

College Swimming

With many different levels of competition, collegiate swimming offers a place for all abilities of competitive swimmer. The NCAA offers three competitive divisions with I and II offering scholarships. The NAIA also offers its own competition. While not every swimmer can earn a scholarship for swimming, being a potential member of the college's swim team can render one a more attractive college applicant, earn one greater consideration for academic financial aid, and enhance one's enjoyment and increase one's opportunities for growth in the collegiate experience. Joining the swim team is the quickest way for freshmen to make new friends and develop a sense of community in their new environments. Collegiate swimming as a goal also helps age group swimmers focus their practice efforts and sustain their motivation through the many years they may be involved in the sport. It can serve as a beacon for all swimmers, not just those at the highest levels. Following is more information about how swimmers can pursue the college-selection process:

- I. General considerations for swimmers in selecting a college
 - A. Coaches cannot initiate contact with recruits until June 1 preceding their senior year in HS, but recruits can and should contact coaches of colleges high on their interest list long before that date. As the recruit's club coach, I am happy to communicate with a prospective college coach, but my experience suggests that recruits who make the initial contact will establish themselves as serious about that school and program and demonstrate the kind of initiative and focus that college coaches like to see. I will, of course, be happy to follow that initial contact up with my own contact(s) to the prospective college coach.
 - B. A simple 2-3 paragraph email inquiry to the head coach of the school of interest is perhaps the easiest way to start this conversation and can include the swimmer's
 1. Age, year in school, hometown and competitive swimming history
 2. Specific interest in that school
 3. Intangible strengths
 - a. Diligence
 - b. Integrity
 - c. Coachability
 - d. Competitiveness
 - e. Determination
 - f. Potential for improvement
 - g. Leadership
 4. Performance history (see sample spreadsheet below showing swimmer's top 8 events)

	8 th grade	9 th grade	10 th grade	11 th grade	12 th grade
SCY PR					
200 free					
500 free					
1650 free					
200 back					
100 fly					
200 fly					
200 im					
400 im					
LCM PR					
200 free					
400 free					
1500 free					
200 back					
100 fly					
200 fly					
200 im					
400 im					

- C. If the coach responds, ask if there is a time you can call him/her for a follow-up conversation. Also ask about the possibility of a campus visit, and do not be shy about asking for expenses to be covered if the school is DII or DI.

- D. Ask your club coach to contact the college coach and to specifically address your strengths from the list of intangibles listed above as well as aspects of your experience that suggest more-than-the usual room for improvement such as not yet having done weights or inability to do doubles because of the long drive to and from practice. This can be done in a formal letter of recommendation or through less formal email and telephone conversations with the college coach. Your coach may also be able to help videotape your swimming to send on to the college coach.
- E. In all of the above, many athletes are reluctant to sell themselves because they have been taught to be humble, but college coaches want emotionally strong, confident athletes and will appreciate your taking the initiative to argue your own case; at the same time, it can be difficult to ask hard questions, so this is another area where the recruit's club coach can be of assistance because they are not selling themselves and as colleagues and peers there is no authority differential between the college and club coach, so ask your club coach to assist you if you believe it would be beneficial. The same is true, and even more so, when you start asking the college coach to convince you that his/her town/school/team/conference are right for you. Do not be afraid to ask the hard questions because the response you get will convey not only objective information but less tangible aspects of that particular choice that may increase or decrease its valuation in your eyes. At the same time, you will demonstrate your resolve to find the best situation and your initiative in doing what is required to make that determination.
- F. Links (or PDFs) to time relevant times
 - a. LookForIt compares swimmer's times to eligible colleges:
<http://www.lookforit.com/site/static/6>
 - b. NCAA DI, DII, and DIII National Championships
<https://www.collegeswimming.com/news/2017/feb/16/cuts/>
 - c. http://www.naia.org/fls/27900/1NAIA/Championships/CoachesCorner/SwimDive/PQ/SD_Standards.pdf?DB_OEM_ID=27900

Considerations for college choice and questions for college coaches in the recruiting process

Criteria (in no particular order) when deciding:

1. Location/size

- a. Distance from home
- b. Distance from other opportunities such as internships, recreational pursuits, shopping
- c. A place you would like to live?
- d. Size of school, town, and campus

2. Academics

- a. What is the quality of the school and the academic program(s) you might be interested in? If possible get contact information for somebody in two or three academic departments you might want to major in and contact them directly.
- b. Is there academic support available for athletes?
- c. What percentage of swimmers graduate in four years? Five?
- d. What is the team GPA? Is scholarship truly supported or simply paid lip service?
- e. Do the coaches strictly adhere to the 20-hour-per-week limit on practices/meets or will they expect "voluntary" time from the swimmers?

