



## College Recruiting: What Athletes Need to Know Before Starting

This is a basic introduction to the college recruiting landscape. I'm sure there will be many who will read this and think, "you've got to be kidding-how could you not know this?" Yet, you would be surprised at how many families don't know that D3 schools don't offer athletic scholarships or that some rules will depend on the college's conference. Consider this a review of the basic terms that you need to know to even start the college recruiting process.



### Organizations Controlling College Sports

Colleges belong to a sanctioning organization that makes the rules for intercollegiate play. The most commonly known organization is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) because of the BCS Bowl Series for football and the March Madness Tournament for basketball.

### Scholarship Rules

These organizations set the maximum number of [scholarships](#) allowed per sport along with rules and regulations for athletes and coaches. It's important to realize that just because a school is allowed 10 scholarships doesn't mean that it actually has to offer them.

The organizations all set minimum academic standards such as SAT and ACT scores and high school GPA. They establish rules for [communication](#) between coaches and prospective players. In other words, there are times and conditions when a coach just can't talk to a player. Scholarship amounts and lengths are also defined by the sanctioning organization.



## Different Levels of Competition

Each organization is made up of [divisions](#). In the case of the NCAA, it has three divisions. The big sports colleges that most people are familiar with are generally in Division 1 and offer athletic scholarships. Division 3 schools do not offer any athletic scholarships. That doesn't mean they don't have teams, just that they don't offer athletes scholarships just to play sports.



## Conferences

Each division is made up of conferences which are groups of schools that are essentially leagues. Each conference can make rules above and beyond those required by the sanctioning organization. For example, the Ivy Group (league) Conference, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc, does not allow scholarships for athletes. Other conferences may have higher academic standards or limitations on the number of practice hours or games played.

Conferences can consist of [public and private institutions](#). The tuition for public universities will be different for in-state and out-state students. Out-of-state tuition can be as high as private school tuition. Both types can provide athletes with additional financial aid and [non-athletic scholarship](#) money. However, private colleges can generally offer much more money than public ones. Public universities may be able to offer in-state tuition to out-of-state students who meet certain academic requirements.



## Independent Colleges

A school can belong to a sanctioning body, such as the NCAA, and not belong to a specific conference. These are referred to as independent schools. Institutions can also have some of its teams compete in one conference while another may compete in a difference conference. It is not uncommon for colleges to change conferences, divisions, or even move from one sanctioning body to another.

## Types of Athletic Scholarships

There are various types of athletic scholarships. Head count scholarships are assigned on the basis on one scholarship per player. Football is a headcount sport for the NCAA. The other type is equivalency scholarships. A team may have ten scholarships but they can be divided up and awarded to more than ten players. Each sport has its own rules on how many players can

receive a scholarship and how small of a proportion can be awarded. Baseball is an equivalency sport.

Until 2011, the maximum length of a NCAA scholarship was [one year](#). It was generally expected that the scholarship would be renewed for all four years but it was not required. Colleges can now award multi-year scholarships but do not have to. Players should visit the [National College Players Association](#) for more information.



## College Athletic Organizations

### **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)**

The majority (over 1,200 members) of four-year colleges belong to the NCAA. The NCAA consists of three divisions. Divisions 1 and 2 are allowed to offer athletic scholarships with Division 1 offering the most. Students interested in playing in Division 1 or 2 must register with the [NCAA Eligibility Center](#) and meet minimum NCAA academic requirements as part of the recruiting process.

The largest division is Division 3 with over 400 members. Division 3 members may not offer any athletic scholarships. Athletes may receive scholarships but not for playing a sport. Division 3 athletic recruits do not register with the NCAA.

### **National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)**

Over 250 four-year institutions are members of the NAIA. There are two divisions and both offer athletic scholarships. Division 2 members offer fewer basketball scholarships than Division 1. All potential athletes must register with the [NAIA Eligibility Center](#) and meet minimum academic standards.

### **National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA)**

The NCCAA consists of two divisions for a combined membership of just over 100 institutions. Students meet eligibility through the college's athletic director. Only Division 1 schools can offer athletic scholarships.

### **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)**

The NJCAA consists of two-year private and public institutions with a few four-year members. There are three divisions with only Division 1 and Division 2 being allowed to offer scholarships. The NJCAA has an online eligibility system where students register each season.

The NJCAA offers more scholarships than the NCAA in some sports such as Baseball and Lacrosse as well as having lower academic requirements. It also may be easier to transfer as a junior to a four-year program than to change from one four-year institution to another. However, as with all two-year colleges, there is a significant risk that not all [coursework will transfer](#).

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