



5 Financial Mistakes that Can Limit Your Chance of Playing Your Sport at the College Level

So far I've covered signs that you don't understand the college athletic [recruiting process](#) and mistakes players and families make about their [ability](#) and what it means. Today, I'm going to cover mistakes related to finances when looking for athletic scholarships. If it's really about using sports to help pay for college, you need to avoid the following college recruiting mistakes.

1. You don't understand that most athletes don't receive a full-ride scholarship.

I think all parents of 12 year-olds playing a sport should have to sign a form that states they understand that most college athletes do not receive full-ride scholarships. It should be handed out the same time parents sign the medical/liability waiver. It should just be two sentences in all caps:

The majority of college athletes do not (bold the not) receive full-ride scholarships. Sports is not a substitute for college financial planning and will not make up for poor academic performance.

Now I know that there are plenty of parents out there who would sign the statement thinking that it simply doesn't apply to their children who are obviously different. But at least they couldn't claim to be surprised when their kids don't get the full ride scholarship they were counting on.

This is something that I have written on often, including a post on [How to Figure Out Your Chances of Getting College Athletic Scholarship](#). And you can find more [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

"But how is this a college recruiting mistake?" you may ask. If students really need help paying for college, the sooner they realize the limitations of athletic

scholarships, the sooner they can start targeting schools that are likely to provide them with the money they need. This doesn't necessarily mean giving up athletics as you'll see in the discussion of the next three college recruiting mistakes.

2 You ignore D3 schools because they don't provide athletic scholarships.

Since many athletes and their families reach high school still pursuing the full-ride athletic scholarship, they will ignore D3 schools which don't provide athletic scholarships. This is included in the list of college recruiting mistakes for two reasons. The first is that D3 is the usually the largest division with over a third of all college teams. Eliminating D3 means eliminating your chances of just playing at the college level.

The second reason is that while D3 doesn't allow for athletic scholarships, they do provide need-based and merit aid. In fact, some of the schools that provide the most generous financial aid are D3 schools. If the main reason you're playing your sport is for money in college, you need to consider D3 schools. Of course, this means you can't afford to make the next recruiting mistake.

3. You're not using financial aid calculators.

There are two financial aid calculators all families should be using when looking for colleges. The first is the [EFC calculator](#) on the College Board website. EFC stands for [Expected Family Contribution](#). Your EFC is calculated as part of the financial aid process. Knowing your likely EFC will give you an idea if you'll qualify for need-based aid or need to be targeting schools that provide merit aid.

The other calculator you should be using is the school's [Net Price Calculator](#) (NPC). Every school is required to have one available on its website. Once you get past the full-ride scholarship mentality, you can use the NPCs to get an estimate of how much the school is likely to cost you without the scholarship.

Knowing your EFC will allow you to gauge how much of your financial need the school is probably going to meet. The NPC will also allow you to compare attending a school with no athletic scholarship to one that is offering a partial

scholarship. If you don't use the EFC and NPC calculators, you're very likely to make the next mistake.

4. You can't afford the school if the student doesn't have a scholarship.

Coaches can and will cut equivalency scholarships for performance. (It happens in headcount sports as well, it's just not called that.) Schools have been known to eliminate entire athletic programs. And not many schools can afford to keep students on athletic scholarship with a [career ending injury](#). So you need to make sure you can afford to attend the school should the athletic scholarship go away.

Transferring to another school can be an expensive proposition if for no other reason it often takes students longer to graduate. And given that an increasing number of coaches are promising scholarships years in advanced (can we say [verbal commitments](#)?) that means there is less of a chance to immediately receive a scholarship when you transfer.

5. You ask coaches about scholarships right away.

While it makes sense that a player would want to know up front if there are even scholarships available for a specific program, asking the coaches about them right away isn't really a good idea. Think about this from the coach's point of view. There are two possibilities.

The first is that the coach is in a head count sport and knows exactly how many scholarships will be available. If you haven't taken the time to learn anything about the program and demonstrate your abilities, asking about scholarships just appears presumptuous and may lead the coach to just move on to the next prospect. Yes, you will need to know your chances for the scholarship but you have to give the coach time to estimate those chances.

The second situation is where the coach is in an equivalency sport where often even the allowed scholarships are not fully funded. The coach knows that the scholarship by itself isn't going to get the player to commit to the school. The coach knows the players need time to buy into the entire program and understand the available education and financial aid opportunities.

So if you immediately ask the coach about the scholarship, the coach may think that money is the only way to convince you to play at the school and will move on to other prospects who realize that they aren't going to get a full-ride scholarship but believe that schools has plenty of other opportunities that make it worthwhile.

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