



## **"25 Things You Need to Know About Summer Camps, Recruiting Clinics, and Travel Teams"**

If you been around youth sports you've probably heard knowledgeable people passionately say these two phrases...

*"Recruiting Camps, Clinics, Showcases, and Travel Teams are ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL in the recruiting process."*

*"Recruiting Camps, Clinics, Showcases, and Travel Teams are NOT ESSENTIAL in the recruiting process and nothing more than a scam and way to make money for the people running them."*

Which is true? Well, like most things in life, it's not so simple. The truth is that the answer is somewhere in the middle and there is some truth in both of those statements.

Are there great recruiting opportunities you probably should be taking advantage of? Yes. Is there a lot of time and money you can waste in doing so? Yes.

As recruiting has evolved over the years there is no doubt that the importance of camps, clinics, and showcases has increased from the traditional recruiting at your high school sponsored events. College coaches prefer these events because it allows them to be efficient and save money by seeing many potential prospects at one time. These events also usually take place during times of the year that coaches have more time to recruit, unlike your high school season which is likely at the same times as the college season.

Families are often willing to spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on camps, recruiting clinics, showcases, and travel teams. In some sports, participation on showcase teams can cost as much as \$10,000 annually. When families just throw money at camps, clinics, and showcases in order to get noticed, they usually skip important steps. What value is being at all the recruiting events if no one knows who you are? Let's take a deeper look at these recruiting opportunities...

### **Clinics, Showcases, and Events**

If you choose to go to a showcase or clinic specifically for the purpose of getting noticed or choose to play for a travel team with recruiting being the main objective, make sure you fully understand this...

*College coaches typically don't go to recruiting events to discover new talent, they go to evaluate athletes they are already recruiting or already know about.*

I know you don't believe me. The movies tell you different. Your club coach tells you different. Ask college coaches.

Let me give you a real life example from my former perspective as a college basketball coach...

I would prepare to attend a showcase where there will be 300 kids playing basketball on a Saturday afternoon in a big gym with multiple courts. To prepare for the event a few days ahead of time, I would contact the event directors and get the list of kids that were going to attend ahead of time and cross reference that list with my recruiting database (4,000+ kids). I can't physically evaluate 300 kids in four hours. I have to be efficient. Sure there are lots of good players all over but I can't recruit all of them.

Also, I don't want to waste my time watching someone if I don't know their academic qualifications ahead of time.

Let's say there were 30 kids on my list that were also going to be at the event. Who do you think I went to go watch and evaluate? That's right, those 30 kids. I would map out a game schedule with players to evaluate and court numbers and games times

Now, I'm not naïve enough to say that random recruiting never happens. However, that happens far less often than most people think. In this scenario, I may have randomly stumbled across 4-5 athletes that were not on my list that I added to my list after watching them at the event. They are probably the tallest athlete, the fastest athlete, the one that jumped the highest, the best shooter, and the best player at the event.

Obviously those five athletes are the most attractive recruits out of the entire 300 athletes. Sure they will get recruited from exposure, but what about the other 295 kids? If I don't know about them ahead of times, I'm probably not going to discover them.

In the example above, I went to a showcase of 300 kids. To recap, 30 of them were on my list and got evaluated that day, 5 got noticed, and 265 kids paid \$150 for a free t-shirt and to play pickup basketball for four hours. *[Note that 300 kids x \$150 is \$45,000 of profit for a four hour event!]* It's just simply more important to spend your time and effort contacting schools and getting on lists than trying to get noticed at random.

### **300 Aspiring Athletes Attending Showcase**

- ✓ 5- New athletes discovered at the event
- ✓ 30- Athletes attending that are already on my list
- ✓ 265- Un-noticed athletes
- ✓ I am not telling you to not participate in these events. Some are great events to attend. I just want you to remember a few important things.
  - Showcases and clinics usually exist as a way for a person or organization to make lots of money.
  - Do some research and find the best events to attend.
  - Your attitude and character will be on display as much as your athletic ability will be.
  - Communicate with college coaches ahead of time about where you will be and follow up with coaches after the event to see if they had a chance to evaluate you.
  - Don't expect to just be noticed at random. Even if you are one of the lucky few who get noticed at the event, you still need to follow all the steps to get recruited.
  - Don't just pick a showcase team for the main purpose of exposure. Factor in playing opportunities, potential to improve, coaching, etc.

### **Camps**

School sponsored camps have to be different because they are not sponsored by businesses, right? Wrong. Many are worse in that they are nearly 100% for profit. At least the businesses running off-campus events make an effort to get coaches to attend and provide information about athlete to those coaches.

I'll give you another real life example from my former perspective as a college basketball coach...

When I was offered a NCAA DII coaching job in the Midwest I was told my salary could be near \$50,000, a good salary increase for me. When I got my contract it was a shade over \$30,000. What's the catch? Camp revenue. My salary was going to be somewhere between \$30,000 to \$50,000 depending on how many kids came to camp. The draft of the camp letter looked something like this....

