

The College Recruiting Process: The Search for the College That is right for YOU

First Question: What do you want to study? You know, the academic part of college.

Second Question: Even if you do not know the answer to the first question, if you could not play Hockey tomorrow, would you still want to be at “that” school? **If the answer is “No”, then you need to look at other schools.** Do not be hypnotized by a school’s NCAA “division” classification. Lots of “D3” schools have better facilities and larger Hockey budgets than many “D1” schools. Two of the finest water-based Field Hockey fields in the nation are at Division III Babson College (outside Boston), and Ursinus College (Collegeville, PA). One of the most successful teams in NCAA history is also Division III, the College of New Jersey (Trenton, NJ). Having coached Division I Hockey and Women’s Lacrosse, I have seen up close what many different schools have to offer.

There are currently 78 Division I schools with Hockey; Do the top twenty teams have things the other 58 don’t? Yes. That’s obvious; some have more scholarships, some have exclusive use of their field during the season, some have full-time head and assistant coaches, and some have more than two coaches (sometimes four or five coaches). These are all wonderful things to have, but they do not mean that a particular Hockey program is exactly right for you. If each of these schools is looking to bring in five freshmen players, that is 100 recruits for the top twenty teams. If there are 280 high school teams in Pennsylvania alone, and each has an average of seven seniors, are you one of the top 100 players out of those 1,960 (the top 5%?)? It gets worse; there are high schools with hockey in California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, and New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and others. One of the greatest athletes I ever coached in college (she started every game in both Hockey and Lacrosse) came from a high school in Colorado! Get the picture? Don’t despair! There are over 225 collegiate teams out there(159 D3 and 25 D2), so **there is a place for you to study and to play.** You just need to find the right place, a place where you want to study for four years and play hockey.

Do not choose a school just because you think you like their Hockey program. The coach may leave. The coach may bring in ten foreign players your sophomore year. The school may drop the program (or discontinue the JV team, if they have one). You could get injured outside of sports. You may discover playing is no fun anymore (even though you continue close friendships with the players and/or the coach). Lots of things can happen.

When you choose to play sports in college, you will need to prioritize your life. Coming out of high school, some high school student-athletes may look at the world like this:

1. Friends and social life (what’s everyone doing after the game Friday?)
2. Sports (this is fun, and many of my friends play too)
3. School (if I don’t keep my grades up, I can’t play sports and be with my friends)
4. Family (I can’t wait to go to college and get far away from home)

In college, the world changes (actually, it turns upside down, if your world view is described above), or you will find yourself either out of sports, out of college, or both. Your priorities in college should look something like this:

1. **Family and faith** come first. When you go to college, you will miss home, and you will eagerly look forward to Thanksgiving (really, you will...).
2. **School-** you are in college to learn. Go to class everyday and do your homework.

3. **Sports-** train as best you can, take care of your body (this is not easy when your parents are not around- and it has nothing to do with the dining service), follow all the rules (NCAA rules- there are a lot of them, rules of your school and athletic department, your professors' rules, and the coach's rules), while maintaining academic eligibility, and fulfilling any other requirements assigned to you (hosting recruits, fundraising for the team, community service, supporting other teams, etc.)
4. **Friends and social life-** if there is any time left over after classes, studying, practice, work study (your campus job- usually part of your financial aid package) and anything else demanded of you by your coach, your professors and student groups you may join at the college, you can hang out like other students. That is, if you can stay awake- finding time to sleep is a problem during the playing season. **The hardest thing to do when growing up is to say "No" to your friends (or teammates) when you have to get important things done (like school work after spending over ninety minutes at the athletic building doing your off-season workout).** Being a collegiate athlete is sometimes a difficult and very lonely proposition.

Always revisit questions "One" and "Two" (see above) during your college search. The answers will change as you visit colleges, talk to college students, and learn more about what you want to do. The following is just a basic outline of what to do. Feel free to seek the advice of adults and of current and former collegiate student-athletes.

Step ONE: Where to start?

Get a piece of paper and list the qualities for your ideal college: area(s) of study, academic intensity (choose a school that meets your academic potential), size of student body, rural or city location, athletics (Hockey), distance from home, etc. Start this in 10th grade.

