

Follow Your Dreams ... wisely. How Preben Gietz Became a Cougar



Pat Grecco, Hall of Fame

I first met Dr. Gietz and Preben via Email, after having been referred through Student Athlete Magazine. Preben was a strong student and a high level player. The Gietz family are from Heidelberg, Germany, living in Belgium for the past five years.

Their first visit to the USA was in the summer of 2005, attending high-level camps at schools like Notre Dame, Brown, Georgetown, U Penn, Johns Hopkins, Goucher and Syracuse University. Both Dr. Gietz and Preben were initially opposed to D-III schools that I recommended, though they were high level academically and in soccer. After a lack of response from the colleges whose camps they attended, Dr. Gietz and Preben then asked me to do a second look of D-III programs. During their USA tour in 2005, Preben attended Global Young Leaders Conference and college summer soccer camps.

In fall of 2005 they returned to the USA, to visit the DIII schools I had recommended which included Clark, Drew University, Wesleyan, Washington & Lee, Swathmore and Vassar College.

Preben and Dr. Gietz were looking for top academic schools; Preben was attending an International School in Belgium and spoke fluent English. At Drew University, the assistant coach was from Belgium, that was interesting; but Dr. Gietz was not impressed with the financial package offered by Drew University nor that of W&L University.

Preben was a very strong student, and also offered the international dimension that colleges seek to diversity their student body. At Clark University 10% of the student body come from foreign countries, and Clark offered a very competitive soccer program and great soccer facilities.

Most important though, was that Clark University offered Preben the best financial package. Many times Dr. Gietz would ask me to do an analysis on two or three schools using soccer and location as well as academics, the analysis always brought us back to Clark University.

Dr. Gietz took on the project of marketing his son like a professional promoter, and was very successful. He is a great student of the game of soccer, as many Europeans are, and knew all the right questions to ask the coaches.

I was very impressed with the coach at Clark University and his record as well as the soccer history of the school. I told Dr. Gietz and Preben that I would lean towards Clark if the price was right. I did a study between the final three contenders: Clark has had 15-4-2 record, the soccer program began in 1921, 6 All- America selections, 3 Academic All-America selections, 23 All-Regional Players, 7 NCAA Tournament appearances 2 ECAC tournament appearances with 1 Championship, 1 Conference title. Also a positive was that Coach David Kulik is married to the Holy Cross Women's soccer coach, Deb Flaherty ... a soccer family!

Finally, "location, location, location" ... being a college student in the Boston area is an important factor.

Pat Grecco
Northport, NY, USA

"When our Son Preben decided in his Junior High School Year he wanted to attend a U.S. College as a Student-Athlete, this seemed a daunting task. While he was a good student and a talented Soccer player, as a German family living in Belgium, we had no contacts at American Universities, were unfamiliar with the recruiting system, and the coaches knew nothing of him. After some research on the web, I stumbled over a reference to a 'College-Bound Student-Athlete Advisor' and decided to get in touch. This is how we started working with Pat Grecco. A year later, Preben has had six coaches recruiting him, four of these colleges admitting him, and will now be joining Clark University with a substantial scholarship in Fall, playing for a very competitive Division III Program under Coach David Kulik and getting a great Liberal Arts College Education."

"While this is Preben's achievement, Pat's contribution was invaluable. With her intimate knowledge of the system, her wide network of contacts among coaches, and her strong reputation in college athletic circles, she was able to guide us at all times, knowing what to do when, and how to do it. She has proven not only an expert, but responsive, supportive, and reliable throughout. Most importantly, Pat Grecco is a delight to interact with, warm-hearted, and a true idealist when it comes to Soccer and helping young people fulfill their ambitions. We have found a good friend in her, and the only thing I regret is that we will not have the pleasure of going through this process with Pat again, as we don't have another Student-Athlete in the family."

Dr. Axel Gietz
Preben Gietz

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A sunny September afternoon in Worcester, Massachusetts. Clark University's Men's Soccer team takes the field for their first NEWMAC Conference game of the 2006 season. Starting at Center Back for the Cougars, wearing #2, is our son, Freshman Preben Gietz, the only international player on Coach David Kulik's roster.

In the middle of his junior year, Preben decided he wanted to go as a student athlete to a US college with a competitive soccer program. A German family living in Belgium, he and his two sisters attended St. John's in Waterloo (yes, 1815, Napoleon and all that), an English-language International School where they had a lot of exposure to both British and American culture. But, Preben had the dream of living, studying - and playing serious soccer in the US.

It was an ambitious plan. A good student and a talented athlete, with competitive club soccer experience in Germany and Belgium from the age of five, Preben was totally unknown to American college coaches. It was my job to change that. Early on, we found Pat Grecco through Bob Collins and his Student Athlete publications. Her counsel was to prove invaluable throughout the process.

To get onto coaches' radar screens, Preben attended four elite camps last summer, measuring himself against some of the best US players in his age group. Now coaches were showing interest. A very strong Division III program would be the best fit, coinciding with his academic interest in a Liberal Arts education and his personal preference for a smaller school in the North East region.

Following Email exchanges with the coaches, Preben visited them during fall break to spend time on campus and with their teams. My wife and I accompanied him, knowing we needed to feel he would be in good hands, while leaving the final decision to him. I just never wanted to have him on the phone, unhappy, homesick, and able to say, "You made me come here." It had to be his choice.

While soccer was very, very important, everything else also needed to be a good fit, academically, socially, mentality-wise, and geographically. Could he spend four years there if he was seriously injured and would never be able to play soccer again?

Preben applied to six schools. He was admitted to Clark, Drew, Vassar, and waitlisted at Wesleyan. In the end it came down to a choice between two we visited again in April. After our return, it was truly crunch time ... but it was HIS decision ... but when he finally declared himself for Clark, I was delighted.

Coach Kulik and his colleagues were highly likeable men and experienced coaches. Clark coaches needed open-mindedness, networking skills, and calculated risk taking, to recruit someone they had never seen play. As one of them put it admirably, "Long-distance recruiting is difficult just like long-distance romance - but romance it is."

What made David Kulik stand out in Preben's recruiting process, in addition to the strength of the team he was building, was his absolute refusal to take "no" for an answer, neither from us nor from Admissions and Financial Aid at Clark. We also liked his innovative ideas in promoting the program. Some of the Cougars' games are web cast live, enabling me to watch Preben play from Belgium; see a very clever, high-profile video introducing the team player by player; and match highlights on their website (www.clarku.edu).



Outside of soccer, why Clark? When we moved abroad, my wife and I decided to place our children into the international education system. As a result, all three have become multilingual young citizens of the world, well-prepared to play an active role in society wherever life may take them.

Clark's motto is "Challenge Convention. Change Our World." They attract high-caliber international students, offering an education with a global outlook. *Everybody*

there showed they really wanted Preben. The very generous merit-based aid offer, under their "Global Scholar Program", a special stream for academically gifted foreign students, clinched it for him.

Our son is playing in a competitive program with chances of going far over the next four years. Belonging to the team helps him adapt to his new environment. His coach and the older players support him, reducing the pressure of being a high-profile recruit - "an international club standout," according to their website, "who is making an immediate impact." Outside of soccer, he is getting a good education and living in a caring system geared towards integrating and promoting international students.

In four years, with a BA degree from a recognized Liberal Arts college, he will have freedom of action. If he stays in the US, that's fine. Should he decide to return to Europe, we know he has what it takes to succeed anywhere as the experience will have made him even more resilient, disciplined, flexible, and confident.

In the end, on and off the soccer field, Quality will always prevail.

Dr. Axel Gietz, September 2006, Waterloo, Belgium