3. Cost

- a. There may be scholarship money available for swimmers at the YMCA National level or faster, especially girls, but it might be at the DII or less-competitive DI schools. Whether the school is offering athletic or academic money, however, do not be timid about asking for more money. You can use an offer from one school as leverage when discussing offers from other schools. You may or may not choose to mention the competing offer. Even if you don't have a better competing offer, you might consider requesting more money because you cannot afford to attend for the initial offer (this might be more persuasive when considering private or out-of-state schools because those schools recognize that their tuition costs are often several times higher than an in-state school. The coach's initial offer will be a lowball number to see what you will take. If you don't ask for more, you won't get it.
- b. Immediate cost is an important consideration, as is scholarship amount, but you don't necessarily want that to be the determining factor in your decision. Ask about contingency funding such as the prospect of increasing your scholarship in subsequent years if you perform at certain levels (be specific and nail this down so the coach cannot "forget" later when you come back to ask for the increase); ask about academic scholarships available through the school; ask about part-time job opportunities (you want to be careful about taking on a part-time job if you are swimming and taking a full load, but this query demonstrates your interest and commitment, and there

might be a job that requires only a few hours a week and pays well or a job in your professional area of interest that would provide valuable experience).

4. Team

- a. Level of competition in their league and depth on the team (do you perform better being the big fish in the small pond or one of the aspirants chasing faster swimmers?)
- b. History of success
- c. Friendliness and positivity of team culture

5. Coach

- a. Is he/she well-informed and authoritative about not only swimming but about the school and its programs and opportunities; attentive to detail; interested in his or her swimmers' long-term development as individuals not just as point-scorers; inspirational; respectful; trustworthy?
- b. Ask the coach how his or her swimmers progress during the four years they swim? Request specific examples. One of the secondary benefits of negotiating your scholarship (as well as any extended conversations you have with the coach) is that you will learn more about how the coach does business. Some college coaches are smooth-talking salesmen and will say all the right things to get you to commit only to disappear later when you need something from them or are struggling.
- c. Ask the coach how well he stands by his athletes in the face of adversity. Ask for specific examples. Also, ask that your scholarship be guaranteed for four years regardless of your performance level (schools can offer four-year scholarships, but many don't).
- d. Ask the coach about his/her plans: Does he/she plan to be there in five years? What is it about that school, that conference, that level of swimming that appeal to the coach? Ask what the coach is looking for in an athlete and team member? Are accommodations made for class conflicts? Who are the assistant coaches and what are their respective roles and strengths? If possible, communicate with both the head coach and the assistant coach who will be responsible for your practice group. Be less impressed if the head coach quickly directs your questions to his recruiting assistant: if the head coach doesn't have time for you during the recruiting process, it is unlikely he will have time for you once you have committed to attending.

6. Athletic facilities

- a. Are the pool and weight room places you would look forward to spending time? With respect to the pool, specifically, what is the water temperature? How well is the water chemistry managed? Do kids have breathing problems? Skin problems?
- b. Are there other exercise/recreational facilities available to you that you would like to use?
- c. Is there a training table? Study hall? Athletes' dorm? Who uses them? Under what circumstances?

The better informed you are the more likely you are to select the best school for you academically, athletically, personally. By asking a lot of questions, not only will you obtain important information, but you will demonstrate that you are thoughtful, serious individual who would make an excellent contribution to the team. When you talk to the coach prior to your visit, ask him or her for names and contact information for others who could help you answer these questions including current team members, former team members, staff overseeing admissions and merit-aid, faculty in disciplines you might be interested in. Contact some of these people prior to your visit. This will help you use your limited time during the visit to meet the people you most need to meet and see the things you most need to see. Finally, it may be worth your time to make an unofficial visit simply to see what everything looks and feels like when they are not laying out the red carpet for you.