*Dear [Student-Athlete], We've been watching you this year and we would love to take a look at you as a potential prospect for our program. Please consider coming to our camp so that we can get a better look*

*at you as a player and you can get to know the staff and get a feel for campus. Attached is the brochure. It's \$575 for Sun-Wed camp. Etc....*

Look familiar? If not, it probably will soon. Sure the coaches might look at a few kids from camp, but the main agenda is revenue. *Think about this...if they really wanted you at camp, they'd let you come for free. Do you think LeBron James' mom was writing checks to camps for LeBron to attend?*

Often times schools have only limited money available to pay the salaries of assistant coaches, and they are supplemented by camp income. Browse through athletic programs websites and you often see *volunteer assistants* listed. Do they all have rich spouses? If not who's paying their living expenses? You are.

They are not all evil. Many college programs host legitimate showcases where they actively target recruits. The trick is to find out if each individual camp is right for you.

### **Selecting Camps, Clinics, Showcases, and Events**

Many families inquire with us as to the effectiveness of attending camps, clinics, and showcases for the purposes of getting recruited. Some people will have you believe that camps, clinics, and showcases are a waste of money if you are trying to get recruited and others believe they are an essential part of the recruiting process. The truth lies somewhere in between.

A camp, clinic, and showcase for a college coach is an easy way to see several hundred players in one place at one time. The summer for a college coach is the time of the year when they are free to really recruit at camps, tournaments, summer games, and showcases. During their season, they are often not able to attend high school games because they are in season as well.

Listed below are issues to consider when deciding whether or not to invest the time and money to attend these types of functions. Some will be more worthwhile than others. Below are thoughts designed to help you determine which will be the best fit for you. This information is not provided to discourage your interest in attending these events. As with all services their value varies.

### **Selecting College Sponsored Camps**

A college camp is one step in the recruiting process and requires some research and communication with coaches on your part prior to the attending a camp. You may find you are getting many camp flyers in the mail or personal requests from college coaches you are speaking to. It doesn't mean they are recruiting you, but it's an opportunity to possibly get recruited. View it as an opportunity to expand your skills, meet some new players, and get a sense of your ability.

You should choose a camp based on the experience and instruction you will get, not just the recruiting opportunities. If you do choose a camp to help get exposure, communication with the staff before, during, and after the camp is essential. Consider the possible recruiting benefits as a bonus only. As a general rule of thumb; the smaller the school, the cheaper the price, and the less well known the camp director, the better the instruction and recruiting opportunities will be. This is especially true in the revenue sports (football and men's basketball).

Do not consider your invitation to camp to be an indication of their interest in making you an offer. Remember, the schools are making a profit from each player who attends. In most cases any player willing to pay to attend and pay their own expenses will be invited.

There are several important steps you as a potential recruit need to perform before you start signing up for camps throughout the country. The first step is to identify schools you might like to attend. If you honestly don't have any interest in a school, then going to that camp for the purposes of trying to get recruited by them doesn't make much sense.

The second step you need to take is to be realistic about certain camps. Many kids sign up for camps at schools they have no realistic shot of playing at and they then wonder why they weren't recruited after the camp. This has a residual affect as they tell future families not to waste their money attending camps for recruiting purposes because *"you won't get recruited."* You need to identify whether your skills would

allow you to play for this particular program in the near future. If you are a 150-pound linebacker, attending camps at Notre Dame, Michigan, and Ohio State won't get you recruited by those programs to play linebacker. This is a fact of life that some people don't want to accept and they keep attending camps at colleges they won't be able to play for. Find a program where your skills match up. You have to do some research on the school and program first and you have to be realistic about your athletic skill. It doesn't matter if you attend one camp or one hundred camps, if you cannot realistically play for that school, the camp circuit won't work for you.

The third important step is communicating with the college coach. Many people simply sign up for camp, run past the coach and then expect a phone call a few weeks later from the coach. Some college camps may have 500 players or multiple sessions so if the coach doesn't know who you are or that you are interested in their program, they simply may not notice you the way you want to be noticed. If you call the coach before the camp and begin to build a relationship with them and communicate that their school is a place of interest for you, you will have a far better chance of being noticed by that coach and making the camp circuit work.

At the end of the day you have to realize that the coach may only be recruiting five or ten players a year and may already have recruits in their pipeline or committed, so the odds of you simply being discovered at a camp are not always in your favor. Some college coaches place a great deal of emphasis on their college camp each year and view it as a valuable tool in allowing them to see athletes and allowing athletes to see them and many players benefit from attending college camps. Other college coaches use camp simply for revenue, community service, or public relations.

There is also a hidden benefit to some camps. Many college camps have other college coaches working at the camp. This allows you the opportunity to be seen by other coaches from other schools where you might be a better fit. Also, don't overlook the assistant coaches, they will be the ones making the recruiting decisions early on in the process.

