

# Getting Recruited:

## Steps You Can Take to Improve Your Chances

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We have received many questions over the past months from young players who want to be recruited. You come from many backgrounds; small schools, isolated areas, non-traditional basketball schools, foreign countries, and lost in the numbers of the great inner-city hotbeds of basketball. Today I want to address the recruiting process and how you might go about taking steps to get you more exposure and improve your chances of being seen, fairly evaluated and recruited to the next level of the game.

Coaches jobs (at least at the college level) are quite dependent upon recruiting. There is no question a great teacher of the game can stretch the talent of his players and team, but that great teacher will have problems competing against bigger, stronger, more aggressive, and skilled opponents. Any coach worth their weight in salt knows this and does their best each season to recruit the best possible players to fit their program. This is also true at the International level where club coaches often see a huge change-over in players from year to year based on the financial capability of clubs. With this premise in mind you as a player must understand no coach in his right mind will turn down a player who has talent if they fit into their system and are willing to be a team player.

### What Are Coaches Looking For?

Today's Playground Pointer is being written for you the player, but my intent is to write this such that you will understand how coaches think. Knowing how they think in the recruiting process will go a long way toward improving your chances of getting recruited by one. With that in mind, let me ask the question what players do coaches recruit? The answer to that is both obvious yet often overlooked when a player asks, why another player was recruited over them. Coaches are looking for the best athlete with the best skills, with poise, intelligence both on and off the court, with good academic records and who have demonstrated good work habits, and self discipline in their daily lives. Oh but you'll argue I've known coaches who have recruited a great athlete who has none of the following characteristics you previously mentioned. Yes, that does occur because at succeeding higher levels of the game athleticism becomes a critical baseline element for evaluating whether or not a player can compete at that level. However just being athletic is neither the lock on you getting recruited nor the desired goal of any college recruiter. The goal in most cases is the best combination of all of these attributes. That is why schools such as Duke, Stanford, Virginia, North Carolina, and other big time programs often get the cream of the crop in recruiting. They get the best selection of young talented players that display all of these attributes.

From a player's standpoint, you will be able to stretch your athletic ability so far, but you can work to maximize all of these attributes in striving toward your goal of becoming a college player. If you have four of these very highly sought attributes, you are more likely to be recruited than a player who has only 3, 2 or 1 of these traits. Think about that the next time you don't think your school work is important, or you demonstrate the lack of self-discipline be at practice on time, execute all the drills all the time, etc. Somewhere someone is watching who can either recommend you or in all honesty cost you a chance at that scholarship. If you lack in the area of natural athletic talent you may have to consider setting your goals to achieve a scholarship at a slightly lower level such as Division II, III or JC basketball. None-the-less the more of these recruitable traits you have the more you will be recruited.

### How to I Get Exposure?

Know here is the "who wants to be a millionaire question?" most asked by players and coaches today. How to I get exposure if I feel I can play? There are about a half dozen ways you get exposure including; attending camps frequented by college recruiters, holiday and post-season state tournaments, video tapes, contacts by a reputable coach or recommendation by former players, and contact by parents or relatives. The most common way a player is discovered is by a coach watching you compete head to head with a player who already have a reputation and demonstrated skill level. This is best in person, but video tapes of your games against quality opponents will open the door for a college coach recruiter to make a telephone call, e-mail or a trip to watch you in person. If your coaches doesn't schedule games against quality opponents or if you geographically are too far removed from them to get games, than you will most likely have to attend all-star camps in the summers to get exposure like this. The least most common way for a player to get recruited is by recommendation of a parent or relative. The problem with this method

is that unless your parent was a well know player or coach, most coaches find that parents or relatives have the least ability of any of these exposure points to objectively evaluate your talent. Keep that in mind if you have an obsessed parent who believes you are the next Michael Jordan. Coaches believe believable sources. If not their own eyes, then the next best set of eyes (an experienced talent evaluator such as a successful coach, or former player).

If you are having problems getting exposure or a recommendation, than consider contacting someone who you feel can adequately evaluate your talent and give you an objective point of view as to whether or not you can play the next level of the game. If not that level, than ask them to help you project what level of the game you should be aspiring to play and focus your efforts to get exposure to that level. A person (coach, former player, or talent scout) who has a track record of judging great talent and who gives you a fair and positive review has the best chance of getting you the exposure you desire. If your high school coach doesn't have many contacts, ask them to talk with other opposing coaches or players who might assist you in opening recruiting doors.

