

Division I

Members institutions must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women), with two team sports per gender. Each playing season must have gender representation as well. There are other restrictions in terms of contests (matches, games etc.) and, with the exception of football and basketball, they all must be against other Division I opponents. Schools with football are classified as I-A or I-AA and generally have quite elaborate programs. Division I-A teams must attain specific attendance levels, such as an average of 15,000 people per home game. Division I-AA schools do not have this attendance standard. Also, Division I schools must meet minimums and maximum financial aid levels for each sport. Division I colleges can offer full and partial scholarships to their athletes. (Note: The eight Ivy League schools field Division I teams but do not provide NCAA scholarships.)

Division II

Division II institutions have to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, (or four for men and six for women), with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria -- football and men's and women's basketball teams must play at least 50 percent of their games against Division II or Football Bowl Subdivision (formerly Division I-A) or Football Championship Subdivision (formerly Division I-AA) opponents. For sports other than football and basketball there are no scheduling requirements. There are not attendance requirements for football, or arena game requirements for basketball. There are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division II school must not exceed. Division II teams usually feature a number of local or in-state student-athletes. Many Division II student-athletes pay for school through a combination of scholarship money, grants, student loans and employment earnings. Division II athletics programs are financed in the institution's budget like other academic departments on campus. Traditional rivalries with regional institutions dominate schedules of many Division II athletics programs. They are less competitive athletically than Division I and have different eligibility guidelines as well. There is athletic aid available, but in lesser amounts than Division I.

Division III

These institutions have to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season represented by each gender. There are minimum contest and participant minimums for each sport. Division III athletics features student-athletes who receive no financial aid related to their athletic ability and athletic departments are staffed and funded like any other department in the university. Division III athletics departments place special importance on the impact of athletics on the participants rather than on the spectators. The student-athlete's experience is of paramount concern. Division III athletics encourages participation by maximizing the number and variety of athletics opportunities available to students, placing primary emphasis on regional in-season

and conference competition. Division III institutions are less competitive than Division I and II, and no NCAA financial aid is provided. Colleges may still offer athletic scholarships on their own. There is a strong focus on academics and balance at Division III schools, so consider all three divisions carefully. Below is a list of differences and, from some perspectives, advantages of Division III.

What Division III Has to Offer:

- *A well-rounded collegiate experience that involves a balance of rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and the opportunity to pursue the multitude of other co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities offered.*
- *Playing season and eligibility standards minimize conflicts between athletics and academics.*
- *An intense and competitive athletics environment for student-athletes who play for the love of the game, without the obligation of an athletics scholarship.*
- *Places special importance on the impact of athletics on the participants rather than on the spectators.*
- *Dedicated to offering broad-based programs with a high number and wide range of athletics participation opportunities for both men and women.*
- *Primary emphasis on regional in-season and conference competition, while also offering 36 national championships annually.*
- *Affords student-athletes the opportunity to discover valuable lessons in teamwork, discipline, perseverance, and leadership, which in turn make student-athletes better students and responsible citizens.*
- *Student-athletes are subject to the same admission standards, academic standards, housing, and support services as the general student body.*
- *Encourages student-athletes to take advantage of the many opportunities available to them, both within and beyond athletics, so that they may develop their full potential as students, athletes, and citizens.*

The Athletic Associations

Colleges that field intercollegiate teams are organized into associations. These groups regulate the sports, ensuring that teams playing against one another are appropriately matched in terms of commitments and funding. Here are most of them:

- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) – large colleges and universities including Division I schools that spend significantly more dollars on their sports programs.
- National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) – most members are small colleges that generally spend less dollars on sports
- National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)
- National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA)
- National Bible College Athletic Association
- National Little College Athletic Association

Each of these associations has academic eligibility criteria that can, and do, change over time. Prospective college athletes must meet these requirements in order to be admitted. Colleges want good athletes, but only ones who can successfully graduate.