### **Selecting Non-College Sponsored Camps, Clinics, Showcases, and Events**

Make sure you realize what invitation only really means? Are they asking you to pay something? Would they allow you to attend if you could not pay? Would they allow a player better than you to attend if they couldn't pay and you could? Chances are every person they have an e-mail or mailing address for is the criteria for invitation only. Even if they had a tryout, if they are asking for money make sure you understand the process.

Typically any athlete receiving post season honors receive invitations to these events. The same is true for off-season club team members whose team rosters are public information. Do not consider yourself a college prospect at any level because you have received an invitation to attend these events. This doesn't mean all events that cost money are scams. Some great events cost money. Just don't get a big head about the *invite* and evaluate the camp on its value to you.

Ask the contact inviting you to the camp for a verifiable list of Colleges Coaches working the camp. Don't take their word for it. Legitimate camps typically have a list of these coaches on their website. If unsure, call the Coach and ask if they are working the camp. How many years they've worked it? Do they have any players on their roster now that they discovered at the camp? Any at your position? If so, who? What local players have been recruited as a result of attending this camp? Jot down their answers then check to see if they are true.

Is your main purpose for attending this session to be seen by college recruiters? If so, the same advice as above applies about verifying which Coaches will actually be there. It is a common practice for Coaches to be paid by sponsors for the use of their name. Often times they will attend to look at the only players they are interested in and leave. Remember, the higher the level of players at the event the less likely it is you will stand out among them. Other things to consider are...

- ✓ Are they insured?
- ✓ Is it "one size fits all" or position specific?
- ✓ How much time is spent on that position and what does that consist of?
- ✓ How many participants are assigned to each Coach at your position?

- ✓ Do you know anyone personally who attended the event you are considering?
- ✓ Have you attended this event, or one like it, previously? What were the results? Why continue spending money in the same way and expect a different result?

## Selecting Travel Teams

Showcase or travel teams also can provide opportunities for exposure. Be aware of the same thoughts above with camps, clinics, and events. If you are invited or win a position through a tryout but it still costs money to be on the team, don't mistake that for something more than what it really is. Decide whether or not to be on the team based on what is best for you. Exposure at large national recruiting events can be a good thing. There are possible negatives as well including...

- ✓ Less Playing Time
- ✓ Cost
- ✓ Time away from home
- ✓ Less focus on skill development

Oftentimes, the high school athletic scene can be political and high school and club coaches will over value the importance of being selected for different teams. Sure, being on a great team could possibly help you in recruiting exposure, but it isn't going to take the place of you getting better as a player. While one player is spending all of his summer on an elite travel team staying in hotels and sharing time with other great players, a competitor could be at home working on his or her skills and sharing that improvement with college coaches via video. In the end the player with the best skills that can communicate with coaches will have the upper hand in the recruiting process. Resist the urge to get too wrapped up in what travel team you are on. Remember, off-season play should also be about getting better. A travel team may help you do that. A travel team may also get you in front of coaches.

However the two most important things as it relates to your recruitment are improving and communicating with college coaches.

## Declining or Negotiating Invitations

You likely won't be able to attend all camps, clinics, and showcases that you are invited to or hear about. There is a limited amount of time and money that can be used for this purpose.

It will be necessary for you to decline some of these invitations because they are too far away, cost too much, or don't work out in your schedule. However, you need to keep them interested in having you for as long as possible. You can accomplish this by using the method below...

- ✓ Thank them for their invitation.
- ✓ Explain why you can't attend this time.
- ✓ Ask them if you can attend for a reduced rate, or find out when the next opportunity is.
- ✓ Explain to them you are still very interested in being considered as a recruit for their program and ask them what else you can do in lieu of coming to camp.

Be sure whoever is inviting you has a copy of your profile and most current competition schedule. Invite them to scout you in person and keep in touch with them. Get yourself evaluated.

- ✓ For example, if qualified people tell you that you are likely a DIII player, it is ok to go to a DII camp, but don't go to camp at Notre Dame or Texas.
- ✓ Research camps, clinics, or showcases in your area and at schools that match your evaluation level.
- ✓ Ask coaches and other athletes and parents which ones they recommend.
- ✓ Remember, bigger schools and more money sometimes means less instruction and less value.
- ✓ Find out if the clinic or showcase is during the recruiting period (This is important if you are expecting DI or DII coaches to be there).
- ✓ Consider camps, clinics, or showcases at schools on your recruiting wish list only if you are evaluated as potentially being able to compete at that level. This is a good way to meet the staff.

- ✓ Make sure the camp, clinic, or showcase is worth it financially, athletically, and socially- regardless of the possible recruiting expectations.
- ✓ Ask for a list of the colleges registered to attend.
- ✓ Contact the coaches running the camp, clinic, or showcase and start a recruiting dialogue with them.
- ✓ Ask questions and let them know of your desire to be evaluated during camp.
- ✓ Remember that character, attitude, and effort will be evaluated during these events. Continue the recruiting relationship after the event.
- ✓ Don't assume you are being recruited because they saw you at an event.
- ✓ If the coaches don't contact you in the months after the event, you are not on their recruiting list. Ask them why not and what you can do to change that. If you don't get a good answer, move on to another school.