Then get some of those fat college guides from the library or go to a web site to find schools that meet some of these criteria. Here are a few suggested links:

<http://apps.collegeboard.com/search/index.jsp>

<http://www.collegejournal.com/>

<http://www.ncaastudent.org/> (download the guide- you do NOT have to print it all out...)

<http://www2.ncaa.org/> and <https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/>

The last site has very good information on the NCAA rules for athletic eligibility. There is an important form that needs to be submitted to the NCAA by your guidance office to be eligible to play in college. Try to get this form completed (the fee is now \$60...sorry) your junior year of high school. This information and links to which schools sponsor each sport by division (the school's division and its' actual student population are not related- there are some very tiny Division I schools) can be found by clicking on the "Academics & Athletes" link on the menu of the NCAA web site home page.

If you are just starting, and have no clue what kind of school you might like, include some big, small and medium schools. Include a city school and a college in the country, etc. Definitely include one "reach" school- a hard one that would be neat to attend, and a safety school- one that you can get into and afford (such as a state school). One thing I have always encouraged players to do is to look at women's colleges, and then pick ONE to seriously investigate and apply to. Don't make a face. I am serious. There are some great colleges that happen to be women's colleges, and the athletes at these schools get

both a great education and a great athletic experience (NOTE: the football and men's basketball teams get \$0.00 in the athletic budget at these schools where **women are #1 !**).

Important note on visits to any college: If you visit any college, not matter what grade you are in, the coach **can talk to you** in person while you are **on campus**. The **ONLY exception** is during NCAA defined "Dead Periods" for D1 and D2 schools (DO NOT visit coaches then). Please go to the NCAA web page at <http://www.ncaa.org> and search for "Recruiting Calendars" for information on the **different** dates for D1 and D2 **Dead Periods**.

Step TWO: Narrowing Your List

After you make a list of about two dozen schools (no, you are not going to apply to ALL of them), get a bunch of those big index cards (5 x 8 inch) and put the name of each school at the top, followed by size, location, majors, etc. On the back of each card make a "+" and "-" column, and list likes and dislikes about the school each time you learn more about it (after you visit there, read about it, or talk to students or people who went there- yes, even "old" people: your parents' friends, neighbors, people at church, teachers, coaches, etc.).

Many colleges have "junior" days to get prospective students to come before they are HS seniors. Even if it is a local school you don't think you will go to, the experience will be good for you (and the travel is easy...). Try to get to several of these events your junior year (or even a local one your sophomore year if you are ambitious). If you go visit a school, write down in advance some questions you have if you meet a teacher, a coach, or a student. Having these available in a little pad or notebook also gives you the ability to write down things you learn (to later transfer to the index card for that school), or new questions you might think up while visiting. Coaches will notice if you are prepared or not. It is a sign of your desire to succeed at the things you want to do.

Next, send a short **one page** letter to the Hockey coach introducing yourself, offering to send a schedule of games for your junior or senior year (they will not come see you "live" before that- NCAA rules), and clearly stating what your interests about their school are (the area of study you are interested in, the location, being a student-athlete, etc.). Include your grades and standardized test scores (the NCAA will eventually tell the coaches what they are anyway, so don't try to hide this information, or worse, exaggerate it). Use the coach's NAME, and not "Dear Coach". If it looks like you sent out a million form letters, they will be skeptical from the start. Be certain to ask for information on the major you think you might be interested in. It is OK to say "I am strong in math and biology, but may start college with an undeclared major." At least signal to the coach that there is something besides Hockey at the college that interests you.

This letter of introduction gets your name into the coaches' files (and they will send it to the admissions department). Some schools have a recruiting form you can fill out on line. Others will mail it to you after you write to them.

Remember, no matter how good you think you are on the field, if a coach does not believe you can handle their school academically, they will probably not be interested in you. They will not want to invest time in recruiting you and then training you for a year, only to have you become academically ineligible by your sophomore season.

After you write to a coach, it is OK to email them occasionally (every two or three weeks during your season, and monthly out-of-season) to stay in touch, and tell them about other Hockey events you are involved/playing in, but coaches love to get *real* mail occasionally.