The NCAA

This is the most influential and well known of all the conferences. It works with the US Congress and the Department of Education to control the flow of most athletic scholarship money. Standards for recruiting and eligibility are set by a committee of college and

university personnel in order to prevent abuse of student athletes. Colleges determine who receives financial aid, but always according to rules set by the NCAA. The NCAA has over 1280 members who offer 23 sports.

The NCAA Organization Websites

Know these websites well if you're interested in NCAA institutions:

www.ncaa.org – the organization itself, includes articles, statistics on teams, search links; www.eligibilitycenter.org- the Eligibility Center that evaluates students' academic records to determine eligibility. This is where you'll find the most current guide, so print a new one every year of high school to stay current. Right now it is found at: <http://www.ncaapublications.com/DownloadPublication.aspx?download=CBSA17.pdf>

The guide includes valuable information for parents and students regarding eligibility, core classes, tests, special situations, instructions for registering, worksheets, questions to ask, recruiting regulations etc. You need this resource if you're serious about NCAA sports. If the link above has changed, more information for prospective students (including the guide) is found at: Visit www.ncaapublications.com

Here is another helpful summary guide:

<http://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/EB16.pdf>

Early Pointers

- *Grades still count. Gone are the days when athletic ability alone gets you accepted.*
- *Talent in high school doesn't necessarily translate into a scholarship.*
- *Be realistic about your skills and ask others to help you evaluate them.*
- *A coach's interest does not guarantee admission or anything else.*
- *Start early in terms of getting familiar with different colleges and their programs.*
- *Watch what happens with your high school teammates who are a year or two ahead of you.*
- *If you're interested in a college's team, watch them practice.*
- *Beware of unscrupulous or unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of coaches and players, and rise above it.*
- *Read the "NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete" (link found in this manual).*
- *Visit the NCAA and Eligibility Center websites often, as rules change.*
- *Remember that non-superstars will get more playing time at Division II schools vs. Division I, or Division III vs. II.*

Amateurism

Maintaining amateurism is crucial to preserving the academic environment as the first college priority. The NCAA believes that men and women competing on the field or court are students first, athletes second. Consequently, membership has adopted amateurism rules to ensure the students' priority remains on obtaining a quality educational experience and that all of student-athletes are competing equitably. All incoming student-athletes must be certified as amateurs. All student-athletes, including international students, are required to adhere to NCAA amateurism requirements to remain eligible for intercollegiate competition. In general, amateurism requirements do not allow:

- *Contracts with professional teams*
- *Salary for participating in athletics*
- *Prize money above actual and necessary expenses*
- *Play with professionals*

- *Tryouts, practice or competition with a professional team*
- *Benefits from an agent or prospective agent*
- *Agreement to be represented by an agent*
- *Delayed initial full-time collegiate enrollment to participate in organized sports competition*

Additional information regarding NCAA amateurism rules is available on the [NCAA Eligibility Center's website](#) by clicking on the "Resources" link at the top of the page, and is also found in the Guide.

All prospective student-athletes intending to enroll in an NCAA Division I or II institution for the first time must complete the NCAA Amateurism Certification questionnaire. You can register on-line if you have a social security number and Visa or MasterCard. You can also reach them at 1-877-262-1492. The fee is currently \$75 (for domestic students, \$130 international) if you do not qualify for a waiver. You are eligible for a waiver of the initial-eligibility certification fee if you have already received a fee waiver (not a state voucher) for the ACT or SAT. If you have not been granted a fee waiver by ACT or SAT, then you will NOT be eligible for a waiver of the certification fee. If you are seeking a waiver of the certification fee, you should confirm your eligibility with your high school guidance counselor. Your high school guidance counselor MUST submit an electronic fee waiver confirmation before your registration may be processed.

Prospective student-athletes may register with the Eligibility Center online during sophomore year in high school. As part of the amateurism certification process, each prospective student-athlete will be asked to answer several questions regarding his or her sports-participation history. Early registration with the Eligibility Center and the completion of the athletics participation questions will allow institutions to have preliminary information regarding a prospective student-athlete's amateurism status, which will promote consistency in the recruiting process. Final certifications of amateur status will occur at the end of the prospective student-athlete's senior year of high school or approximately two to three months prior to initial full-time enrollment at an NCAA Division I or II institution.

