

To Be or Not To Be: College Athlete

by Lindsay H., Lake Forest, IL

I only had half an hour between my last class and my first practice with the University of Richmond field hockey team. My adrenaline was pumping as I trekked across campus, burdened with gear. Feeling nervous, I approached the field and put on my shin guards and shoes. With all eyes on me, I walked over to speak with my future coach. I wondered if she had told the team I would be practicing with them.

As they introduced themselves, I forgot my worries and began to feel comfortable. The next two hours were grueling and concluded with endless 100-yard sprints. I have been an athlete all my life so I was able to keep up with most of the girls, but I lagged behind on the last sprint. The captains ran toward me, grabbed my hands, and pulled me to the finish. At that moment I realized I would be spending four years with a group of amazing girls, developing skills to guide me through the real world.

Although a committed high-school athlete, I never thought I would be involved in college athletics. Now, I cannot imagine the college experience without sports. The bonds between teammates are irreplaceable. I also love that I am in good shape and don't just sit around watching TV. In addition, my rigid schedule forces me to get everything done.

The recruiting process in high school was difficult and I did not receive the responses I was wishing for, but I never lost hope and was able to be a walk-on at Richmond. Perhaps there were other things I could have done when contacting schools, so I hope this helps you if you want to experience college athletics.

Many high-school students play multiple varsity sports. Therefore, the number of prospective athletes continues to climb, but colleges have only so many spots available. High-school athletes now spend every minute focusing on which college they should try to attend in order to play their desired sport. At the beginning of my

junior year, I wrote 50 letters of interest to college coaches, as did most of my friends.

In many cases recruits have it the hardest since they put their sweat and tears into creating videos, resumes, endless emails and letters, but college coaches have it just as hard since they must evaluate this large group of possibilities. Coaches at more academically competitive schools tend to recruit those with strong academics. The field hockey coach at Columbia University explained that she usually has 200-250 potential recruits. She quickly shrinks the list to 30 and then down to 12 to 15 athletes. From there she'll have eight to 12 athletes who are highly interested and admissions will accept five to eight of them.

Prospective athletes need to stand out in a pool as big as 250. They need to tell coaches who they are and why they deserve to be recruited. Do not be humble; brag about yourself as much as you can. A college coach will ignore someone who doesn't make it clear that he or she is interested and has something to offer the athletic program.

Athletes also need to submit their information to colleges that are right for them. I received many offers but not from the right school for me. Academics were my top priority, and field hockey or lacrosse were just benefits. It is difficult to appreciate your time at school if you only like the athletic program; if the coach happens to leave, you could be stuck at a place you do not enjoy.

I also told colleges that I would consider being a walk-on. Walk-ons are athletes competing at the intercollegiate level who were not on the coach's lists for admissions. They are accomplished athletes who had been in contact with the coach during the admissions process. Walk-on athletes need to be admitted to the university on their own.

As a college athlete I have noticed off-the-field advantages of participating in college athletics. Athletes learn lifelong skills such as teamwork, discipline, resilience, perseverance, how to play by the rules and accept bad results. Athletes also realize that errors are expected from those who take risks. In addition, teammates teach each other cooperation, an essential quality in the real world.

Something to consider when deciding whether to take high-school athletics one step further is the time commitment. Late nights and early mornings are the daily schedule of the competitive athlete. Not only is every hour filled with classes, practice or homework,

but there are many weekend games. College athletes learn time management, an essential real-life skill.

Since I am not fully involved in the varsity athletic program yet, I still have time to go to sleep fairly early and have classes later in the morning. Three hours of daily practice may change this, but the friendships and skills will outweigh the drawback of less sleep.

My dreams of participating in college field hockey were reassured when we sat at a table together in the dining hall. I felt as if I had known the team forever. I had so much in common with these girls: a work ethic, determination, love of the game and a fun-loving spirit. Hopping into one of their cars was exhilarating. I just sat in the backseat with a smile, singing my heart out with my future teammates.

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