

Understanding the “process” of College Recruiting

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I want to address the subject of getting a scholarship to play baseball in college. After all, that is the goal of many young players? There is a lot to know, and based on some recent conversations I've had on this subject recently with several players and parents, there still appears to be a lot of “mis information” floating around. So, here it goes.

Rule #1. DO NOT compare your situation to any other player's situation. We have had over 150 players from our organization get scholarships and EVERY one of them was different. This is a very unique and personal experience. The mistake many people make is comparing their situation to another player's. I'm going to use a real life example to illustrate my point.

Our organization recently had a player commit to Vanderbilt. Troy LaNeve just committed as a freshman. The first thing you need to know is that is very, very rare. There are very few programs in the country offering freshman scholarships. Vanderbilt does it simply because they can. The second thing you need to know is Troy's older brother, Zac, was a highly recruited player out of high school. He was also drafted by the Marlins his senior year of high school. Why is that important? Because Troy had the advantage that few players have of going through the recruiting process as the “little brother”. The LaNeve family has been on over 25 visits. Troy met all of those coaches when he was 9-10 years old. Third point, Troy is a rare talent and is physically advanced. He's 6'1”/180 lbs. He is already big enough to play D1 baseball. Many freshmen have not matured like that (yet). Fourth point, Troy has been in the US Program since he was 10 years old. I have personally watched him develop. I knew Troy as a kid. I knew his makeup. Therefore, I had no problem sending his video to Vanderbilt when he was in 8th grade and saying to Travis Jewett, “here is a kid to keep an eye on”. He did and Troy is going to Vanderbilt.

Do you see how many very unique variables there are to Troy's story? The truth is, every kid will have his own story. Keep reading, there is more to share.

Rule #2. Trust the process. The recruiting process is not an exact science. Don't try to figure it all out. it will drive you nuts. Last year I had a parent call me in February to tell me he was concerned that “nothing was happening for his son”. He was a sophomore. I knew differently. I told him to relax and that alot was happening, he just wasn't aware of all the “behind the scenes” things that were going on. My exact words were “trust the process”. In May his son committed to UVA. The key word in all of this is “process”. There is indeed a process.

Here are couple components to the process;

Building a Relationship

We had a player a few years ago who was an outstanding LHP. Yet, several ACC schools told me they were not going to recruit him. Why? They never saw him smile. Who would ever think that would have anything to do with getting a scholarship? College coaches are not just interested in you as a baseball player. They want to know you as a person. It takes time to develop a relationship. Like any other relationship in your life, you need to be willing to invest in that relationship. For many kids, this is done through hours and hours of time on the phone with college coaches.

Watching you play

College coaches have a job to do. Their job security depends on how well they do their job. They only have 11.7 scholarships to work with. They cannot afford to make mistakes with that money. Therefore, they take their time. They watch players play multiple times. They need to see them in many different situations. They are watching EVERYTHING you do. Let me use a more descriptive word. They are SCRUTINIZING EVERYTHING you do, from the moment you step out of your car. They are looking for things to disqualify you. They never want to “take a chance” on a kid. Again, their job depends on the decisions they make. You also need to understand how you are being evaluated. Results play a part, but much smaller than you think. More important are ACTIONS. How does your arm work? What is your body type? How athletic are you? Do you play with passion? Are you a leader? How do your feet work? Do you have quality at bats? Are you a strike thrower? Do you take good angles? Are you an aggressive hitter? Are you an instinctual base runner? Do you have soft hands? Are you a solid defensive catcher? What are your in game pop times? What is your home to first time? What are your times on turns? Do you use the whole field? What is your mound to home time? Are you an unselfish player? Do you look like you know the situation of the game? Do you make good decisions? What is your baseball IQ? How do you look throwing the ball around the infield after a strikeout? Are you a hustler? Are you a gamer? Do you back up plays? How do you handle bad calls by an umpire? What is your body language like? Do you project confidence? Will you bunt to help your team? Will you play hurt? Do you compete?

Seeing you fail

Every coach knows how hard this game is and every coach understands that its a game of failure. They know you are going to fail alot, especially when you get to college. Therefore, they want to see how you handle failure. I had a coach say to me one time, “I just need to see him have a bad outing before I can offer him a scholarship”. While his parents sit in the stands crying because Johnny is getting hit all over the place, the college coach is sitting there going, “this this is good, this is want I wanted to see today”. If this kid manages his bad day like a pro, he gets a scholarship. If he throws a hissy fit the coach quietly leaves and that’s the end of that.