The Eligibility Center must also get copies of your SAT (use school code 9999) or ACT scores. The NCAA requires prospects who intend to enroll at NCAA Division I and Division II institutions to supply ACT or SAT scores to the Eligibility Center *directly from the testing agencies*.

How the NCAA Treats Test Scores

- The SAT – the highest scores achieved on the critical reading and math sections from two different test dates may be combined to attain the minimum test score requirements. *Note: The NCAA will not combine section scores from the "old" SAT (pre March 2016) with the "new" SAT.*
- The ACT – the high scores achieved on the individual subtest of the ACT from more than one national test date may be combined in determining whether your composite score meets the minimum requirements. Fractions may be rounded UP from .5 or higher. For example, 16.5 = 17 but 16.3 = 16.
- SAT or ACT tests used to establish eligibility must be taken by July prior to that student's senior year on a national test date. The tests may be taken as many times as desired and may mix and match sub-scores from various test dates.

- More often, it's not test scores that prevent students from being eligible but rather it's their grades.

Eligibility - Division I

High school athletics can be a huge advantage both in gaining admissions to colleges that might otherwise be out of reach, and in obtaining funding for college. However, there are minimum requirements for consideration for an athletic scholarship, and they can change over time. It is becoming harder to qualify, not easier. For an updated list of athletic requirements, visit the NCAA website at www.ncaa.org and download this guide: https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/High_School_IE_Standards.pdf Always refer to the most recent guide, as the eligibility requirements change from time to time and can be confusing.

There are 16 core classes required now for Division I, and 10 (ten) must be completed before senior year of high school. Of the 10, 7 must be in math, English, or science. You must have a 2.30 average in your 16 core classes. There is also a GPA+SAT or ACT sliding scale that determines a student's eligibility. (For example, a 2.7 GPA plus some SAT Reasoning or ACT score). The full scale is available in the guide (link above).

Although the NCAA sets minimum requirements, many colleges will have their own, more stringent, standards for admitting athletes. (see the Guide for more information)

Eligibility – Division II

If you enroll full-time at a Division II school before Aug. 1, 2018, you must meet all academic requirements and earn at least a combined SAT score of 820 or an ACT sum score of 68 to be eligible to compete. If you enroll full-time at a Division II school after Aug. 1, 2018, you must meet all academic requirements and earn an SAT or ACT score matching your core-course GPA on the Division II sliding scale to be eligible to compete. The sliding scale will balance your test score with your GPA. If you have a low test score, you need a higher GPA to be eligible. If you have a low GPA, you need a higher test score to be eligible.

If you enroll BEFORE August 1, 2018

You must graduate high school and meet **ALL** the following requirements:

Complete 16 core courses:

- Three years of English.
- Two years of math (Algebra 1 or higher).
- Two years of natural or physical science (including one year of lab science if your high school offers it).
- Three additional years of English, math or natural or physical science
- Two years of social science
- Four additional years of English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy

Earn at least a 2.0 GPA in your core courses.

Earn a SAT combined score of 820 or an ACT sum score of 68.

AFTER August 1, 2018

You must graduate high school and meet **ALL** the following requirements:

Complete 16 core courses:

- Three years of English.
- Two years of math (Algebra 1 or higher).

- Two years of natural or physical science (including one year of lab science if your high school offers it).
- Three additional years of English, math or natural or physical science
- Two years of social science
- Four additional years of English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy

Earn at least a 2.2 GPA in your core courses.

Earn an SAT combined score or ACT sum score matching your core-course GPA on the Division II sliding scale, which balances your test score and core-course GPA.

What if I don't meet the requirements?