Step THREE: Pursuing the schools you want

Next, during the summer between 10th and 11th grade, start making a one page “Hockey Resume” to send out as a follow-up to your letter. For hundreds of dollars you can get your parents to pay someone to make one for you, and they will fax it to every school in the nation, and those coaches will throw them in the garbage with the other fifty mass produced profiles they get each week. Or you can easily make your own profile for free and the coach may actually read it. Coaches prefer the homemade kind. It does not have to be full color, but a picture of you is a nice touch (either a head shot, or an action shot). I recommend you not fax it, but snail-mail it, or even better, hand deliver it if you can visit the school. If a coach requests a profile in an email to you, it is OK to respond via email. Convert the resume to a PDF file, so they can print it out whether they have windows or a Mac...google “convert to pdf free” for lots of free online document converters.

Include a section on each of these in your **one** page resume (no one reads page two...):

- Academic info and interests.
- Name address and phone number of school, phone number of your school principal, and the phone number of your guidance counselor.
- Your school Hockey activity/accomplishments.
- Out-of-school Hockey activities and accomplishments.
- Contact info for your coach or coaches (school and club), and school athletic office.
- Other athletic activity (running times if you have any), other sports and athletic accomplishments.
- Hobbies, volunteerism, other interests.

Once you start visiting schools and narrow down the number to about a half dozen (the maximum number you should apply to), you can consider sending out a SHORT videotape or DVD. If it runs more than twelve minutes most coaches will fall asleep or turn it off. It should include a brief personal introduction (look into the camera, speak clearly, and state what will follow on the tape). You do not need to hire a professional to do your video. I have seen excellent tapes done by high school students interested in video production (you may call them geeks- but they get results with electronic equipment). They have the interest to do it right and may have access to excellent school equipment (like a tripod- it is VERY important to have steady video). If you can find such students at your school, see if more than one of your teammates is interested and you can benefit from combined efforts to secure a place to film, get equipment (balls and cones), and have help running the drills. Talk to your coach. They can offer suggestions, or even may be eager to help in some way. Your tape should include about two minutes each of these items:

- Footage of some individual skills (slalom dribbling, dodging some cones, and a straight dribble at speed with ball in constant contact with the stick), preferably on artificial turf, or a gym or field house floor.
- Footage of receiving (run to one cone, receive, sprint to the other cone, receive, and back a few times) and passing (push passing is just as important as hitting the ball- set up a short slalom of cones and then push through a gate of cones fifteen yards beyond the slalom). HINT: Try and make sure that YOU are the focus of attention in footage that includes another athlete (a passer or receiver). Your friend can star in her own video.
- Some game footage, but not three second clips of a goal that is two seconds celebration. Actual footage of you losing the ball, and then recovering to stop the other team is more valuable than a dozen two-second clips of goals. If the footage is “unsteady”, please don’t use a lot of it- the coach will get seasick watching it.

Step FOUR: Letters of Recommendation

Get letters of recommendation from other people in addition to your high school coach. Get an opposing coach, an umpire that you respect, or even a coach from camp, futures or your Hockey club. The best way to get letters of recommendation is to politely ask first. If they say “yes”, then hand them the following prepared packet in a big manila envelope:

- Business size envelopes addressed to the coach at each school you are interested in.
- Put a stamp on each envelope you want mailed in your lifetime.
- Include a brief letter introducing you to the person writing the letter. Also include these things in the letter:
 1. Spell your name correctly
 2. Provide your mailing address, email, and phone number
 3. Your year of graduation from high school- Class of 20XX (this is easier to track for the coach if you are not a senior yet- that year is not supposed to change...)
 4. Name of your high school
 5. What you hope to study in college
 6. The name of your coach and years playing Hockey
 7. Most importantly, thank them (in advance) for taking the time to write the recommendation(s).
- Politely request in your brief letter an email or phone call when the letters are put in the mail, and also request that they keep a copy of the letter on file in case you need to give them a couple more addressed envelopes (to new schools you may discover later on). Always welcome any advice they have on colleges, or your choice of Hockey schools.

