



THE NCAA RECRUITING JOURNEY

A Guide for Players and Parents

Blue Star Europe

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There is a lot of information involved in the NCAA recruiting process, and many of the questions players and parents ask me during the journey are answered here. Please take your time to read this carefully. The process can look complicated at first, but it becomes much easier when you understand the different stages and start the necessary administration early.

IMPORTANT: NCAA, university admission and US immigration rules can change. This guide explains the process but should not replace a final eligibility decision from the NCAA Eligibility Center, a university compliance department or the relevant US authorities.

1. NCAA ELIGIBILITY AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSION ARE DIFFERENT

One of the most important things for international players and parents to understand is that there are several separate processes.

- 1. NCAA athletic and academic eligibility - determines whether you can participate in NCAA athletics.
- 2. The university's own admission requirements - every university decides whether you are academically qualified for admission.
- 3. English-language requirements - international students may have to demonstrate English proficiency.
- 4. US immigration requirements - international students normally need the appropriate student visa before studying in the United States.

Passing one of these stages does not automatically mean you have passed the others.

2. NCAA ELIGIBILITY

The NCAA governs college athletics at NCAA member universities. For players hoping to compete at an NCAA Division I or Division II university, the NCAA Eligibility Center reviews both academic eligibility and athletics eligibility.

International students have their school records reviewed in the context of the education system in their home country. The NCAA will normally look at your secondary-school education, subjects studied, grades, graduation documents and your history of basketball participation.

This is why it is extremely important that you keep good records throughout high school.

3. SAT AND ACT - AN IMPORTANT CHANGE

This is one of the biggest changes from the old recruiting process.

SAT or ACT scores are no longer required by the NCAA for initial eligibility in NCAA Division I or Division II.

You should therefore not automatically book an SAT or ACT simply because you want to play NCAA basketball.

However, this does not mean that SAT and ACT tests have disappeared completely. An individual university may still require or recommend a test score for admission, use scores when considering academic scholarships, or have different requirements for particular academic programmes.

For this reason, always check the admission requirements of the universities recruiting you. Your academic performance throughout secondary school remains extremely important.

4. YOUR SCHOOL GRADES MATTER

For NCAA Division I and Division II eligibility, the NCAA examines your secondary-school academic record. For international players, education systems vary considerably between countries, so NCAA eligibility cannot always be reduced to a simple US-style GPA calculation.

- Take your schoolwork seriously from the beginning of high school.
- Avoid dropping important academic subjects without checking the consequences.
- Keep copies of school reports, transcripts and official examination certificates.
- Make sure your name and date of birth are consistent across official documents.
- Tell Blue Star Europe or the recruiting university if you change schools or education systems.



Do not wait until your final year of high school to discover that an academic issue needs correcting.

5. REGISTERING WITH THE NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

Players seriously pursuing NCAA Division I or Division II basketball should register with the NCAA Eligibility Center. For most international players targeting NCAA Division I or II, this will eventually require an Academic and Athletics Certification Account.

Registration can begin well before graduation. It is better to start the process early than leave everything until a university urgently needs your eligibility certification.

During the process, you may be required to provide information about your schools, academic history, basketball teams, national-team participation, clubs and academies, payments or expenses received through basketball, agents or representation, professional-team involvement and other sporting activities.

Always answer these questions accurately. If you are unsure how something should be declared, ask before submitting incorrect information.

6. ACADEMIC DOCUMENTS

International academic records are particularly important. Depending on your country and education system, the NCAA or university may request school transcripts, annual grade reports, examination results, certificates or diplomas, proof of graduation and official translations.

Do not assume that a screenshot or document uploaded by the family will always be considered official. The NCAA Eligibility Center may require documents to be submitted through an approved source or directly by your school or examining body. Keep your original documents safely.

7. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TESTING

The old assumption that every international player must take the TOEFL is no longer appropriate. English-language requirements are normally determined by the university, not by the NCAA.

Universities may accept one or more forms of evidence, including the Duolingo English Test (DET), TOEFL, IELTS, Cambridge English qualifications, previous education conducted in English, or other university-approved evidence of English proficiency.

For many international players, Duolingo has become the most convenient option because it can usually be taken online and is widely accepted.

However, do not take an English test simply because another player took that test. Before paying for an examination, check what the universities recruiting you actually accept and what minimum score they require.

My recommendation

International players who are approaching the serious recruiting stage should consider taking a Duolingo English Test practice test early. This gives you an indication of your current English level without waiting until an NCAA coach urgently needs an admission application completed. If improvement is needed, you then have time to work on your English.

8. NAIA AND JUNIOR COLLEGE

Not every US college basketball opportunity is NCAA Division I. There are also NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, NAIA universities, NJCAA/Junior Colleges and other collegiate organisations. These organisations have different eligibility rules.

