



# SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

## *NCAA Divisions*

We are at the end of the regular season for NCAA Division 1 softball teams. Facebook and other social media are full of posts about Senior Day at many schools. This is a bittersweet event. For most student athletes, this means the end of their softball career is near, but so is receiving their diploma! This got me thinking about the way these student athletes spent their four years of undergraduate studies and playing softball. Many played softball in exchange for part of their education. Some played just because they loved the sport. Either way, student athletes may spend four years of their lives at one or more schools playing softball. Therefore, school selection is very important.

In Issue 29, I talked about the college selection process. One topic that players and their families want more information about is details about the differences between the NCAA divisions. Playing for a Division 1 school is very different than playing for a Division 3 school. Some of the key differences are listed below. Please keep in mind, that some D2 and D3 schools can easily beat some D1 schools, so it isn't all about performance. Some superstars decide they want to concentrate more on their education than on softball and select a D3 school. It all depends on what is the best fit for you, the player. Not your parents. Not your friends. You. When you



play for a D1 school, softball is your job and your education is considered secondary. When you play for a D2 school, softball is your part-time job and your education is considered as important as softball. When you play for a D3 school, your education comes first and softball is more of a hobby. These are gross generalizations, but they do drive home the point about sport vs. education.

## **Division 1:**

- Must meet minimum financial aid awards and not exceed a maximum award.
- A high level of competition – winning is very important.
- Good choice if you want to make sports your career.
- Approximately 295 Schools are designated as D1 with softball programs
- Typically have the best athletic facilities
- Sport is the athletes “job” and education is somewhat secondary.
- The sport played will leave little time for any other college life.
- Must take > 16 core courses over 4 years
- Must have > 1020 on SAT
- Ivy League schools compete at the D1 level, but do not offer athletic scholarships. Instead they offer financial aid, grant packages, and need based aid.
- Softball is an equivalency sport and there are only 12 scholarships available that can be divided up as the coach sees fit.
- Must maintain a minimum 2.3GPA
- Classes will be missed for games, road trips, and practices.
- Early morning practices or training programs are expected
- Off-season training programs are required



- Most of the people you will be spending your time with during off hours will be your teammates.
- Generally expected to pitch at 60mph+ with top schools requiring > 63mph
- Time to first base is approximately 2.9 seconds
- Catcher pop time 1.8 seconds
- Pitchers receive larger scholarships than other players
- 53% receive some level of athletic scholarship
- Graduation rate is 81%
- Average school size = 12,900 students
- Typical Schedule: 34 home games, 10 road trips (30 games) plus conference championship, regionals, super regionals, and WCWS. Games start early February and the regular season concludes early May. Successful teams play through early June.

## Division 2:

- There are maximum financial aid rewards that cannot be exceeded
- Many D2 athletes pay for school via scholarship money, grants, student loans and via jobs they either find themselves or through assistance at the school
- Slightly less competitive than D1 – winning is not everything.
- Good choice if you don't want the pressure of Division 1
- Good choice if you are not trying to make sports your career.
- Approximately 264 Schools are designated as D2 with softball programs.
- Must take > 16 core courses over 4 years
- Must have > 840 on SAT



- Must maintain a 2.0GPA
- Classes may be missed for games, road trips, and practices.
- Off-season training programs are required
- SAT is required and students must meet minimum requirements
- Generally expected to pitch at 58mph+
- Time to first base is approximately 3.0 seconds
- Catcher pop time 1.9 seconds
- Pitchers receive larger scholarships than other players
- Softball is an equivalency sport and there are only 7.2 scholarships available that can be divided up as the coach sees fit.
- 56% receive some level of athletic scholarship
- Graduation rate is 71%
- Average school size = 4,200 students
- Typical schedule: 22 home games, 10 road trips (24 games) plus conference championship and playoffs. Games start mid-March and the regular season ends late April. Successful teams can play through mid- May.

### **Division 3:**

- Student athletes do not receive financial aid related to sports
- Financial Aid available as: academic scholarships, leadership scholarships, grant money, and needs based financial aid. Aid is not based on athletic ability or health.
- Low level of competitiveness.
- Good choice if you are looking to focus on class work and still be able to play sports
- Less travel than D1 and D2.
- Good choice if you are not a star player.



- Good choice if you aren't looking for scholarship money
- Good choice if you are not trying to make sports your career.
- Approximately 392 Schools are designated as D3 with softball programs.
- Academic life and community service are more important than athletics.
- Even though D3 schools do not provide Athletic scholarships, in many cases they can provide packages that provide even more financial aid than D1 or D2 schools can.
- SAT is not required
- Offers a later recruiting cycle
- Generally expected to pitch at 55mph+
- Time to first base is approximately 3.1 seconds
- Catcher pop time 2.0 seconds
- 75% receive some level of academic grant or need based scholarship averaging \$13,500/year
- Graduation rate is 87%
- Average school size = 2,600 students
- Typical schedule: 20 home games, 6 road trips (18 games) plus conference championship and playoffs. Games start early February and the regular season ends late April. Successful teams can play through mid-May.

Current high school students need to seriously consider the type of school they want to attend. If you decide to attend an NCAA member school, then the division selected will dictate much of your college life. If you want a career in sports, then D1 is the way to go. If you want a career that supports sports, either D1 or D2 might be appropriate. If you want a career outside of sports then D2 or D3 might be appropriate. If you spend some time now thinking about





what you want to get out of your college experience, you may save yourself a lot of heartache later if you get it wrong and go to the wrong division of school.

Another way to better understand the differences between the divisions is to speak with a player from each division. If you currently play travel ball, speak with your organization about providing contact information for past players from the three different divisions. Be sure to ask about what a typical day is like during both softball season and off-season. This will provide you with the best idea of what your life may be like in college as a student athlete softball player.

*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](mailto:fastpitch2001@optonline.net).*