If you do this carefully, they will be impressed, think well of you, and hopefully write a great letter on your behalf. In the second to last page of your Hockey notebook, write down this person’s name, AND the date you gave them the packet. You may need to contact these respected people in the future (for more letters- or even to ask questions about college in general or a particular school). At this point in your life it is not polite to ask someone to write a letter and give it to you. Trust me, you will get a better letter if they get to write it and send it unseen by you. If you don’t trust the person to write a good letter, then don’t give them an envelope. Someday, if you go to graduate school, and need letters of recommendation, professors may offer you the chance to review a letter, and suggest changes, before they send it, but you are not there yet.

Step FIVE: Paperwork and a Test Drive (Applications and Overnight Visits)

Although you can get driven to any college campus anytime by a parent and ask to see the coach (except during NCAA “Dead Periods”, such as the NCAA Championships for that sport and the one week in the fall and early spring when National Letters of Intent are sent to recruits), there can only be one “official” visit to up to five colleges your senior year. An official visit is one in which the coach arranges and pays for any part of your visit (providing you with a dining hall pass, staying in a dorm room with a player, providing the host student with up to \$20 to get you pizza or take you to a movie, etc.). “Unofficial” visits do not involve the reimbursement of any expenses by the team--you are on your own, or need to squeeze some freebies out of the Admissions Office (sometimes they will take you and your parents to lunch as part of an Admissions guided tour of the campus preceding an interview with an Admissions representative).

Coaches will not want to commit time and their budget to a visit though until you have started the application process. They will need your SAT or ACT scores, high school

transcripts (they can get these things after you have them sent to their admissions office, a photocopy is not acceptable under NCAA rules), and you should have either filed an application, or be bringing a completed one with you. The application fees are a nuisance. See if applying on-line through the school web site is free, or if the coach can send you a fee waived application (I know from experience that division one coaches have access to an ample supply of these). Some admission departments will even waive the application fee if you come visit the school and meet with an admissions rep (some rural schools are very eager to get you to drive out for a visit).

One note about SAT scores and ACT scores. For some reason, women have historically scored slightly higher on the ACT test than they have on the SAT. If you are really concerned about your SAT scores, taking the ACT may help (if you get a “better” score) with admission to a particular school, and also may help you qualify for a little more financial aid for academics (depending on the school’s academic aid criteria). Yes, it is another test, and another \$40 or \$50 fee, but a few points more can possibly mean \$500 to several thousand dollars additional academic aid a year, times four years - you do the math. For dates and testing sites: <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html>

Some coaches have limited budgets, or are not pursuing you as one of their “top” recruits, and will NOT offer you an official visit. If you really are interested in the school (remember Question #1?), ask if you can come on an un-official visit. If the coach still balks at arranging any part of your visit (what does that tell you?), then consider two courses of action: 1- cross the school off your list, 2- if the school still interests you for reasons beyond Hockey (you could be very happy there *without* playing Hockey...), call admissions and arrange a visit anyway. You are going to college to learn, the coach is not.

What do you want to do on a visit? (Whether arranged by the coach, or just through the Admissions Office.)

- If you have not been to the campus before, ask for a tour (preferably student guided).
- Attend at least one class (if possible, in a subject area you want to study)
- Meeting with a professor of the subject area you are interested in (the chair of the department, if possible). If this meeting is not offered to you, **request it**.
- Eat at least a couple meals in the dining hall (if you stay overnight). You might have to pay for one or more of the meals, but if your parents are with you at Admissions, an Admissions representative might treat all of you to lunch.
- A night in the dorms (some Admissions Departments may not be eager to arrange this, but if you are polite and ask the right questions, you might get them to arrange it anyway- but do not ask to stay with an athlete.). If you already know someone at the school, you can always stay with them and tell Admissions you have a room with a current student, and just need all this other stuff arranged.
- Interview with an Admissions rep. Ask them what your chances are of getting admitted. Sometimes they will give you an admissions decision that same day.
- Meet with the coach during your visit- **ask questions**: What do you expect of your players? What are your rules? What is your practice schedule like? What if a class/lab conflicts with practice? ---if the coach says “change your major” before they say “you have a full scholarship if you come play here”, then cross that school off your list immediately (if you are getting good grades, no coach has a right to tell you what to study in college).

