

Working 1 on 1 with the College Bound Player by Pat Grecco



The Author - Pat Grecco

Pat has helped more student athletes get to college than anyone on the planet. Here she is honored for her College Advisory work, with induction into the Hall of Fame at LIJSL, the nation's largest league of 70,000 players.

- A veteran soccer mom, Pat's daughter Beth, played on a full soccer scholarship at UCONN; her son, Marine Lt. Frank Jr., is a USNA soccer team graduate; and her husband Frank, Sr. is a referee.

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Soccer has given my children great experiences and opportunities, so I wanted to give something back to this magical sport. What could I do to help? Not being a coach, I became a volunteer and had many jobs ... everything from "orange mom" to my present job as Director of College-Bound Player Programs.

Since 1990, I have worked with college-bound student athletes. Helping families succeed in this final, crucial step has given me endless satisfaction. Meanwhile, it helps me deal with the bittersweet feelings of the soccer mom whose players have moved on to college. Working with families has helped me define my own future, providing consulting with players and parents to help them successfully manage the college search process.

It began when a young man named Peter approached me and asked for my help. He explained that he was not a "blue chip" level player as he had not made the Olympic Development Program nor the Long Island Select Program. But he was a solid varsity player at a competitive high school and played Division I club soccer. Peter was a strong student with an A average and an 1100 SAT score. With a smile, he confided that his dream was to attend Rhode Island's prestigious Brown University, a small, very competitive Ivy League school.

We sat together and I assured him that he could play soccer in a collegiate program ... then, together, we created his Athletic-Academic Profile ... Peter's credentials in outline format.

Then we looked through Peterson's Guide to Four Year Colleges choosing 25 colleges that fit Peter's preferred major and geographic area. Armed with his personal Athletic-Academic profile and 25 hand picked colleges, Peter embarked on one of the most exciting and meaningful adventures of his life.

Unfortunately, because of extreme selectivity (Brown accepts less than 24% of applicants and SAT average is 1300), Peter was not accepted by Brown. But, because he had a backup plan, and used it, he did hear from several other fine schools. At Trinity College in Hartford he enjoyed an exciting soccer career, was a four year starter and received an excellent education.

Trinity, like Brown, is rated as a "very competitive" college. As a Division III college, Trinity does not award athletic scholarships, but Peter's strong grades enabled him to receive merit grants.

I am asked by parents about scouting agencies that charge large amounts of money to market student-athletes. I feel that marketing is the parent's role; given a little guidance and direction, parents are the player's best agent. College coaches agree, preferring players who personally make contacts for initiative and self confidence.

Somewhere, there is a college, for every student athlete. There are over 1000 Men's programs in D-I, II, III, NAIA and Junior colleges; and the growing women's list now totals 1200 colleges. We have never failed to find a college for a serious player.

I have had the privilege of working with Learning Disabled athletes. L.D. students are usually shy about their disability. In fact, being classified LD can become a tremendous benefit, both in achieving admission and in gaining entry to LD educational assistance after matriculation. Last year I met Dave, an outstanding goalkeeper, who was classified LD, is now playing in a very competitive program and receiving the professional academic support that he needs to complete his education.

A recent Heisman Trophy winner, discussed on national television his history of LD and encouraged other students to get help in realizing their full potential. Recent studies have shown that a larger proportion of athletes (than non-athletes) are learning disabled, perhaps because athletics provided the recognition that had eluded them in the classroom.

Once you have your Athletic-Academic Profile, be realistic in selection of colleges, then begin sending it to college coaches. Try to play in tournaments that attract large numbers of college coaches and attend summer camps run by college coaches you may want to play for. Network, Network, Network. Write, call, FAX, visit and talk with players and coaches who are in any way involved with college soccer. If you are not fortunate enough to participate in ODP, play on the most competitive team you can find, and be sure they share your goal of getting to college. Constantly raise your level of play by using professional trainers, clinics and camps. It's hard work, it's a wonderful experience and it's outcome will positively improve your future.

Most important, don't judge a college soccer program, just because it has a D-I after its name. There are many outstanding programs that are D-II, D-III and NAIA. Evaluate the program for its past performance and its coach and your possible contribution.

Work hard on the field and in the classroom. The better your GPA and SAT, the more opportunities that will be available to you.

A high school basketball coach once remarked, "Anybody can get scholarships for the top players, but it takes a really dedicated person to find opportunities for the rest of the squad."

I feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment when I am able to see an athlete locate the right college situation. Yes. Soccer truly is, a magical sport.