If you enroll full-time at a Division II school before Aug. 1, 2018, and you have not met all the Division II academic requirements, you may not compete in your first year. However, if you meet the requirements to be a partial qualifier, you may practice and receive an athletics scholarship in your first year at college. To be a partial qualifier, you must graduate high school and meet **ONE** of the following requirements:

Earn a 2.0 GPA in 16 core courses:

- Three years of English.
- Two years of math (Algebra 1 or higher).
- Two years of natural or physical science (including one year of lab science if your high school offers it).
- Three additional years of English, math or natural or physical science
- Two years of social science
- Four additional years of English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy

Earn an SAT combined score of 820 or an ACT sum score of 68.

If you enroll AFTER August 1, 2018

If you enroll full-time at a Division II school after Aug. 1, 2018, and you have not met all the Division II academic requirements, you may not compete in your first year. However, if you meet the requirements to be a partial qualifier, you may practice and receive an athletics scholarship in your first year at college. To be a partial qualifier, you must graduate high school and meet **ALL** the following requirements:

Complete 16 core courses:

- Three years of English.
- Two years of math (Algebra 1 or higher).
- Two years of natural or physical science (including one year of lab science if your high school offers it).
- Three additional years of English, math or natural or physical science
- Two years of social science
- Four additional years of English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy

Earn at least a 2.0 GPA in your core courses.

Earn an SAT combined score or ACT sum score matching your core-course GPA on the Division II sliding scale.

If you are concerned you may not meet the Division II academic requirements, consider taking the following actions:

- *Ask for advice and accountability from your high school counselor. Check in with the admissions or compliance office at the college you hope to attend.*
- *Get tutoring or other study help.*
- *Graduate on time. Division I schools allow college-bound student-athletes who graduate on-time to take one core course during the year after they graduate high school.*
- *Avoid quick fixes through credit recovery programs. These courses may not be accepted by the NCAA.*
- *Keep your coursework. If the NCAA Eligibility Center needs to review your record due to irregularities, you may be asked to provide your coursework.*

- *Follow your high school's policies. The best thing to do is work within the rules.*

Recruiting Basics

The NCAA has very detailed and complicated rules which vary by sport and league, and they are too complex for this manual. In short, the member schools have adopted rules to create an equitable recruiting environment that promotes student-athlete well-being. The rules define who may be involved in the recruiting process, when recruiting may occur and the conditions under which recruiting may be conducted. Recruiting rules seek, as much as possible, to control intrusions into the lives of student-athletes. Recruiting is “any solicitation of prospective student-athletes or their parents by an institutional staff member or by a representative of the institution’s athletics interests for the purpose of securing a prospective student-athlete’s enrollment and ultimate participation in the institution’s intercollegiate athletics program.” Here is some other helpful information, but see the NCAA website for a thorough understanding of the recruiting process.

What is a contact?

A contact occurs any time a college coach says more than hello during a face-to-face contact with a college-bound student-athlete or his or her parents off the college’s campus.

What is a contact period?

During a contact period a college coach may have face-to-face contact with college-bound student-athletes or their parents, watch student-athletes compete and visit their high schools, and write or telephone student-athletes or their parents.

What is an evaluation period?

During an evaluation period a college coach may watch college-bound student-athletes compete, visit their high schools, and write or telephone student-athletes or their parents. However, a college coach may not have face-to-face contact with college-bound student-athletes or their parents off the college’s campus during an evaluation period.

What is a quiet period?

During a quiet period, a college coach may only have face-to-face contact with college-bound student-athletes or their parents on the college’s campus. A coach may not watch student-athletes compete (unless a competition occurs on the college’s campus) or visit their high schools. Coaches may write or telephone college-bound student-athletes or their parents during this time.

What is a dead period?

During a dead period a college coach may not have face-to-face contact with college-bound student-athletes or their parents, and may not watch student-athletes compete or visit their high schools. Coaches may write and telephone student-athletes or their parents during a dead period.

What is the difference between an official visit and an unofficial visit?