- Hang out with the players (there can be very different kinds of players on a team-try to meet some of the different cliques to get the whole picture...). What do they think of the coach, practices, and schoolwork? What do they say about the coach's rules? The coach's attitude towards academics and possible conflicts? Is their perception or experience a lot different from what the coach told you? Do you like the teams' attitude towards itself? Is there a group of players on the team whom you feel comfortable with? Do the younger players say they felt "welcomed" by the older players? What stresses did they experience during their freshman season? Does the social life of the team fit in with all the other things you tell yourself you will accomplish in college? Don't fool yourself by thinking the team behaves completely differently 'out-of-season' than they do during the season. Your visit to any college your senior year is likely to be **after** the Hockey season is over, so be realistic about your evaluation of the team you are visiting, and whether they mirror the goals you have as a collegiate student-athlete. You must realize that it will be much **more difficult** to participate in athletics in college than it was in high school. Being a successful student-athlete is much harder than just attending practice and working out on your own. Are you willing to do what it takes to be successful? Or will you be satisfied merely participating?

Remember: The coach neither owns the school, nor is likely a tenured professor. Coaches move around, no matter what they say (most non-teaching coaches are on one year contracts). Sometimes coaches change jobs by their choice, sometimes by the choice of others. Choose a school and be prepared to accept the coach that comes with it. Do it the other way around and you may end up with neither the coach or the college experience that you wanted.

Remember to write down things you learn about the team, the school and the coach. Warning: detailed written descriptions of everything you "see", with names, are not necessary. Some notes, like "compatible w/team" or "very active night-time social life" will suffice to describe two very different teams, and should be written on the ride home after you are safely off campus.

After the visit, mail a card to the coach, or Admissions rep, (or both) thanking them for arranging your stay. If you liked the school and might go there, a similar card to the professor you met with would be wise too. I am sure you will have exchanged emails and IMs with some members of the team, including the player(s)/student that hosted you. Stay in touch, they may have valuable news for you about the team or the school, if you are still considering that institution.

Step SIX: Committing to a School

Hopefully, by February (you may do it sooner) of your senior year, you have narrowed your list down to several schools that have admitted you. How do you select one?

- Which school offers the most academic options should you *change* your major?
- Would you survive academically at each of these schools? **Critical for science majors-** college lab courses are as different as night and day from what you did in high school. **Hint:** Absolutely avoid taking TWO lab courses your first semester (unless you are a genius who will **stay in your dorm room and study** every night the entire Hockey season).
- Which school has the most comfortable fit for you socially?

- Which team is the best fit for you as an athlete (remember, the players may be there longer than the coach)? Remember to be realistic about what you think you can contribute to that team. Ask the people who wrote your Hockey letters what they think of how you might fit into these hockey programs.
- Which school is offering the best financial aid deal? (Yes, sometimes money is important. If one school offers practically zero aid, while others offer more—that is a signal you should not ignore...)
- What would be the reason(s) to stay at the school if you stopped playing Hockey?
- What does your gut feeling tell you?

Once you make your decision, first call the lucky coach whose school you chose (if there was a financial aid offer made, make sure the deal is still “on”). Then inform the other coaches that were still hoping to get you to come to their school (at least via email that same day- it is very bad if these other coaches find out from someone other than you that you have chosen another school). There may be papers you need to sign, and the coach will explain this and send them to you.

Aside to Parents: No NCAA coach can appear off campus with a prospective student-athlete for any type of “signing ceremony.” NCAA rules not only prohibit coaches from appearing at any event (public or private) for this purpose, they prohibit the coach from commenting to any media outlet on the student-athlete’s athletic ability or possible future contributions to the team. All inquiries by the media must be directed to that college’s Sports Information Director (every school has one). Please do not ask your daughter’s prospective college coach to attend a “signing ceremony.” The coaches cannot come, and such “ceremonies” are simply silly. Ask me if you really want to know why.

Gee, am I doing this right?

