

You Must Promote You

The college softball recruiting process can be very challenging to understand. At times, it can be extremely confusing and frustrating for players and their families. As an organization, Terror Fastpitch has decided that we want to help our players understand this process. One way is to provide a guide to help our players understand and navigate the ever evolving landscape of college softball recruiting.

If you REALLY want to play softball as part of your college experience, YOU have to make sure that you take on the responsibility to make it happen. YOU have to take control of the process. YOU have to create your own opportunities. This is not magic; it is hard work and requires determination to achieve your goals.

This is not “American Idol,” or “America’s Got Talent.” You will not be discovered because you hit a home run and get your name in the paper, or get selected to the All-Area team and get your picture in the paper. College coaches don’t wake up on Saturday morning and decide to drive to the nearest softball tournament, in hopes of discovering the next Jenny Finch; and they don’t travel long distances to attend a college evaluation clinic / showcase tournament because they know 20, 30 or even 70+ teams will be playing, and they have a feeling that they might find the next great home run hitter.

So, how do college coaches identify prospective players? How do they evaluate players? What are these coaches looking for and where do they go to find players? Every college coach is different. Some prefer to see their targeted player in action at tournaments, others prefer that you visit their campus and attend their camp. Most coaches want to see your skills video, while others discount the videos because of heavy editing that show only the good swings. ALL coaches, regardless of the size and success of the program, have limited recruiting budgets, and numerous rules that they must follow. There is no single way to become visible and known by these coaches; therefore, you have to develop a plan to create exposure for yourself. You have to make yourself visible through a variety of channels – No single channel is good enough.

The Bottom Line - SELF PROMOTION

You have to market yourself to the college coaches. You have to make yourself known. You have to express your interest in the college and their softball program. Then, you have to demonstrate your softball skills for them to evaluate. You have to be realistic about your abilities, and persistent in your pursuit of making your desires known to your target colleges. Promoting yourself may not come easy, at first. Marketing your softball skills may not feel comfortable to you. Well, get over it! If you want to play college softball, take charge and get started!

STOP! Before you start promoting yourself as a softball player, you have to understand that softball is not your #1 consideration. That’s correct. You have to answer some tough questions about yourself first. You have to think about what you want to be when you grow-up. What do you want to study in college? Academics are #1, not softball. You will only be happy if you find the college that offers the best overall fit for you. You have to build a target list of colleges that meets your academic and social requirements as well as your desire to play softball.

Take some time to think about these questions before you begin your softball marketing campaign:

- What are the 2-3 areas of study that I want to pursue in college? What if I am not sure yet? What if I change my mind once I get to college? Does the college offer more than one area of study that I am interested in?
- What geographic areas do I want to consider? Close to home and family? A short drive away from home? Is 5 hours away ok? 12 hours?
- Do I like city schools or rural schools?
- Large, Medium or Small? 30,000 students, 10,000, or 2,500?

These are just a few questions to think about before you begin to ask yourself about softball. You also need to be honest with yourself and ask tough softball-related questions:

- What is my talent level? Division 1, 2, 3?
- Why do I like the softball program?
- What kind of coach do I want to play for?
- Is the program on the up-swing or down swing? Are they investing in facilities?
- Does the team have openings at my position?
- How does the team travel for away games?

Ok, Now it's Time for Self Promotion!

Let me first start by emphasizing not to get overwhelmed by this process. Although, it takes time and dedication, you need to enjoy the ride and have fun with the experience.

You should begin by asking yourself these questions as early as your freshman year. Going into your sophomore season, you should be in high gear, and going full speed by the start of the Terror Fastpitch tournament schedule.

By the beginning of your Sophomore HS season, you should have a target list of 25-30 colleges. This should be based on the questions that you have answered about academics and your softball ability. If you are not sure about your ability level, ask your coaches for their input, and consider attending a couple of college evaluation camps. Always be realistic and honest with yourself about your skill level.

Making Contact

Sophomore – Start pushing the “boulder”

Begin the process by sending an email to each college coach on your target list. While 90% of the email content will be the same for each email, you should take the time to make each email specific to that college and coach. Include the coach's name; highlight the reason why you are interested in the school and the softball program. Include the link to your video, and attach a copy of your player profile. If you know your summer tournament schedule, include it in the email and invite the coach to come watch you play. Do not expect a reply. Division 1 schools are not allowed to contact you until September 1 of your junior year. Regardless of division, all coaches are receiving numerous emails; some do a good job of replying, some don't.

