

College Recruiting Guide: Marketing Yourself.

By Adrian Rudd-FloSwimming

You are a junior or senior in high school. Between school, swimming, and planning for your future, navigating the recruiting process is tough water to tread.

Am I fast enough to swim in college? How do I grab coaches' interest? Will I find a program that will help me reach my athletic and academic goals?

These are just a few of the questions you are probably drowning in. So let's go ahead and dispel the myth that you have to be really fast to swim in college. Here's the secret: If you want to, you can. There is a program and a team that fits your dynamic needs as a student-athlete whether you want to swim at a Division I, II, or III level.

Regardless of the differences between each division, there is little variation in how the recruiting process works on the swimmer's end. In this guide to college recruiting, we sat down with coaches to discuss how to effectively generate interest, the key qualities they look for in swimmers, recruiting faux pas to avoid, and ways to stand out among your competition. In part one, we will discuss the best ways to market yourself and your swimming abilities to college coaches.

First off, swimming fast will obviously put you at a great advantage for generating coach interest. If your times are already in conference scoring position (top 16) it is likely you are already being pursued. However, swimming fast does not guarantee a spot on the roster, and being a bit behind time-wise certainly does not knock you off the table.

Pittsburgh assistant coach and women's recruiting coordinator Sarah Dunleavy said she approaches swimmers that are still developing.

"We keep our eyes open to people that fly under the radar," Dunleavy said. "Of

course you have to be within a certain time range, but if I just look at the top 100 times I might miss out on someone with a lot of potential."

Developing swimmers naturally take more effort for coaches to find, so the best way for you to get discovered is to initiate the conversation. *Make sure you follow these steps:*

1. Set up profiles on one or more recruiting websites

Popular sites you can use as resources are CollegeSwimming.com, NCSAsports.org, and Berecruited.com. Coaches across the nation can easily access all of your best times and contact information. Setting up a profile is free, but on some sites you can pay for benefits such as making your profile more visible, matching your qualifications with certain programs, or seeing which coaches have viewed your profile.

2. Email coaches directly

If your times do not necessarily reflect your swimming abilities, Dunleavy says be sure to give information about your training background. How long have you been swimming? How often do you do dryland? For example, if you have never been exposed to weight training, include that information because it indicates room for improvement on a college weight program.

Other important things to mention are your goals, reasons for your interest in the school, and your accomplishments outside of the pool such as academic achievements or community involvement.

"We are trying to build a culture here," Dunleavy said. "So there is a lot more to consider than just someone's time."

Any college program worthwhile is trying to build a culture of excellence in and out of the pool. If you have something other than your times to contribute, make it known.

3. Make yourself visible

Centre College head coach **Dean Brownley** says the best way an athlete can improve his or her visibility is to fill out the student-athlete questionnaire available on most teams' websites.

"Every person that fills out [a questionnaire] pops up in our archives." Brownley explained. "This way I can access all of their information quickly."

The archive also allows him to see the number of times a swimmer clicked around the website. Brownley pointed out one potential recruit who had clicked on 12 website links, while most athletes were between three to five clicks.

"I can tell just by the number of clicks that this guy is very interested and is doing his research, so I'm more likely to contact him," Brownley said.

Mason Norman, an assistant coach at Kentucky, advises athletes do everything possible to be visible.

"We try to get to the big meets like sectionals, nationals, and junior nationals," Norman said. "But if you're not at those meets you have to be willing to put yourself out there and get in front of the coach."

Norman suggests three ways to do this. First, take an unofficial visit to campus and set up a meeting with a coach. Not only is face-to-face conversation always more valuable, you will also get a feel for campus to see if it may be a good fit. Another option is to invite the coach to a swim meet you will be attending in the region. If these options are not realistic, send a video of you swimming that highlights your excellent technique and racing ability.

Keep in mind that persistence is key in this stage of recruiting. The more you can put yourself in front of a coach, the more likely it is that you will grab their attention. Coaches receive emails from prospects daily, so stay hopeful and active even if you do not get answers immediately. Norman also suggests recruits seek alternate forms of communication.

"Encourage your coach to reach out. If they're not, you have to be willing to do it yourself," Norman said. "If you don't get a response from an email, try direct messaging on social media."

Among the many things recruits should do, there is a big "don't" that Norman said swimmers should avoid.

"I wouldn't advise parents reaching out," Norman said. "If you're speaking to a coach as a 16- or 17-year-old and show that you can effectively communicate on your own, that's somebody that's going to be a developing athlete on the team."

Communication skills are key during the recruiting process in order to impress a college coach. Asking the right questions and consistently communicating with coaches is not always an ability that comes naturally. In part two, we will discuss exactly what skills are necessary and how to execute them in ways that will impress.