



LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

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The following notes were taken from the Lower Merion Soccer Club's College Advisory Program seminar, run on October 16, 2013 at Harrilton High School. The program was headed up by LMSC travel team head coach Paul Stinson. Paul is an assistant coach for the Haverford College Men's team and has coached at the college level for over 10 years.

The biggest difference between recruitment by **Division 1** and **Division 3** programs is the timing of how they function. The division 1 process is more accelerated; players often have to make a commitment to a school earlier than in the Division 3 process. Division 1 schools often require a commitment before the start of their senior year.

The comments below came from panelists Jamie Gluck, the Head Coach of Haverford College Women's Soccer; John Byford, the Head Coach of Villanova Women's Soccer; Marissa Turchi, Senior Assistant Director of Admissions at Bryn Mawr College and Jay Dubow, LMSC Board Member and parent of two sons who went through the LMSC program (one played soccer at Division 1 Princeton University, the other opted to not play college soccer and now attends Duke)

Academic Perspective

- Students interested in playing soccer in college need to start looking at the college process before their junior year. They should try to visit colleges for any number of reasons ... watch a play, concert, game, or just stop by to walk around or catch on with the Admission tour on your way to another destination. A couple hours out of your way is a small investment in finding a great match for your child.
- Colleges want to see that you are being authentic to yourself – where is your best fit?
- Students need to think about the course load that they are taking in high school.
- When selecting courses, students should take a course load that will challenge them, but will also show the student in the best academic light.
- Colleges like to see that students increase their level of academics over their years in high school; taking tougher classes and earning a steadily higher GPA along the way.
- Students want to make sure they are balancing academics and other activities. They need to maintain good grades and show they have a passion in something else outside the classroom.
- Leadership roles within organizations and communities look good to colleges. Being a team captain, president of an organization, editor of something, etc. is a lot better than simply being a member of an activity or organization.
- Be deeply involved with fewer activities rather than being superficially associated with a large number of organizations at your high school!
- It is important to visit college campuses during your junior year. Arrange with the admissions department to sit in a classroom. Also, look into overnight programs they provide. Campus visits are VERY important.

Athletic Perspective

- First and most important, the student must ask if he / she really wants to play soccer at college level. Some players do, but some do not.
- It is very important that a student goes to a school that he / she will be happy at even if the sport aspect doesn't work out. Student athletes must always ask themselves "would I enjoy being at this school if I was not playing soccer?"
- Very few players get full soccer scholarship rides. Most division one schools offer partial scholarships (14 scholarships per team for women, 9.9 per team for men). Grades are very important as they are the main source of assistance. There are many opportunities to get financial aid and non-athletic scholarships (regardless of whether the school is Division 1 or Division 3). Students need to research financial aid non-athletic scholarships. Discuss this with each school's admissions department.
- Scholarships are a ONE-YEAR, renewable contract!
- Don't get caught up in what other students are doing. Each student should set their own course of action and not worry about what the other students in their high school are doing.
- Parents need to work things out at their child's level. Be sure to look into each school's team and the position your child will be in. Does it look the child will have a chance to play at that school or are there other colleges that offer opportunities that best fit them?
- Look at the environment that the players will be playing in. Will the student be able to play at that level? Will they have a chance to develop? Will they be playing in an environment that they will enjoy and grow as a person?
- When it comes to college soccer camps, check for ones highly recommended, ones where coaches are really there looking at players. Ask prospective coaches what camps they will be working at. They should know their camp schedule by February at the latest.
- When on campus visits, talk to the coach and also talk to the players on the team about the coach, the environment, etc. Do the current players appear to enjoy playing for the coach? Do they enjoy playing on that team?
- PLAYERS (not parents) need to initiate contact with the coaches and show interest. They must always be honest. Do not lie to them. Coaches often will find out if a player is lying to them about something.
- Always answer all e-mails from coaches, even if you are not interested in that school. Coaches sometimes change colleges. Coaches from different schools are often in contact with each other and discuss prospective players with each other. Be sure to treat them nicely.

Division 1

- Q: What is the normative career path for high school kids to get into the recruiting pipeline?
- A: Give the coaches important information – do not give them your life story. Keep it short and to the point. Be sure and mention your school, team, and tournaments that you will be playing in during the summer (recruiters will go to watch you play).
- Recruiters look at players as early as the student's sophomore year.
- Division 1 schools look strongly at academics. They need to be sure that the student athlete will be able to stay in the school and do well academically. College coaches

need to show their schools that their players maintain good grades; they do not want players who are going to have poor grades and bring down the team GPA.

- Admissions want to make sure you are in a financial position to commit yourself to the school.
- Some students are deferred so that the school can see another semester of the student's grades.
- Coaches work closely with the admissions department and will know if potential recruits have a chance of getting accepted. Soccer is NOT like football or basketball. The students must show strong academics in order to be considered for admission.
- Coaches get a feel for the players and take scores and academics to the school's admissions department.
- It's not uncommon for coaches to commit players during their junior year.
- Division 1 schools expect players to be playing for a strong club team which plays a good portion of the year. However, they also know that players need a bit of down time to maintain a balance.

