



10 Secrets to Playing Soccer in College

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So you are interested in playing soccer in college? Lucky for you, we are letting you in on 10 Secrets to Playing Soccer in College. The main thing to realize with picking a soccer program and college recruiting is that there are many factors that are important.

Secret #1 : Schools are dramatically different, and you really have to understand yourself and the schools you are interested in, to make good decisions.



First, does the school fit your soccer needs as well as your academic and social expectations? In other words, are you going to be proud of the degree from that school? Will it be able to open doors for you later on?

Second, is it a place you'd like to be if you weren't playing soccer? Some schools are big, some small, some in urban settings, and some in more suburban or rural areas. You have to ask yourself these questions because

Secret #2 : soccer could easily be taken out of the equation. Many times unforeseen things can happen: a freak injury, not enjoying the team, not getting along with the coach, and/or unexpected family or academic concerns. So make sure your choice is based on more than just the quality of the soccer program.

Another thing to consider is what soccer program is right for you? Division I? Division II? Division III? NAIA? Each situation has its different types of advantages and disadvantages. Is Division I the best? Not Necessarily. Division I programs are usually very large,

high profile schools that everyone thinks are the best. This is not entirely true. I know several Division III coaches that are better teachers of the game (and outstanding people as well; their players love both playing and learning the game from them) than 95% of the Division I coaches out there.

Secret 3# : The differences: Division I is much more professional, awarding more athletic scholarships (although it is uncommon for a men's soccer program to have the full 9.9 scholarships the NCAA allows...and remember that is 9.9 for the entire program at any given time, NOT 9.9 each year! Women's Div I allows for 12 scholarships). However, Division I is also extremely demanding and exacts a huge amount of time and sacrifice from the players. Some fortunate and talented players will get financial aid, in the form of a full scholarship or partial scholarship, and in essence are being paid to play: you can't get much more professional than that.

Division II schools offer scholarships, but the schools are a bit smaller and less reputable. There are some excellent soccer coaches and soccer programs in Division II; however, the competition is smaller (less teams make their post season NCAA tournament). One thing of interest, **Secret 4#** : a HUGE advantage for D2 schools, is that you can actually go on campus as a high school senior and train with their team! This gives you and the school an idea of how you would fit in with their program. **Division I Schools Do Not Allow This Opportunity!**

Division III is a whole different animal. D3 schools are usually small liberal arts schools that are much more academically oriented. Because their mission is one of an academic nature, they have an extremely limited spring season and offer NO scholarships for sports. Since there is often no spring season, **Secret 4#**: it is not uncommon for Division III athletes to be multi-sport athletes; if you love two sports, you might have the opportunity to play both in college, a huge advantage you will almost never find in D1.

Remember, EVERY college has a ton of positives and down sides to consider. **Secret 5#** : Make and rank lists of what is important to you academically, socially, and athletically; as you weigh your options, you will begin to have a good idea of what YOU want. This is

a great start. Schools you are looking at will start to either fit into or fall out of each of these categories.

The last thing is do a TON of research on the top three or four schools you are looking at. It is also not bad to have one school that is a long shot to play at/get into, two schools that are really attainable, and maybe a definite safety that you know you can get into or the coach is really interested in you.

Secret 6# : After you understand what you want, now you have to try to understand what the **PROGRAMS YOU ARE LOOKING AT NEED**. At higher levels, it is not always about just being a good player. There are many good players at the college and pro level, a lot of it is being **IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME!** You can help this by knowing about the rebuilding phase a program is in. Maybe you are a strong defender, but your absolute number one program you are looking at is only looking for forwards and a couple of midfielders. Maybe their entire back line is made up of freshman! It can happen. You might be able to get a roster spot, but you might be behind key players in their program for two or three years. Will you be happy getting little playing time, or is having a good chance to play a deal breaker? Only you can decide. On the other hand, maybe you are the exact type of player they need! Check their web-site and find out about who and what type of players are graduating the year before you would be coming into the program. Do some research on their staff and its relationships with players. Chances are if you dig around enough, you will network with someone that knows someone who can give you a snapshot of how happy the players are in the program. Wins and losses are only part of the package. Again, are the players really enjoying their soccer development?



Secret 7# : Also, most colleges have a summer soccer camp. Make no mistake, these are money makers for college coaches. However, they are one of the **ABSOLUTE** best ways to get to know a program. You can tell an awful lot by the way a program runs its camp. Programs that have really well run camps will most likely be equally organized with their college team. In addition, most times you also get to be on campus for almost a week and get to know the coaches and players of that university. This is invaluable.

Often the camps run a fairly average level of play because they are open to anyone who wants to come (the NCAA doesn't allow the programs to segregate levels of players at camp). But again, do research and find out what coaches will be coaching the groups. At some camps the college's staff actually does the instruction, and you could wind up with one of the staff coaches coaching you for five days. This is ideal, and there is no better way to get a feel for the program. It is also possible that current players will be working the camp (another great way to find out about the program by talking to them). Watch Out, Sometimes their staff will do **NO** coaching and just direct the camp (a great question to ask before you go!).

Now, camps do cost money, and your summer is probably already busy with a lot of soccer so choose wisely. If you are having a really hard time deciding on which schools to try, an option is to pick a camp that has other college coaches on the staff. This is great for not only exposing you to that host college, but also to other colleges as well. Not a lot of camps do this, but there are a few that have quite a few college coaches within the camp (Notre Dame, Elite 300, etc.)

Secret 8# : The best time to go to a camp is the summer before your senior year. Attending in your sophomore and junior year is great too; however, your senior year is the time that most schools have just started talking to their top recruits on the phone; a huge factor here is that there have been no verbal commitments and the recruiting classes are still open. Again, most good schools have their classes almost full around November. So, the summer is a great chance to try to get you in their minds at a crucial time.

Videos are another alternative for exposure, but realize programs can only tell so much from a video. **Secret 9#** : If you are going to make one, send it in your junior year. Make it a VERY brief highlight film of your best attributes. No more than about 10 minutes. If you score goals, show that. **DON'T SAVE THE BEST FOR LAST!** Coaches receive so many videos they might not watch more than a couple of minutes. If you have speed, show it; great in the air, great tackler, etc., show it. You should know your own game best, so try to make them as interested as possible right from the start. Showing a completed five yard pass is not recommended. If you want to show a strong game, put it at the **END** of the highlights film with your number and jersey color easily identified.

Secret 10# : Other great ways to find out about a school and its program are to take an unofficial visit to the campus (i.e. you pay for everything) and talk to the coach or assistants. Most good staffs will give you 15 minutes or so to talk or answer questions about their program if you make arrangements in advance. Maybe you can watch a training session if you are really serious. How is the training run? Is it organized? How does the coach instruct and treat his players? How do they respond?

Again, the more research and thinking you do, the better decision you will end up making. Picking a college is an important step. But remember it is not life or death. Any place can be great if you have a good attitude and work hard to accomplish your goals. Do the preparation to make a good decision. This will help to eliminate any last minute skirmishes and make your transition into the program as smooth and confident as possible.

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