Any visit to a college campus by a college-bound student-athlete or his or her parents paid for by the college is an official visit. Visits paid for by college-bound student-athletes or their parents are unofficial visits. During an official visit, the college can pay for transportation to and from the college for the prospect, lodging and three meals per day for both the prospect and the parent or guardian, as well as reasonable entertainment expenses including three tickets to a home sports event. The only expenses a college-bound student-athlete may receive from a college during an unofficial visit are three tickets to a home sports event.

What is a National Letter of Intent?

A National Letter of Intent is signed by a college-bound student-athlete when the student-athlete agrees to attend a Division I or II college or university for one academic year. Participating institutions agree to provide financial aid for one academic year to the student-athlete as long as the student-athlete is admitted to the school and is eligible for financial aid under NCAA rules. Other forms of financial aid do not guarantee the student-athlete financial aid. The National Letter of Intent is voluntary and not required for a student-athlete to receive financial aid or participate in sports. Signing a National Letter of Intent ends the recruiting process since participating schools are prohibited from recruiting student-athletes who have already signed letters with other participating schools. A student-athlete who has signed a National Letter of Intent may request a release from his or her contract with the school. If a student-athlete signs a National Letter of Intent with one school but attends a different school, he or she will lose one full year of eligibility and must complete a full academic year at their new school before being eligible to compete.

Students should read the guide mentioned earlier and study the NCAA website's rules for the sport(s) they are interested in. Being well versed in these rules is helpful. Below is the link to the most current recruiting calendar, and see the website for calendar updates.
<http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/resources/recruiting-calendars/2016-17-division-i-and-ii-recruiting-calendars>

What is a “Walk On”?

Students who do not receive an athletic scholarship but wish to play intercollegiate sports anyway may be given permission to do so. These students are referred to as “walk-ons”, and they may try out for a position on the team. If successful, they might be able to earn a scholarship in the future. A student who is considering the walk-on option is still subject to the same rules and regulations and must register with the eligibility center to be certified as eligible.

So What Steps Should You Take?

- If you're an athlete, the best advice we can give you is to keep up your grades. Gone are the days when athletic ability alone will get you accepted.
- Send letters of interest during sophomore and junior years, expressing to colleges that you are interested and think their school is a good fit academically and athletically. You need to reach out to college coaches, as they seldom have time to reach out to you.
- Have a candid conversation with your coach during junior year in order to assess the level of play you can aspire to. Obtain realistic input.
- Keep records! Have a filing system wherein you keep all correspondence with coaches, even email. Be sure to reply and follow up on all contacts. (That means YOU, not your parents.)
- Make notes about every encounter.

Tips for the Letter of Interest

- Include: Test Scores, GPA, athletic record, goals and aspirations (realistic), current team, coach contact info, birth date, height, weight (as applicable), mention a scholarship interest if it is a priority, and if a videotape is available.

- Request: application form, college catalog, media guide or team brochure
- Mention: parent connections (alumni etc.), if you are new to the sport, other sports you play
- Attach: Resume, recommendation letters (if you have them), competition schedule

The Application Process

- Register with the eligibility center on-line sophomore year. You will need to ask your school counselor to release your transcript to the center, and you will ultimately submit a final one.
- Prepare an athletic resume with three basic parts:
 - ✓ *Basic information*
 - ✓ *Sports statistics (starting in 9th grade)*
 - ✓ *Academic*
- Update the resume and polish it at the end of junior year.
- You may need to submit a videotape. For most sports, this would show the athlete in a competitive contest and will want to have footage demonstrating the athlete's best skills. Accompany the tape with a statistics summary.
- Early Decision (ED): College coaches want to lock in their teams early, so you may be encouraged to apply ED. Be aware that you must attend if admitted and will miss opportunities to compare financial aid awards.

Transferring

Students may transfer from a two-year or four-year institution into an NCAA college. To do so they must meet certain requirements prior to practicing or competing. Download the NCAA Transfer Guide from the NCAA website.