NAIA

Players wishing to attend an NAIA university normally register through PlayNAIA, the NAIA Eligibility Center. NAIA freshman eligibility differs from NCAA eligibility. Academic results remain important and SAT/ACT scores can still be relevant under some NAIA eligibility pathways. Do not apply NCAA rules to an NAIA recruitment.



Junior College

Junior College can provide an excellent pathway for some players, particularly when academic, basketball-development or recruitment circumstances make it the right option. Eligibility and admission requirements should be checked directly with the college and its athletics compliance staff.

9. WHEN NCAA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COACHES CAN CONTACT YOU

The recruiting rules have changed considerably.

For NCAA Division I women's basketball, coaches can now begin direct recruiting communication with a player from June 1 after the player's sophomore year of high school.

This can include telephone calls, text messages, email, video calls and social-media direct messages.

For international players, translating an American school-year definition into your country's education system is not always straightforward. Blue Star Europe therefore tracks players by both their expected high-school graduation year and their expected NCAA recruiting class.

This is one reason why it is important that I know your full date of birth and expected school graduation date. Recruiting rules differ between NCAA divisions and can change, so do not rely on old information found online.

10. BEFORE DIRECT CONTACT STARTS

Do not confuse “a coach cannot yet contact me directly” with “nobody is recruiting me.”

NCAA coaches identify and evaluate players long before the direct-contact date. They may watch you live, watch game film, receive scouting reports, research national-team performances, monitor development and compare you with other players in your recruiting class.

This is why Blue Star Europe scouts players several years before they will arrive at an American university. The objective is not simply to identify who is the best player today. It is to identify players who may become excellent NCAA players in the future.

11. YOUR FIRST CONTACT WITH A UNIVERSITY

When NCAA coaches begin communicating with you, conversations today are much less formal than they were ten years ago. You may initially receive an Instagram message, WhatsApp or text communication, an email, a phone call, or a Zoom/FaceTime call.

Do not judge the seriousness of a university simply by which communication method they use.

As recruiting develops, try to understand how seriously the university is recruiting you, where you sit on their recruiting list, what basketball role they see for you, what position they see you playing, who else they are recruiting in your position, the academic opportunities available, the coaching philosophy, the team's style of play, roster construction, and scholarship and financial arrangements.

12. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media now plays a major role in recruiting. Coaches routinely use Instagram and other platforms to communicate with and research prospects. Your social-media account therefore creates an impression of you.

You do not need to turn your account into a basketball advertisement, but remember that coaches may see what you post, share, like or comment on. Use common sense.

A coach is not only asking “Can this player help us win?” They are also asking “Do I want this person representing our programme and living with our team every day?” Character matters.

13. VIDEO

Coaches increasingly make early evaluations using video before deciding whether to invest more time in a prospect. Every serious recruit should eventually have good-quality full-game video and a short, well-produced highlight video.



A highlight video gets attention. Full-game film confirms the evaluation.

Do not create highlights that only show made shots. Coaches also want to evaluate decision-making, passing, defence, movement without the ball, athleticism, communication, effort, reactions to mistakes and basketball IQ.

Blue Star Europe's evaluation is based primarily on what I believe will translate to NCAA basketball - not simply statistics or highlights.

14. LIVE EVALUATION

If a university is seriously interested, coaches may travel to watch you play live during periods when NCAA rules allow them to evaluate prospects. This remains a very important part of recruiting.

If you know an NCAA coach is attending your game, do not try to play differently because somebody is watching.

Coaches are evaluating much more than points scored. They notice effort, defence, communication, body language, decision-making, reaction to coaching, behaviour on the bench, response to mistakes and interaction with teammates. Play your normal game.

15. OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL VISITS

Campus visits remain one of the most important parts of choosing a university. An official visit is a visit where the university is permitted to pay certain expenses associated with your visit under NCAA rules. An unofficial visit is generally funded by the player/family.

The old rule telling every player that she can take only five official visits is no longer an appropriate blanket rule for NCAA women's basketball. Current visit rules depend on the division, sport and circumstances and have changed considerably.

During a campus visit, do not only look at the basketball facilities.

Ask yourself: Would I still want to attend this university if basketball disappeared tomorrow? Look at academic programmes, location, campus, housing, teammates, coaching staff, strength and conditioning, sports medicine, academic support, international-student support, travel, training expectations, basketball facilities and style of play.

Most importantly, spend time with the players. They experience the programme every day.

16. SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS AND COMMITMENTS

Recruiting conversations can develop into an offer. Do not feel pressured to make an immediate decision simply because you are excited. Ask questions. Understand exactly what is being offered.