When in doubt, go back to the First and Second Questions. Remember, you will only spend two or three hours a day with the Hockey team (and **less** during the off-season). If you are not happy the other 21 or 22 hours a day, the Hockey experience is not going to salvage your college experience. Be realistic about your academic interests, and your Hockey ability for that particular school, and honestly consider **your willingness to make sacrifices to pursue both**. Please, do not confuse the college’s “division” with the “level” of Hockey at any college or university – many, many D1 players would never start on any of the teams from the “final four” schools from last year’s D3 Hockey tournament.

Almost every player that will be on your college team was probably a captain at their school, and a first team all-star, and the leading scorer, or the top defender, etc. Are you ready to play defense after leading your team in scoring in high school for two years? Would you switch from defense to offense if the coach asked you to? Can you live with sitting on the bench for two (or three) whole seasons before playing even ten straight minutes in a single game? These are some of the challenges you may be confronted with when you pick a school at which you hope to play Hockey.

None of this is intended to discourage you. Just think things through, and keep adding notes to those index cards until you eliminate a school (save each card though, in case you forget why you crossed that school off your list). Write down notes and observations in that notebook with your questions for people at the colleges you visit. On visits talk to students who are not athletes. Sit in on at least one class (over four years you will spend more time in class than doing Hockey). Write down your impressions of the school after each visit (review as much as you can in your mind and **write it down – do not assume**

you will remember everything). If a coach is interested in your athletic ability, they are going to try to present their school and team in the *best light possible*. Try your best to get a complete picture of the school if you think it could be a match for you.

Then return to the First and Second Questions, *again* 😊.

What if I am wrong?

Although you should choose your college carefully (they are lucky to get you, not the other way around), if it turns out to be the wrong college, you can always transfer. It isn't easy (imagine choosing colleges all over, but now knowing a lot about one type of college), but it can be done. Lots of students do it. Lots of student-athletes do it. And no one dies. And no athletic careers are automatically ended (although for NCAA related paperwork and financial aid reasons, it more difficult to transfer "up" a division, than to a school of the same, or a "lower" division). If you are really unhappy at a college, the only reason to consider staying is if you are on a full scholarship and there is no other way to pay for school (then Hockey becomes a job, not just an extra-curricular activity). No one has the right to demand that you be unhappy. No coach, no administrator, not even yourself.

But none of this will be an issue if you if you start studying schools before your junior year of high school ends. Get your priorities straight:

- ❖ Remember who really loves you: **family!**
- ❖ Remember why you are at college: **to learn!** (...and to graduate.)
- ❖ Remember that you cherish Hockey because you love it: **train with passion and always be faithful to your obligations as an athlete!**
- ❖ Choose your friends wisely: **your friends can reinforce good habits**, or they can prevent you from fulfilling your potential, and they can even get you into trouble.
- ❖ Recognize that being on a particular team at a particular college **is not the end goal of your entire life.**

Get organized now. Take notes on index cards or in a notebook (or both- the cards are an easy way to separate each school, and allow you to lay them out side-by-side for comparison). Do not trust everything to memory. Do not rely solely on the glossy literature sent to you by the school for information. They are selling you their school, and will try to present only the positive things. **You need to do your own research** to see through the "advertising" the admissions office and the coach will certainly engage in.

Choosing a college is a big (and very expensive) decision. Start your research now; visit some local schools to get "practice" talking to professors and admissions personnel. Even if you would "never" go to a local college, as a sophomore or junior in high school it is an easy journey, and useful training for learning what to look for when on a college campus. Even if you don't like the local school, at least you now know some things you do not want in a college. Can you list the reasons why you don't like it (besides the proximity to home...)? Be **SPECIFIC!** This local college should be your "first" index card. Remember also to list a few positive things about the school: there must be at least a few good things about the place...things you want to remember to look for in the college you eventually choose to attend.

Remember: Take the time to seriously look into some women's colleges. Not only is their athletic focus exclusively on **women's** athletics (not token gestures to "gender equity"), they all have **excellent** academic reputations. You may be surprised if you visit one...

Good luck in your search for the school that is right for you!