

Splash Online Extra: The College Recruiting Process (4/25/2007)

BY ARLENE DOUGLAS//Special Columnist

Being recruited to swim for an NCAA University is a tremendous achievement. The recruiting process can be daunting. However, knowing the steps to the process and getting an early start can put you ahead of the game.

The process officially starts junior year. If you expect to be recruited to swim for an NCAA Division I institution, it's a good idea to start thinking early on about the type of college that might offer the best environment for you, given your athletic strengths, academic interests, desired geographic location and financial situation, among other factors. But the recruiting process officially begins in your junior year as outlined in the NCAA rules and regulations.

Starting in your sophomore year of high school, you may receive brochures for camps and questionnaires from universities, make calls to coaches at your own expense and make an unlimited number of unofficial visits to campuses.

"It's not until the first day of your junior year in high school that college coaches can begin sending you personal letters and recruiting materials," says coach Charles Warner, Rutgers University head coach and three-time Big East Conference Coach of the Year.

In your junior year, it's all about collecting and organizing information from the various colleges that are of interest to you. College websites provide a wealth of information. Also, the athletic departments usually have recruitment questionnaires that provide a feel for what the college coaches consider to be important.

For instance, the Rutgers questionnaire asks for the number of years you've trained year round. Coach Warner sees a swimmer's willingness to train during the summer as an indicator of the athlete's dedication to the sport. Coach Warner says that he is looking for athletes that "really want to improve, and that means training and competing seriously in the summer."

In her junior year of high school, Rebecca Kane, a nationally ranked sprinter, started to seriously narrow down her choices by considering a variety of factors. "I was looking for a place where I would be challenged, but not get burnt out," says Rebecca. Additionally, she wanted a medium-sized school in a college town near the East Coast. Now a high school senior, Rebecca has committed to attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall.

Senior year steps

"College coaches can begin calling recruits on July 1 prior to senior year," says coach Warner.

Thereafter, college coaches are limited to calling once per week. High school athletes are allowed to make official visits to colleges

beginning opening day of senior year, with one official visit per college and up to a maximum of five official visits to colleges.

The NCAA defines official visits as "any visit to a college campus by you or your parents paid for by the college." The expenses that could be paid for by the college include any of the following: transportation to and from the campus, room and meals while visiting, and entertainment expenses.

September through November are hectic months for recruits, particularly those looking to commit in the early signing period.

"There is an early signing period in November that lasts for a week in which recruits can sign a binding letter of intent to a school," coach Warner said. "Then there's another signing period in April. Ninety percent of national level young women seem to sign in the fall. Less young men commit in the fall than women."

"On July 1, I received phone calls from coaches around the country," Kane said.

The coaches invited Kane on recruiting trips to their colleges. Taking recruiting trips enabled her to see firsthand what life is like at the different colleges. After attending a recruiting trip to the University of North Carolina, Rebecca knew for sure that it was a perfect fit for her.

The university flew her in for the weekend. She met with the academic advisers and the coaches. The coaches held an open workout for the recruits but, in compliance with NCAA rules, did not watch the swimmers. Rebecca spent one night in the dorms and another night with a group of students who live in an apartment off campus. On the last night, the hosts took the recruits to see a show in the school gym where the basketball team put on skits. Rebecca signed her letter of intent on November 8.

Current college swimmers get to meet all the recruits at official visits. In addition to the coaches, the college swimmers try to identify recruits that would be a perfect fit for the team—those who care about the team's success as well as their own.

"We give our team quite a bit of say in who they want on their team," coach Warner said.

Club coaches can play a critical role in the recruiting process.

"Club coach might be thought of as agents for the club athlete," coach Warner said. "We will always call and get the input of a club coach before offering someone athletic aid."

For Kane, her club coach, Lou Petrozziello of the Jersey Gator Swim Club, counseled her on where he thought she would excel and be happy.