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Softball

MAGAZINE

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JANUARY 2015



SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

Getting Ready For College Recruiting

Colby Norris a pitcher from James City County, Virginia signed her National Letter of Intent this past November with Bryant University, a Division I school in Rhode Island. As a high school senior getting ready to graduate with a 4.0 grade point average, it would seem to some that Colby could just sit back and wait for the offers to come in. After all she throws a fastball in the mid 60's, gets great spin on her pitches, and is a pretty good hitter too. Well, it just doesn't work that way in the world of college recruiting.

Colby started her college recruiting journey when she was 11. That's right – 11 years old. Are you shaking your head saying that's too early? Well it isn't – especially for pitchers. Colby attended one day, two day, and overnight camps as a way to provide exposure to college coaches. It also gave her experience performing in front of large groups. I started addressing the topic of college recruiting with our 12u program last year and we are working through the process with our 14u program this year. The steps of the Alexander Early Recruiting College Selection Process are listed below.

STEP ONE: Student athletes need to have an idea of what career path they want to take. I provided some links to our families (many resources are available on the Internet) that help students think



about their future careers. Some of the links provided career selector guides and even some interactive web pages where students can narrow down what careers they are interested in and might be good at. Some links provided information about what types of jobs will be in demand when the students graduate from college. For our 14u team who will graduate high school in 2018-2019, we were concerned about job information 7-10 years out. I asked our families to take 4-6 weeks, look through the links, and have their daughters select a career path and be ready to report a career choice during one of our indoor practice sessions. One thing that's important here is to realize that middle school and even high school students may not be able to pick a definitive career or one that doesn't change many times before they graduate. The important lesson from this process is to understand the process itself. There are many benefits for student athletes who can actually identify a career early on. Many students who identify their career choices early can set goals and focus on achieving these goals more quickly, more easily, and often with higher performance.

STEP TWO: Student athletes should consider school location. Many students fall into one or more of the following categories which are extremely useful in narrowing their searches. Keep in mind the distances are approximate and can be changed according to your own requirements:

- Students want to live at home while going to school or students that want to stay close to home. This geographically limits students to schools that are within commuting distance – roughly 60 miles.
- Students with special needs. Depending on the needs of the student, there are typically two categories that are useful. The first, is a student who needs to live at home, which limits the school's distance to approximately 60 miles. The second, is for students



that can live away from home but need to be accessible by parents within a few hours by car. This limits the school's distance to approximately 200 miles.

- Students that want to choose a school in a particular region. For example, some students may want to select a school in a warm climate, or a cool climate. This limits the available schools to those regions.
- Students that don't care about the location of a school.
- Students that want to get away from home.

STEP THREE: Identify what type of school you want to attend. For the sake of this article, we will limit the discussion to Division I, Division II, and Division III. Each of these three types of schools has their own attributes. You need to decide what goals you want to meet by going to school: is softball your primary focus and your education is secondary, or is your education the most important and softball is secondary. Three attributes that seem to be most important are:

- 1. Focus on athletics**
- 2. Focus on education**
- 3. Availability of scholarships vs. financial aid**

The following statements are gross generalities with many exceptions. Better definitions exist and can easily be found on the Internet. Division I schools typically have more money to spend on athletic scholarships than Division II. Division I schools focus on athletics as being very important, while Division II schools focus more on education. Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships, but need-based aid packages are typically available.

STEP FOUR: Students need to be honest with themselves and



evaluate both their academic and athletic abilities. Students with a high GPA, may be able to academically get into most schools. Student athletes with elite softball skills may be able to make the cut in most softball programs. The combination of elite athletic ability and high GPA are rare. Be honest with yourself when making the evaluation. If you are interested in attending a Division I school, but your softball skills aren't near the top of your team, you may need to rethink this category. Similarly, if your grades aren't that great and you're interested in attending an academically competitive school, you may need to look elsewhere.