Junior – Building Momentum

During the summer before your junior year, you should be sending an email to each of your target colleges every 1-2 weeks. When the game times are posted for the upcoming tournament, send an email with the game times, park name, location, and an invite to come watch you play. If you had a great tournament, send the coaches an email with your stats for the weekend, and the

game schedule for the next tournament. Every email should include a link to your video and have your player profile attached.

During the fall and winter, your email frequency should slow to about once a month. Keep your name in front of your target coaches, by giving them your fall tournament schedule, let them know what clinics you will be attending, let them know about your SAT score and your GPA (If they are good!). Prior to the start of your junior high school season, send your game schedule to your target list.

Senior Year – The Final Stretch

Now it is time to narrow your search. Most D1 schools have made their offers, so if you have not committed to play at a D1 school, you should focus on DII and DIII schools. Continue sending emails, and making phone calls to your target list every 1-2 weeks, especially to those coaches that have seen you play. Ask the coaches where you stand on their list. You have worked hard, and deserve to know. Continue to attend camps and clinics, but make sure they are targeted to the schools on your short list.

On-Line Questionnaire

Most colleges have an on-line questionnaire for prospective players. You should go to the website of each college on your target list, and complete their questionnaire. This is how the coaches populate their recruiting database, and build their initial prospect list. Now you are in their system, but it doesn't mean that they know who you are. Like everything else, this is only one part of the process.

College Exposure Clinics and On-Campus Softball Camps

The ultimate goal is to meet your target coaches in person. You want them to see you in action. If they have received letters from you, then they see you at a clinic or camp, then they are more likely to come see you play – of course – if they are interested in you. Not all of them will be, but that is life, and it is all part of the recruiting process.

College exposure clinics and on-campus softball camps can be an extremely valuable way to gain exposure to your target colleges. These clinics and camps are offered across our region of the country, and provide college coaches the opportunity to evaluate your skills in person. The best clinics are the type that the college coaches and/or players actually work the clinic. This allows them to interact with you, coach you, and most importantly, evaluate your skills first hand. It is important for you to attend as many of these clinics as possible. It may take more than one clinic for you to impress a coach, plus, the more often you attend, the more comfortable you become with the environment, and the better you perform. Ideally, coaches on your target list will be at the clinic that you attend. Regardless, send an email to your target list, and tell them the date, time and location of the clinic, and invite them to attend. They may not attend, but they most likely know one of the coaches at the clinic, and may get feedback from their friend (More on this later). After the clinic, send a thank you note to the coaches that worked the clinic and if you are interested in them, express your interest in their program and hearing back from them.

On-campus softball camps are usually offered during the summer, fall and even in the winter for the southern schools. Most of these camps are conducted by the college coach and the current players. Sometimes, the smaller colleges will work together and host a camp on behalf of 4-5 colleges. They are usually limited in size, and can last anywhere from a few hours to 2 days. The biggest benefit to you and the coach is that you travel to their campus and pay to go to the camp.

Once on campus, the coach can talk to you about anything. She can evaluate your skills, get to know you as a person, and assess your fit for their program.

And remember, this is a great opportunity for you to evaluate the college and the softball program. While on campus, ask yourself some important questions; Do you like the coaching staff and their style of coaching? How are the softball facilities? Can you see yourself living on this campus for the next 4 years?

College Showcases vs. Non-Showcase Tournaments

Are College Showcases more important than “Regular” tournaments? Should my travel team play in a showcase tournament every week in order for me to get recruited? How come we played in a college showcase last week, but we never saw a college coach? All good questions; however, there are no simple answers. The truth is that college showcase tournaments are only one part of the overall recruiting landscape. College coaches do not go to college showcases – or any tournament – in hopes of discovering a great player. They go because they want to see a specific player or several players that are on their prospect list. Some of the very big (50-100 teams) showcases, are well established and have a good reputation for attracting college coaches. These tournaments also host travel teams that have a long, well established history of producing college level softball players. For college coaches, these tournaments are attractive because they can go to one place and see several prospects on the same weekend. But again, the coaches will only go if their prospective players are playing. “Regular” tournaments also serve as a valuable way to gain exposure. If a college is interested in you, they will come to see you play, regardless of the name of the tournament.