Final Tips

- Try not to make your entire decision about sports. The college you choose will impact you in other ways. What if you were injured or, for some other reason, don't play all four years?
- Being eligible doesn't mean you'll be admitted. Keep lots of options open.
- If you're unclear whether you're being recruited, ask! Also ask if you're likely to be admitted.
- Consider summer camps. It's a good way to be noticed by coaches.
- Look at the school's team roster on the website. You can compare your stats to those on the teams and see how you stack up.
- Be sure you've developed a rapport with the coach before you make a final decision. If you are accepted to play a sport, that coach will be a major part of your overall experience.
- If you're approached by a scouting or recruiting service that claims it will "package" you for maximum changes at your colleges of choice, beware. While some of these may be legitimate resources, they are not sanctioned or endorsed by the NCAA.
- Have a backup plan. The odds of you becoming a world-class, highly paid athlete after graduation are not high.

The following pages contain our checklist for student athletes. Good luck with your athletic endeavors.

Checklist for Athletes

9th Grade

- Discuss your curriculum with your counselor. Discuss athletic goals also.
- Get to know coaches in your sport closely. Discuss your goals with them also.
- Keep your grades up. Gone are the days when athletics alone will get you into college.
- Research and attend sports camps. Are there any at colleges you are interested in?
- Be realistic about your abilities. Candidly discuss if you have NCAA potential.
- Start thinking about your goals and where you'd like to go to college.
- Start a rough draft of your sports resume and keep it updated.
- Keep all news clippings, honors, awards etc. that you obtain.
- Visit the NCAA website and familiarize yourself with requirements (see below)
- www.eligibilitycenter.org – check it out! The rules change from time to time.

10th Grade

- Grades, grades, grades. Keep focused on your academics.
- Register with the Eligibility Center. www.eligibilitycenter.org
- Take a practice PSAT and PLAN test.
- Talk to coaches and ask for honest feedback about your abilities.
- Double check NCAA requirements against your curriculum.
- Research colleges that might interest you. Visit if possible. Research your sport.
- Keep your sports resume updated.

11th Grade

- Revisit your goals and progress with your counselor.
- Have you registered with the NCAA Eligibility Center?
- Ask your coach for a realistic assessment of your chances at various levels.
- Attend all college meetings, fairs etc.
- Take the PSAT and the SAT or ACT. *Scores must now be sent directly from the testing agency!*
- Refine your list of target schools and realistically evaluate your chances.
- Stay organized and keep your resume updated.
- Do you need a skills video? Work with your coach on this.
- Send letters of interest to colleges with an unofficial transcript of your grades.
- Return questionnaires and/or other paperwork to the college coaches.
- Obtain letters of recommendation as needed.
- Last change at sports camps. Attend and get yourself noticed.

- Update your amateurism certification any time if necessary.

12th Grade

- Are you taking the SAT or ACT again? Watch dates and register. *Remember that scores must now be sent directly from the testing agency!*
- Are all your core classes/graduation requirements met?
- Keep up your grades. No Senioritis!
- Request final amateurism certification any time after April 1 for fall enrollment.
- Print the most current NCAA “Guide for College-Bound Student-Athletes” on their website and review it.
- Attend all college related meetings at your high school.
- Narrow your target list down to a manageable number of schools and rank them.
- Download applications and practice filling them out. Work on essays.
- Watch deadlines. Submit test scores, transcripts, letters etc.
- Be aware of recruiting rules regarding campus visits etc. Follow them.
- Make copies of everything. Get applications in on time.
- Fill out FAFSA form (federal financial aid) as soon as possible.
- Discuss your decisions, pros and cons of each school, etc. with parents and coaches.
- Send letters of interest to coaches along with your final resume and season schedule.
- Keep your high school counselor and coaches updated.
- Don't sign any paperwork without careful review.
- Let all schools/coaches know of your final decision. Thank them.
- Send thank you notes to anyone who helped you through the process.

Important Note:

The NCAA changes eligibility requirements, information, and website links frequently. While we do our best to keep this information 100% current, you will want to visit the NCAA and Eligibility Center websites yourself frequently in order to double check that you have the most current information.