When you send a video to a college coach for evaluation send them a complete game video (unedited) with your name, uniform color (light or dark) and number. I've been sent dozens where we watch a video and can't determine which player we are suppose to be evaluating. You can send highlight video's but these are the least credible to a college coach because any player of some ability will have a few highlights. Being able to watch the complete game let's a recruiter know how you handle adversity, foul problems, what your defensive footwork is like, your communication skills and coachability with your coach and teammates. There are literally dozens of things a recruiter picks up watching a full game video. If you are a "real big time player" you can send several videos. Being able to send 4 great games will have a substantially greater impact on a recruiter than just sending your best game of the year. When you send a video, make copies before sending it. Send out only copies and keep the originals for yourself. It costs a little more but you be shooting yourself in the foot if you send a video to a college and never get it back, or they hold it to keep a potential competitor from seeing your skills.

When you do finally get a recruiter to come watch you play, remember to play hard, with focus and play relaxed. We watch hundreds of games a year and one mistake will not normally cost you the interest of that college scout. They are looking for patterns of play including your skill execution, physical efforts, attitude, understanding of the game, etc. Most of all they look to see who performs big under pressure. When all is said and done, and all things equal amongst players recruited all coaches will recruit a player who can play with poise, plays big under pressure and produces when the game is on the line. This doesn't mean necessarily going solo in the last five minutes of a big game, but it does mean demonstrating you can execute skills and good decision making when the game at it's critical juncture.

## Getting Recruited Is Primarily Based on Performance Under Pressure

In general the most important part of getting recruited is simply being able to consistently perform at a level which indicates to experiences coaches and recruiters that you can perform that way at the next level of the game. You cannot expect to be recruited if you have athletic ability but are physically out of shape and often injured. You cannot expect to be recruited if you have one great skill such as shooting but cannot pass, dribble the ball, and defend. You cannot expect to be recruited if you have athletic ability and skills but you loose your cool and poise under pressure. The best players in the game of basketball have their minds under control and are aware of their whole environment around them as they are performing. You cannot expect to be recruited if you never crack open a book in your school classrooms. A recruiter cannot take your SAT or ACT tests for you. And even if you can qualify through these tests, poor study habits will result in academic failures at the next level which will keep you from competing. Performance is the external measure of your skills, intelligence, and work habits. It does not lie. One strike (one bad performance...on the court, in the classroom, out on the streets) will not cost you a scholarship, but a trail of bad performances will be a hot lead for any recruiter that you lack the decision making skills and discipline to "perform in the big time", when all is on the line.

## For Foreign Athletes Language is the Barrier

For the foreign athlete who wants to be recruited it's much the same although you have to pay much more attention to your academic records, your language skills, and understanding the academic-athletic eligibility issues in the US which are foreign in nature to most international club system players. However the same ideas I have spoken about here apply to you as well. You need to demonstrate your ability to perform under pressure, demonstrate your skills levels, poise, and intellectual abilities. Having a decent command of the English language is crucial if you are to survive and compete for scholarships with players of equal ability who are closer to the teams recruiting them. You must also demonstrate your willingness to compete under difficult situations. Many young foreign players are use to being one of the two or three best players in their area and not competing with six or seven other players at the same position for

playing time. Your willingness to handle this competition will also help a recruiter determine if you are worth the effort to recruit.

## Tips to Get Recruiting Trips

Here my tips for things that will get you recruited and things that will cause a recruiter to drop their interest.

Things to Help you Get Recruited:

**1. Get a strong recommendation from a reputable coaches or former player who can objectively and accurately assess your ability for a college recruiter.** If you do not know any ask your coach, or other players in your area to make recommendations of people who might assist you. Then pursue them to have them come watch your games.

**2. Send copies of at least two or three complete game videos of your best efforts to a half dozen college programs.** Then listen for their feedback. If you only get a lukewarm warm reception they are politely telling you that you may have some ability but you may need to re-assess and adjust your expectations of what level you can play. If you get some positive response, it doesn't insure you getting a scholarship but you at least have a foot in the door for them to make more contact with you. Remember to follow up your videos with a phone call to get their honest assessment of your ability. If one door closes, send your videos to other schools. Remember however that sending out 500 videos when you have marginal ability at one level will be no more effective than sending out 2 or 3 to a level at which you realistically can perform. Being honest with yourself and your ability will go a long way toward getting you recruited at a level you "can play".