Several members of the Terror Fastpitch Board and coaching staff, have spoken to numerous college coaches, and have heard a wide variety of opinions and comments about college showcase tournaments. Once a coach actually said that she NEVER goes to college showcases, because they have become too big, and she has spent too many Saturday’s hoping to see her prospective players in action, and the player gets one at bat, or no action in the field. Other coaches prefer the smaller college showcases because the games are at a single complex and they don’t have to drive all over town between games.

So, the bottom line is that all tournaments can be a great way to gain exposure to college coaches; however, you have to promote yourself to your target coaches, send them your tournament/game schedules, and send them an invitation to come see you play. You have to create a compelling reason for a coach to see you play.

Regardless of the type of tournament, you should always carry yourself in a professional manner, always be a team player, and demonstrate a positive attitude at all times. If you are not in the game, support and encourage your teammates. Coaches watch every aspect of your game and your personality. They are not simply looking for the best players; they are also looking for a player that will be a good fit for their team and their program.

College Visits

As part of choosing a college to attend, you should visit as many campuses as possible. When you plan your visit, you should also plan to visit the softball facilities, and try to schedule a meeting with the coach. This is not always easy to do, but is well worth the effort. Once you schedule your campus visit, send an email to the softball coach. Tell them the date and time of your campus tour, and express your interest in meeting them to learn more about their softball

program. You may or may not get a reply. A few days prior to your visit, send them another email. Don't be discouraged if you don't get a reply! On the day of your campus visit, go find the softball field and the coach's office. They may or may not be at the same place. You may have to go to the Athletic Department and ask for the softball coach. Be persistent and creative, and you will find the office. If the coach is there, she will most likely meet with you, at least for a few minutes. You should have some questions prepared. Coaches like to see that you are truly researching a school and their program. If the coach is not there, leave your player profile at her office. When you return home, send the coach an email, either thanking her for the meeting, or telling her that you liked the campus, enjoyed your visit, and reiterate your interest in the softball program.

How Do I Know If I am Being Recruited?

Good question! You have done a great deal of hard work, and you would like to know if it is paying off. So, here are a few ways to know if you are really being recruited by a college. In general, the more generic the email, the less likely you are really being recruited. The more personal the response, the likelihood that the coach is interested in you is higher. If you receive an email inviting you to a college's camp, you are probably in their recruiting database, but this does not mean you are being recruited by that school. If you send an email to a coach, and she replies to say thank you, she is acknowledging your interest, and may or may not be interested in you yet. If you receive an email response from a coach, and she says something very specific, or asks you additional questions, then they are probably beginning to develop an interest in you. If the coach sends you an email that says, "I enjoyed meeting you and working with you at the camp this weekend. I really liked your swing, and your fielding. I returned to my office and viewed your skills video, and I am impressed with your ability. I would like to invite you to attend our camp, Sept 15. While you are on-campus, I will arrange for you to take a tour and meet some of our players. I have attached some additional information about our school. I hope you will consider playing softball at XYZ University," then you are being recruited by that school.

The College Coaching Network

All college coaches have limited recruiting budgets and must follow NCAA rules, limiting the number of days that they are allowed to travel for recruiting purposes. Therefore, the coaches rely heavily on their network of other coaches across the country. College coaches routinely speak with their friends and counterparts at other schools. They rely on each other to help evaluate local players. They recommend players that they have seen play, or worked with at a camp. For example, a coach in North Carolina cannot afford to fly to upstate New York to attend a college showcase clinic and tournament; however, they are interested in three players that have registered for the clinic and will be playing in the tournament. The NC coach will call 2-3 of her friends (Coaches in her network), and ask them to evaluate these players, and provide her feedback on their skills. In return, the NC coach will be willing to evaluate players at an upcoming clinic/camp/showcase in NC, and provide feedback to the coaches in NY.

College coaches must work together to evaluate players and find players that are a good fit for their program. It is important to be aware of the College Coaching Network, and understand that you never know who is really watching you. This is another reason that you should always, 100% of the time, conduct yourself in a professional manner, always give 110% effort, always support your teammates and coaches. Never demonstrate a poor or selfish attitude. Always be positive and polite. You never know who is watching.