STEP FIVE: By this step you know what career path you want to take, geographically where you want to attend school, what Division school you want to attend, and you've performed an honest assessment of both your academic and athletic abilities. You now use the results of STEPS ONE through FOUR to narrow your search. Lists of schools in the Division you are interested in can be found on the Internet. Use the following checklist to narrow your search of schools in the desired Division. If you can't "check off" each category, then move on.

- This school is located in the region I want/need
- This school has a program that supports my career path
- This school has a softball program
- This school is within my reach academically
- This school is within my reach athletically

STEP SIX: Now you should have a master list of ALL schools that fit your basic requirements and are within your reach to attend. Keep in mind that many college selection processes will talk about having a "backup" or "safe" school you know you can easily get into as well as a stretch school that you may not be able to get into



on your prospect list. You should also include these schools in this process as well. However, our focus is on the middle part of the fit curve – the schools that most closely meet your requirements and skills. Start researching the schools on your list. There are many resources that can provide advice on what attributes you should consider when selecting a college. Try to narrow your list down to 15-20 schools.

STEP SEVEN: You've made a lot of progress by this step and you now have a narrowly focused list of 15-20 schools you are interested in attending and playing softball for. The next step is to further narrow your list down to your top 5-10 favorite schools. Then identify the top 2 schools on your list. Finally, check out the websites for each of these programs. If camps and clinics are listed, make note of the details on a calendar. If nothing is listed, then email the contact address asking to be notified when camps and clinics will be held. The idea here is to make initial contact with the coaching staff by attending their camps and clinics. You should try to attend the camps and clinics held by the top two schools you identified as often as possible, and at least every year.

STEP EIGHT: Now that you have a calendar of camps and clinics you want to attend. Work with your parents to select camps and clinics that meet your family's schedule and budget. Once you have this finalized schedule in place, be sure to register early for each camp or clinic. About two weeks prior to each, mail (by physical snail mail ONLY) the coaches holding the camp or clinic the following: a handwritten note telling them you are interested in their program and that you will be attending their event, a player profile sheet (there are many examples on the Internet), and a list of the upcoming travel games you will be playing in if they are known. The process doesn't end at step eight, but student athletes can



follow this process through their freshman year. If you're currently a freshman or older and you haven't performed these steps, you need to begin as soon as possible! Student athletes should run through the entire process at least annually if any of the decisions used in school selection have changed. Next steps include registering on the NCAA Eligibility Website, playing in showcase tournaments, taking informal school visits, creating a skills video, and keeping coaches on the top 15-20 list updated on your progress, including academic and athletic achievements. A great resource that EVERY prospective college softball player should buy is Preparing to Play Softball at the Collegiate Level by Catharine Aradi. It can be purchased through the NFCA website.

Coach Sue Enquist has commented many times that she and other coaches evaluate MANY other attributes of student athletes besides their grades and playing skills. You need to be very careful about how you use social media. Never post anything that is inappropriate or can be interpreted as inappropriate. Coaches are



very interested in your character. They want to see that you are involved in charity and community work. They watch you as you are arriving at the practice field. They want to see how you interact with your family members as well as with the other players.

Colby Norris attended clinics since she was 11 years old, and narrowed her focus to 15-20 schools when she started playing 14u. She took her first SAT in her sophomore year and started playing in showcase tournaments. Having an early, high SAT score is a great way to draw attention to yourself! All



Division I and II schools prefer to select players who are high academic performers as these student athletes may also be eligible for academic scholarships which helps coaches have more athletic scholarship money available to obtain other great players. So make sure you keep working hard at your GPA and SAT scores!

Mitch Alexander is the CIO for a major electronics company and coaches both Little League and Travel softball teams and is currently completing his PhD. He is a certified SUNY, ASA, and Double Goal Coach. His wife, Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League Softball World Series. Over the years, both have managed teams together and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. In his spare time, Mitch designs websites for fastpitch teams and businesses and can be reached at fastpitch2001@optonline.net.

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