The cost of attending an American university can include much more than tuition, including housing, meals, university fees, books, insurance, travel and personal expenses. The university should clearly explain your financial package.

Also understand the difference between recruiting interest, a verbal offer, a verbal commitment, formal admission and financial-aid documentation. Do not assume that an Instagram announcement itself creates a legally binding scholarship.

17. NCAA ELIGIBILITY HAS CHANGED AGAIN

College sport continues to change. Beginning with the new NCAA eligibility model, many future NCAA Division I prospects will operate under an age-based five-year period of eligibility rather than simply thinking in terms of the traditional "four seasons in five years" system.

For prospects first enrolling in college from fall 2027 onwards, age and the timing of first full-time college enrolment become particularly important.

This is another reason international players must tell us about their correct date of birth, expected high-school graduation date, any previous university enrolment, professional or senior-club participation, and any gap year being considered.



Never make a decision to delay university, attend another university temporarily or play professionally without first checking how it could affect NCAA eligibility.

18. AMATEURISM, PROFESSIONAL TEAMS AND NIL

The NCAA landscape concerning amateurism and player compensation has changed dramatically. Players should not assume that receiving money, playing alongside professionals or being connected to an agent automatically creates the same consequences that it might have ten years ago.

However, these areas remain regulated. You must accurately disclose relevant basketball activity to the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Before signing professional contracts, agency agreements, representation agreements, commercial agreements or NIL agreements, make sure you understand the NCAA implications.

If in doubt, ask. It is much easier to check something before signing it than to solve a problem afterwards.

19. AFTER YOU COMMIT

Committing to a university does not mean the administration is finished. In many ways, another process begins.

You may still need to complete NCAA Eligibility Center certification, university admission, final school examinations, final transcripts, proof of graduation, English-language testing, housing, medical paperwork, health insurance requirements, immigration documentation, visa application and travel arrangements.

Respond quickly when your university asks for documents. International applications can be delayed simply because somebody has ignored an email for a week.

20. YOUR STUDENT VISA

International students attending a US university will normally require an F-1 student visa. Once you have been admitted and the necessary university processes have been completed, the university's international-student office normally issues your Form I-20.

- Receive your I-20.
- Pay the required I-901 SEVIS fee.
- Complete the US visa application.
- Pay the relevant visa application fee.
- Arrange any required visa interview.
- Provide the required documentation.

Visa procedures, fees and interview waiting times can change. For that reason, Blue Star Europe does not recommend relying on old telephone numbers, old fee amounts or unofficial websites. Always use current US Government information and the instructions provided by your university.

Start the visa process as soon as your university tells you that you are able to do so. Do not leave it until a few weeks before you are supposed to fly.

21. BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Before travelling to the United States make sure you have a valid passport, the correct visa, your I-20 and required immigration documents, confirmed university arrival information, accommodation details, insurance information, copies of important academic documents and emergency contact details.

Check with the coaching staff before booking flights. Basketball players are frequently expected to arrive earlier than the normal student population for summer classes, orientation, medical screening, strength and conditioning or team activities.



22. PREPARING FOR COLLEGE BASKETBALL

The transition to NCAA basketball can be difficult. You may simultaneously be adjusting to living away from home, communicating in English, American academics, a new culture, a new basketball style, strength and conditioning, greater training volume, increased competition and less playing time than you had in Europe or elsewhere.

Prepare properly. Arrive fit. Be willing to learn.

Do not expect your freshman year to be easy simply because you were successful in your home country.

23. THE MOST IMPORTANT ADVICE

The recruiting process should be exciting, but the objective is not simply: “Can I get an NCAA scholarship?”

The objective is: “Can I find the right university, basketball programme and academic environment for me?”

The highest-profile university is not automatically the best choice. The university offering first is not automatically the best choice. The university with the nicest facilities is not automatically the best choice.

Your decision should consider: Basketball + Academics + Opportunity + Coaching + Environment + Financial Situation

You are choosing somewhere that could become your home for several years. Choose carefully.

HOW BLUE STAR EUROPE HELPS

Blue Star Europe helps players and families free of charge. I am a basketball scout, not an agent.

My role is to evaluate players, provide NCAA coaches with accurate information, help suitable prospects understand the recruiting process and connect players and families with universities when appropriate.

I will always try to give you an independent assessment of your NCAA potential rather than simply tell you what you want to hear. The recruiting journey can sometimes feel complicated. Ask questions whenever you are unsure.

Dan Bowmaker
Blue Star Europe

USEFUL OFFICIAL RESOURCES

NCAA Eligibility Center: <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2021/2/10/eligibility-center.aspx>

NAIA / PlayNAIA: <https://www.playnaia.org/>

US Department of State student visa information: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>

Duolingo English Test: <https://englishtest.duolingo.com/>

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