Meeting the family

College coaches know that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Getting to know mom and dad (and even siblings) is part of the process. Parents; beware, you are being scouted too. Many, many times a college coach will ask me to point out the parents of a player they are watching.

They will watch the behavior of a parent in the stands. Don't ever coach your son from the stands, unless you are trying to get him scratched off a coach's list.

Talking to references

College coaches do their homework. They will talk to as many references as they can. What are they looking for? Consistency. They want to know if their high school coach, the summer coach, the local coach all say similar things about the kid and the family. If there are too many inconsistencies that will scare them off pretty fast.

Waiting for you to develop (make a jump)

This is the hardest one of all...waiting for genetics to catch up to desire. College coaches know that players need to be strong to play D1 baseball. It's a grueling schedule. Players that are not physically strong cannot and will not stand up to the rigors of the schedule. They will either get sick, or hurt if they are not strong. Kids that are slow to develop (physically) are called "late bloomers". My younger son, Zack, was that kid. Eventually he caught up, but it took him til his junior year to top the scales at 180 lbs. This is a VERY GENERAL rule of thumb, but it is true. Players less than 165 lbs and shorter than 5'10" are going to be looked over by college coaches who are looking for bigger, stronger players at the D1 level. Just look at rosters of college teams and you'll see what I mean. Again, I emphasize the word "general". The players who defy this "general" rule of thumb are players who have an elite level tool i.e. if you're small, but you run a 6.3 60 you will catch the attention of college coaches. If you are 6'3"/155 lbs but have a live, lose and whippy arm, you will still catch the attention of college coaches.

Going on visits

You need to go on visits so you can learn alot about the school. I encourage our players to go on as many visits as possible. It's fun. Enjoy it. But....college coaches need to ask you to visit. That's how visits happen. I'll get a call from a college coach and they'll say, "Mark, I really liked your SS today. Can you ask him to give me a call. I'd like to invite him to visit. It can happen another way, too. I (or your head coach) may call up a coach and say, "Coach, I was just talking to and he is very interested in your school. I think he would be a good fit for you guys. Would you like me to ask him to call you". NOTE: We (US Elite coaches) will not make that call until we feel you are ready. That's why I always say you need to impress us (US Elite coaches) before anyone else.

Rule #3. Forget stats and player rankings. I'm still hearing way too much talk about stats and player rankings. In 9 years of doing this, and going through the recruiting process with hundreds of players, I can tell you that there are two questions I have NEVER been asked by college coaches; 1. What is his batting average? 2. What is he ranked? Read my lips....College coaches DO NOT CARE! Neither should you! It's not about any of that. Instead, they ask me questions like; What kind of kid is he? What are his parents like? Is he a good student? How tough of a kid is he? What kind of teammate is he? What is his work ethic like? Where do you see him playing (position) at the next level? Can he handle the pressures of being a D1 athlete? How well does he handle failure? What are his hobbies? Does he play other sports? Is he a confident kid? Does he have a serious girlfriend? How responsible is he? Is he a team player or self centered? How well does he communicate? Is he a leader? Do his teammates like him? Does he want to be "the guy" when the team needs someone to make a play? Are you catching my drift? These are the REAL

questions I get asked about our players. Do you see why I am so anal about the disciplines in our program?

The Moment of truth!

Getting an offer is the LAST thing that happens. Everything I have outline above happens BEFORE you get an offer. For many of you reading this I hope you are realizing that ALOT still needs to happen before you get an offer. Just because other kids in your grad year are getting offers has no bearing whatsoever on you getting an offer. In the end, the offer is almost anti-climatic. A head coach will sit down with you and your family and he will say, "we really like you, and we want you to come to school here and I want you to play for me. I'm going to offer you X% to help your family financially". Of course, that is a VERY exciting day for everyone, but understand, it will not, and does not, happen until you have gone through the entire process.

In conclusion, you can see how much there is to this process of getting a scholarship. It's different for everyone. Trust the process.

About the Author

Mark Helsel is the National Director at US Elite Baseball. From 1981-1985 he was a 4 year starter at D1 Mercer University. He graduated with degree in Interpersonal Communications. He has been an Associate Scout for the Florida Marlins and the Kansas City Royals. Since founding the US Elite program in 2007 Mark has helped over 150 players get scholarships to play baseball in college. Nine players from his organization have been drafted. Mark is a published author and an accomplished public speaker. He regularly gives seminars on the developing athletes for the next level, understanding the recruiting process, goal setting and motivational talks. For more information on Mark, or to request Mark to speak to your team, organization or league please send an email to info@uselitebaseball.com