

THOUGHTS ON COLLEGE DIVING

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You're a high school senior and you are interested in diving in college. You want to use your diving to either get into a better school or get a college scholarship, but you don't know where to begin. Here are a few hints to help you on your way.

How do I begin the process?

First, you need to narrow down your selection of schools by going through your college guides and finding schools that offer the academic curriculum you are looking for as well as a swimming and diving program. Determine if you want a [division I, II or III](#) type school. Register with the [NCAA Clearinghouse](#), forms can be found on the NCAA.org web site. Read the [Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete](#). This is a very important publication for all high-school athletes preparing to compete at the college level. This book summarizes the rules and regulations in an easy-to-read form. You should have this process complete by the start of your junior year. During your junior year, write a "dear coach" letter - a letter of introduction stating that you are interested in the college. Include information about yourself and your diving (name of high school and club team), and a little bit about your academics so that they know whether you are academically eligible. Also, be sure to include your year in high school, mailing address, phone number and an e-mail address. If you receive a positive response from the coach, send a follow-up letter to confirm your interest. NCAA coaches can not call you until the end of your Junior year. Juniors may call the coaches and talk with them if you reach them. They may not [initiate the call](#) or even return your call. Coaches may write or email you during your Junior year, so if you do call and do not reach them, leave an email address. Also, keep in mind that March is a busy month for college coaches due to championship meets.

How do I arrange a visit to the college?

There are two types of visits – the first is an unofficial visit. This is where you and the coach make arrangements to meet and you pay your own way, you can take as many unofficial visits as you want. The second type of visit is an [official visit](#). An official visit typically takes place in the fall of your senior year. An official visit occurs anytime the college or coach expends funds on any aspect of your visit – this could be anything from buying a plane ticket to a pack of bubblegum. An official visit may include the plane ticket, housing and meals, or it may include just housing and meals or just meals depending on the college. Official visits can last no longer than forty-eight hours and the University is required to send you a letter acknowledging that you had an official visit. The NCAA only allows each athlete to take five official visits. Each athlete may take only one official visit per college but you are welcome to take other unofficial visits to the same college.

If you are a National level diver, quite often the coaches will offer you an official visit in order to persuade you to look at their college. If you are not a National level diver, you may want to ask for an official visit if it has not been offered to you. The coach may explain that they cannot because they are spending money in other ways or have no money left. If you are serious about a college and you are not offered an official visit, you can arrange your own trip

by calling someone at the school and asking to spend the night. While you are there, you should attend a few classes and call the coach to arrange a meeting with him or her and members of the team.

Can my high school or age group coach help me get into college?

It depends on whom your coach knows and the team or club you dive with. If you are from a small high school or your team doesn't compete much, your coach may not have a lot of contacts and your club may not be widely recognized. If you are from a nationally recognized U.S. Diving club, coaches may pay a little bit more attention to you. Age group coaches can help by talking to interested college coaches about you. Most of the diving coaches know each other and are willing to help.

Does training in the summer help?

Absolutely. Many college coaches use the U.S. Diving competitions (Regionals, Zones and Nationals) to gauge your diving ability. College coaches make a distinction between divers who compete at regionals and do not advance to the zones, versus divers who make it to the zones. Any diver who qualifies for USD Junior Nationals is considered a strong recruit. Most college coaches are familiar with these distinctions.

Should I ask my coach to write a recommendation?

Generally, coaches are happy to write recommendations for their divers. However most college coaches know this and rarely does someone give a bad recommendation. Usually, a coach who is serious about recruiting you will call your club or high school coach to learn more about you. They may also ask other coaches in your region that may have seen you compete. The diving community is small, so most coaches will be pretty straightforward with other coaches about your diving ability.

Will diving help me get into college?

