"MAKING THE GRADE" by Coach Mike Ketchel

From the Coach's Clipboard
By Coach Mike
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Read this no matter what sport you play!

This coach recently met a young man who plays soccer at Dublin High School, CA, as well as for the San Ramon Santos soccer club, one of the top club teams in the region. (But read on, because if you play ANY school sport, this article applies to YOU!) He has been an All-League performer on his high school team, and carries a GPA above 4.0. He wants to play in college, and study bio-medical engineering - a bright young man. He’s also been smart and pro-active to the point of listing his student-athlete profile on recruiting websites, such as NCSA, AthleticQuest, BeRecruited, and several others. (BTW, all of the major recruiting sites succeed in placing student-athletes’ profiles in front of college coaches. Some might do better in one area or another. Most offer paid services that should be considered if a family feels the need for professional hands-on guidance beyond the player’s high school and AAU/club coaches. Choose carefully, however. Parents, do your homework!) We were meeting, along with his mom and dad, to discuss developing a game plan to assure successful college recruitment. The great part is, along with this young man’s achievements on the field, he’s already tackled the most important factor: GRADES.

Grades mean everything. Most college coaches, today, would rather have a good player who is a great student over a great player who is a mediocre or poor student! (Ideally, he wants the best of both.) A 3.0 is pretty much the recruiting floor today, unless we’re discussing junior colleges. The NCAA also requires that certain academic standards be met by all college athletes once enrolled! Three D-1 universities have recently been placed on probation for their student-athletes failing to meet those minimum academic standards. So what does that mean?
Bluntly, mediocre grades do not cut it anymore. Over the past ten years the bar has been raised and it's rising. Still, a GPA over 3.0 means a statistically increased chance of obtaining a scholarship. Here's another tip: Your 9th grade year counts for about a third of your high school GPA. Think you have plenty of time to bring your grades up? The longer you procrastinate, the harder it is. You just can't flunk your way to a college recruitment. The NCAA eligibility center verifies that required core subjects have been completed with "C" or better grades, just to be eligible to be recruited! But "C" grades don't cut it anymore either!

Let's compare our Dublin student-athlete with another area California student-athlete we met with in the spring, at the request of his high school basketball coach, regarding recruiting. He was carrying a 2.6 GPA as we met. He said he was interested in a top tier D-1 basketball powerhouse university such as Georgetown... Why? With a 2.6 GPA, and not a "blue chip," that's not going to happen. He's a good but not great player, and small for his position, playing center at 6'2" for a .500 basketball team. Maybe he could play at a JC, if he developed guard skills, where he'll need to maintain a 2.5 to be eligible. And the truth is that this young man, according to his coaches in two sports, basketball and football, has potential, and likely more in football; but, "he refuses to put in the effort" to be the best he can be. A 2.6 indicates the same in the classroom. And if your high school coaches think you're lazy, in 2 sports, it's fair to say you've got problems. (I don't know about the school system where you live, but most kids in my area will get a "B" nowadays for just showing up every day, and turning in assignments and homework on time!)

It may sound tough, but, if this guy was serious about college, he would already have his grades above a 3.0. Somewhere along the way, someone has been advising this young man that he is D-1 material and will be offered a "full ride." I'm afraid it's time for a reality check. Another big issue is CHARACTER: This student-athlete was not truthful when I queried him on his 40 yard dash time, as well as his GPA. (He said he ran a 4.6 40 (Not shabby for a lineman!), and was carrying a 2.9 GPA (Ok, we're very close). So far, I was thinking this young man had some serious potential - he just needed a roadmap and a plan to follow. Then, his coaches verified his true 40 time at 6 seconds and GPA at 2.6. (Whoa! Stop the train.) Athletes need to be aware that stats and grades are always going
to be checked - always. If you lie to a recruiter or college coach, they will find the truth, and you're done. At that level, the consequences can be extreme to a college coach and his program. (A "doctored" SAT score by a certain well-known Memphis player was caught a year later by the NCAA, and a 35 win season was nullified! Do you think coaches want to take that chance?). Also, with roughly 80%-90% of collegiate sports playing opportunities outside of NCAA D-1, this young man is not being realistic about his likely best college playing level. Now, he has another year to bring himself over a 3.0, in addition to scoring well on his SAT and ACT tests. He has another year and a half to develop his game with dedication and discipline he has not shown thus far. Will he? I hope he does. The catch? It's all up to him.

Worth noting: It's been said that less than 3% of college athletes are on what we would call "full ride" athletic scholarships. And only about 1% are those who we would label as true "Blue Chip" elite athletes. They worked extremely hard to win that status. Everyone else has to work just as hard, if not harder, on the court and in the classroom!

What of our Senior scholar-athlete from Dublin, CA? He will definitely play somewhere. With a 4+ GPA and solid SAT test scores near 1300, and ACT score of 27, as well as his dedication to be the best athlete he can be, he has earned the privilege of being recruited by some excellent schools from coast to coast, where he WILL have the opportunity to compete in college sports, more than likely with a very good scholarship and financial aid combo package. He's also not all hung up on considering only D-1 schools. He's smart enough to be looking for the right school, one that would be best for his future aside from sports. That may prove to be a D-1, or D-2, or D-3 school.

If you are a high school or middle school athlete with college goals and dreams, your grades can either help pave your road to success, or a road of broken dreams. Are you willing to lay out a plan to achieve your goals, and be disciplined enough to follow through and stick to the plan?

Remember that 75% of All-League high school athletes are NOT recruited. Know that only about 5% of high school basketball players and less than 10% of high school football players make the transition to competing in college. The lack of
good grades plays a big part. And that is something that you can control. Get your priorities straight. It's about education first. If you're a scholar-athlete of good character, you will be able to play sports in college. A good school will want you. Jim Harbaugh, Stanford University's football coach, said it well: "We're not looking for student-athletes. We're looking for scholar-athletes." Stanford is Stanford; but, that reflects a growing reality.

GAMEPLAN FOR ALL MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES:

Want to make the grade, and play sports in college? Then, MAKE THE GRADES! And be smart enough to seek guidance early, from your advisors and coaches, and (honest) recruiting advisors, as well as the several very informative recruiting websites out there that are loaded with great advice, so you are ready for the recruiting process, as well as academically and emotionally prepared for college.

There are even a few great books on the subject. Families often spend many thousands of dollars on highlight videos, camps, travel teams, and recruiting services to help their children ultimately get recruited. **All that effort will be wasted if the student-athlete cannot make the grades, and if there is not an equal emphasis on scholastic performance from parents or guardians.** Remember how it's written: Student-Athlete. "Student" always comes first.

Why do I include middle-school student-athletes? If you start early, grades 6 through 8, to develop proper discipline in your studies, and correct any bad study habits, by the time you're in high school, you will be on the right track. If you wait until high school to start focusing on grades, you may have an uphill battle. Make it easier on yourself: Start early, start now. Every day counts, so make it count for you.

BTW, always remember, the Five-Star Basketball site is loaded with great resources! Use them. It's a great exposure site as well; and, can also aid in your own recruiting strategy! Make sure you mention in your Five-Star published profile if you have profiles on sites such as SportsPresssTV, BeRecruited, AthleticQuest, NCSA and others. Make it easy for Coaches to find you!!! Get help if you need it.
Thanks for reading. I hope you found it helpful.

Good luck,
Coach Mike