

College Search - The Parent's Role by Pat Grecco



Pat, shown here being inducted into The Hall of Fame, is a regular Student Athlete magazine columnist.

Daughter Beth, is a UCONN graduate; her son Frank Jr., a USNA graduate now First Lieutenant, USMC, is serving in the Pacific; her husband, Frank is a referee.

Pat has personally helped more players get to college, and on the team ... many with full scholarships ... than anyone on this planet.

Available as a consultant, she may be reached at:

(631) 754-0026
soccervol@aol.com

As Director of the College-Bound Player Program for the 60,000 member Long Island Junior Soccer League, I have had the opportunity to work with student athletes of every level, on both athletic and academic issues.

I have yet to see a serious player denied the opportunity to play college soccer ... somewhere, there is a college program for every player.

However, the student athlete must be sincere about playing college soccer, and more important, must have an interested adult to guide and focus him/her.

As the mother of two student athletes, who have used soccer to earn their college education, I learned that it is imperative for parents to become involved in the college search and selection process.

It is not only about the money, winning a scholarship, the lure of a "full ride." It is more about creating opportunities for your child. If your student athlete is strong academically, then soccer could launch them into the "most competitive" colleges. Or, if the student is academically weak, soccer could open the door to a junior college with an academic advancement program (also called tutoring) to help the player stay focused and stay in college.

When, where and how can parents help? Ask your player what kind of college they are considering; what size, location, level of soccer and what academic programs?

In the Spring of their junior year I typed letters to coaches requesting information about their programs. I wrote to about 30 colleges. At the same time we wrote to the Director of Admissions of each school requesting a catalog, a video and admissions information.

We then went to our office supply store and spent \$10.00 on a plastic file crate and file folders for each school we had written to.

Next, we waited for the mail to arrive. And it did. As time progressed, our file box filled up. The schools we were very interested in were kept in the front; those with some interest in the middle and those with little interest in the back.

Keep in mind, that NCAA coaches cannot negotiate with players until July preceding their senior year. However, families may initiate contact with coaches at any time. We wrote to coaches requesting their camp information, telling them what tournaments we would be playing at during the spring season and constantly updating our soccer resume. And we networked.

The key word here is NETWORKING ... the process of identifying and using others to help affect the outcome of your situation. Please read the SASF pamphlet "Networking The College Coach" to understand this very important portion of your campaign.

When senior year started we had 8 to 10 schools as top choices and kept networking with these coaches. Sometimes, when my children were too busy with school, soccer, SAT prep courses etc., I did the correspondence with the coaches, showing the kids the letters for their approval. Each time a coach called or came to see my student athlete play, we wrote a thank-you note. Some coaches will lose interest because they have not heard from you lately.

As time progressed, we continued to work on our college applications, and focused on six. We called each of those coaches and told them we were processing our application for their school, then documented our call to them in a letter.

It is very important to help your student athlete focus on the schools that are realistic choices. I recommend the purchase of the SASF book called "Winning Your Scholarship." It is a valuable tool that identifies every college soccer program in the US. Use it to identify possible colleges. Use the Internet and other references to determine which of your choices are "best fit" schools. Use the book to guide you through successfully communicating with your "bet fit" schools.

Keeping academic factors in perspective is very important. Does a college offer your intended major, and can you qualify? Colleges offering the best academic opportunities prepare you for your first job and a career.

I have yet to see a student athlete successfully go it on his own. Parental help is always very necessary. I am not saying that you should take over. No. You should guide them and help them. Visit college campuses and watch soccer games. Afterwards, walk around the campus to get a sense of the school's personality.

During crunch time, while waiting to hear from the colleges, your intimate knowledge of every college situation and parental wisdom can have a calming effect when self doubt comes creeping out of that empty mail box.

Your kids are feeling a lot of stress now. Not only from this college acceptance crisis, but also it is their senior year in high school, where social, academic and SAT/ACT pressures are all increasing.

Keep several options open. Don't focus on one or two schools. Regardless of your qualifications, there are many factors beyond your control in the player selection process.