The short answer is yes, although it varies from school to school, coach to coach, and year to year. And there are lots of factors. Obviously, if you apply to a college without a swimming or diving team your diving may not be very useful. If you apply to a college that has three graduating senior divers and you're better than they are, your diving will definitely help you. Also it depends on how much the college administration supports the diving team. With a supportive administration, most coaches can help pull someone in if they are close to the standards set by the college. There are 380 NCAA Division I, II and III diving programs for men and 479 for women.

How much should the diving weigh in my decision-making?

There are some divers out there who have a goal of going to the Olympics. In that case, college may not be the best choice because training time is limited. Some may choose to go to college and train for the Olympics simultaneously. In this situation it is clear that selecting the right coach and program is more important than academics.

However, for the majority of divers who are not training for the Olympics, it is important to keep in mind that after graduation the thing that matters most is not your diving, but where you went to college and what you learned there. I recommend that divers choose the most

suitable school from an academic perspective because that is what really matters. The question that every diver should ask themselves when looking at schools is: if I broke my leg and could not dive anymore, would I still want to be at this school?

If the divers are good, is the coach good?

There are different types of coaches that you should be aware of to help you determine if a school and diving program will be a good fit. There is the good recruiter. The good recruiter can get a reputation as a good coach because he has been successful at recruiting good divers, but be careful, he may not be a good coach. You should try to determine if divers in his program have improved during their college careers. Then there are coaches that make and create their own divers. These are coaches who have a history of taking divers that do not necessarily have the highest level of talent coming into the University but are able to improve tremendously while they are at the University. This is the type of coach that usually works you hard. Of course, there are coaches who are both good recruiters and excellent coaches. If you are serious about a program, you should look carefully at the performance of that coach's divers over their college career.

Some Dos and Don'ts

After you and the coach have made initial contact, make a video tape and send it to the coach. You don't need to send it with your initial letter unless that school is one of your top choices. Don't over-edit the video. A coach will get a little suspicious if the video shows eleven dives from eleven different meets. They would prefer to see the real you – your talent level and what you are capable of doing in a typical meet situation. This usually comes through whether the tape shows your best dives or not.

Don't show up to Michigan for a visit wearing an Indiana Diving t-shirt!

Don't dive for the diving coach, whether it is an official or unofficial visit. Most divers on a recruiting trip feel the need to dive for the coach; the NCAA strictly prohibits this.

Don't feel you need to prove yourself at a team party by keeping up with the others. If you're uncomfortable in a situation, just walk away.

Be honest with the college coaches about your interest level; don't tell seven different coaches that their college is your very first choice. If you do, you will have disappointed six coaches, and that does not reflect well on you, your high school or club team. And, keep in mind, you'll probably see these coaches on a judging panel sometime in your college career.

Don't be afraid to ask the coach where you stand in the recruiting class; what your chances are of getting into the college; and, the possibility for a scholarship.

Don't judge your chances based on past years. Every year is different based on the different needs of the team and the university, and the availability of scholarship money.

After you have decided

After making a decision, put in a call to the coaches of the schools you didn't choose who spent a lot of time with you and tell them your decision. It is often very hard to call a coach who has shown a real interest in you, but it is important that they hear about your decision from you and not on the deck from another coach. You may want to tell them the deciding factors that helped you make your decision, but not too much detail is needed.

Questions to ask diving coaches (in no particular order):

When are practices?

Do you have double sessions?

Do you do dry-land training or conditioning?

How many divers are on the team; what years are they?

How many divers on your team are walk-ons?

Have your divers ever made it to Conference Championships, NCAA Zones or Nationals?

Do you train during school vacations?

Do most of your divers compete all four years?

Do most of your divers graduate from here?

What is the relationship like between the divers and the swimmers?

Do you drive, fly, or take buses to meets?

How long have you been with the University?

Do you have an age-group program?

Are college divers able to train off-season?

Where do I stand on the recruiting list?

How much assistance can you offer to help me gain admission to the college?

Do you have any scholarships available?

With a 25-year age group and 16-year NCAA coaching career, Joe Chirico has extensive experience on both sides of the college recruiting scene.