**3. Attend as many summer camps as you can afford to attend, especially those commonly attended by college recruiters and other better known players.** Attending summer camps not only improves your skill level and understanding of the game but it also gives groups of recruiters who attend these camps chances to evaluate you against stronger competition than you might face during the course of your regular basketball season. Often you are allowed to play positions more natural to your ability as well than what you are required to play at your local high school. Coach recruit players based on where they will "most likely play" in college, not where they play in high school. Use the summer camps to play your "college position" whenever possible.

**4. Encourage your high school and club coaches to schedule holiday tournaments out of your area for more exposure against well known teams.** Coaches and recruiters can make better evaluation of player when they see how they compete across regions within states or even the whole country. Head to head competition against other top prospects is probably the best evaluation tool college coaches have to rank players for recruiting purposes.

**5. Make the State Tournament.** Making the state tournament not only exposes your abilities to competition at a higher level of play but also indicates to coaches that you and your teammates have enough ability to raise the level of play to compete at a higher level. If you score 35 points per game but your team doesn't make the play-offs this often sends a message that you can score but lack the ability to make others better around you. Great players make average players better because they get them involved in the game. Great player are not just a one man show, they lift the level of play all around them. If you want to get recruited, lift the level of play and take your team to the tournament. College coaches are always at State Tournaments because it is where the cream rises to the top.

## Miss-steps to Shut Doors

Here are some ways to damage your hopes of getting recruited:

**1. Have a coach, friend, or relative promote you subjectively and by comparing you to a more talented player who is obviously better.** Credibility of the person promoting you is a key to getting recruited. The kiss of death in recruiting is to have an unreliable source selling you with rose colored glasses.

**2. Be slow to provide academic records, game tapes, and contact information.** Coaches operate on very tight schedules. They will often look at more than 500 videos a year, and evaluate more than 300 players in order to decide which 2, 3 or 4 players get scholarships. Unless you are the next coming of Shaquille O'Neill, being sloppy with providing information they ask for will put you in the discard box.

**3. Be a jerk!** Yes, jerk's do get recruited but most coaches are looking for players who have a healthy sense of self-worth and realize they are but part of this big world. Some college coach is out there saying I might recruit that player if they didn't have such an attitude. Better they go somewhere else and beat us twice a year than to come and destroy positive chemistry and all the efforts we have built and beat ourselves 20 times a year and cost me my job.

**4. Lie to a recruiter!** Giving false information about your academic records or statistics is a red flag to avoid recruiting a player. By giving misleading information you are driving a wedge between the most sacred of all coach-player relationships, one that requires trust. If you want a coach to be up front and honest with you, be sure to initiate it the other direction. Even if it means exposing a weak point, if you are really wanted by a program, they will find a way to help you overcome that weak point and get through it. That is the kind of coach and program for which I want to play. Some players have enough ability they can mislead recruiters and still get recruited, but if you are a marginal prospect and think you can do this think again. Lying is like play in the steering wheel of a car. You can drive with it but the driver won't have much confidence it will respond when the time is right.

**5. Send video highlight clips that show only your good points and no defensive competition.** Remember getting a recruiter to come evaluate you live only to discover that you aren't anywhere near the player your highlight clips show will not solidify your scholarship offer.

**6. Be unprepared as a player to go to the next level in athletic ability, strength and conditioning, lacking skills for the position you must play in college, and paying no attention to academics is the best way to cost you a scholarship.** Playing at the college levels requires all these things and more. Get prepared and show coaches you have the personal self-discipline and work ethic to grow even more steps on your way to greatness.

**7. Use PAY recruiting service that promise to get your names listed for a fee.** I never used these and most coaches do not today. They use reputable recruiting and scouting services that make their money by selling their evaluations instead of giving them away. If I want to pursue a list of players I'm going to use scouting services of a professional who has a proven services and produce results. If you do your homework most of these services guarantee nothing but a receipt for your money. That is because if you don't have the talent you will not get recruited even if you get exposed. Keep that in mind before you spend your money. Put it instead into copies of your videos and mass mail it to coaches who will take the time to review them.

Hey players, these are but a few of many factors that contribute to getting recruited. In all my years as a college and professional coach, talent finds coaches. If you work hard, compete hard, improve your skills, and demonstrate in head to head competition against other talented players you can play, you will be found. Do not hesitate to use other reputable resources such as coaches, or former players to assist you but be realistic about your abilities. A player who fairly assesses they skill level has the best chance of locking down a scholarship at a level where they can contribute and play and that should be the goal of any aspiring player. That is this month's Playground Pointer, Getting Recruited.