Division 3

- You could be the best soccer player around, but academics are just as important in the admissions process.
- Recruiters for Division 3 schools typically start looking at players during their junior year.
- Camps and clinics are the best way for coaches to be able to see you play more than just once. Find out what camps / clinics coaches will be working at. Be sure to ask them what camps that they will be at well in advance of the summer. Be sure to get to know the coaches when attending the camps. Talk to them at the start of the camp so they know you are interested in their school. It is possible they will not see you at a camp if the camp is large.
- Coaches can give players a read/idea where a player stands with admissions, but they cannot say for sure if the student will get in or not. Every school is unique so have honest discussions with coaches about your chances of admission.
- Division 3 programs will be much less of a commitment to soccer than those at Division 1 programs.

Commit vs. National Letter of Intent

Being committed by a coach is a verbal trust between the player and the coach. Admissions are aware and involved in a verbal agreement, but it is not official until the National Letter of Intent is signed. The NLI only applies to Division I programs and for those students receiving a full or partial athletic scholarship. "Committed" is a term used in both Division 1 and Division 3 but has no formal or contractual standing.

Once the NLI is signed, the student is committed to that school for a year unless the school releases the student from the commitment. If the student changes his / her mind about the school, the student should NOT sign it the NLI. This is not signed until their senior year. Even before it is signed, admissions have said they have accepted the player. The NLI does not mean that the student is guaranteed to be there for four years. It is up to the coach to decide. Be sure to do a normal college search. If a college really wants a student, they will not force the student to commit as early as their sophomore year.

Club Soccer vs. High School Soccer

College soccer is combination of high school and club soccer. High school soccer is the closest environment that a student will have compared to playing at the college level until they get to college. High school soccer is playing for something other than yourself. Players play for their school, their fellow students, etc. They play in front of their teachers, classmates, school administration, etc. They play with students who are older and younger than them, just like the college level.

College coaches rarely go to high school to view players because a) club games are much higher level and b) college coaches are very busy with their own teams during the high school season. They do not have time to recruit very much during the fall season.

On that note, playing high school soccer is definitely not discouraged. It is a great life experience and helps students to grow as people. Players learn to be leaders with players of different ages / grades, etc. These experiences are not found in club soccer where, for an entire career, a player only plays with teammates very close to the same age. There is a huge difference between a 14 year old freshman and an 18 year old senior! In this sense, only high school soccer can offer a preview of the same type of setting as a college program.

Club coaches and high school coaches can be helpful – they usually know many college coaches. Guidance counselors are also helpful when narrowing down schools from an academic stand point.

Camps & Clinics

- Summer camps can be quite large so there is no guarantee that a particular coach will see the student play. It is important the players talk with coaches at the camps if they are interested in their school. This way, the coach will be more likely to focus on that student.
- Clinics are often much smaller. They often take place during school breaks, school holidays, etc. It is important for students to find out what clinics will be taking place during those times. Again, initiate a conversation with the coaches of the schools the student is interested in.
- Narrow your search – see schools first so you do not waste time and money on clinics with schools that the student would have no interest in. This will also keep the student from getting burned out by attending so many clinics.
- Camps or clinics at a particular college with only that college's soccer staff can be very helpful for the recruiting process at that college.

Important Side Notes

- There is a lot to be said for playing different sports when the kids are at a young age. It helps in the development of many different muscles. Most college coaches encourage students to play other sports.
- Coaches want to hear from the student / athlete, NOT from the parent. The student should be mature enough to handle a conversation with a coach.
- Be careful about brand name colleges. Public ones can be just as good. Do your research.

Questions & Answers

Q: What is the best approach to sit in on a class?

A: You should go through admissions. Keep in mind that colleges limit sit ins to seniors.

Q: What gets prioritized in the acceptance process?

A: Admissions focus on transcripts, the essay and recommendations. When it comes to essays it should NOT be about the "big game" or other such clichéd topics. Most colleges are test flexible and some optional. They take into account that some students do well in class, but not on tests. Be sure to look into what each different college requires.

Q: When it comes to Division 3 schools, are camps and clinics at the colleges?

A: Check to see what coaches will be at the camps. Admissions can notify students what camps or clinics they should attend. Get the most bang for your buck; do not try to attend camps every week, all summer.

Q: Is the summer between the junior and senior year too late to start the Division 3 process?

A: No, however many schools start looking at sophomores. If you wait until the summer before your senior year, start moving fast.

Q: How much soccer is too much soccer at a younger age?

A: Kids are still developing at younger age so keep in mind that too much soccer will lead to fatigue and injuries. Parents need to consider what their child can physically and mentally handle. Each child is different. If the student is involved in both club soccer and school soccer, talk to both coaches and judge who has your child's best interest at heart. As a parent you need to decide what is best for your child.

Q: If a child decides not to play soccer at the college level how does high school soccer play into applying for a college?

A: Schools still want to see that the student has a passion for something outside academics. Therefore it is a plus to be playing. Being a team captain can be a plus since it is a leadership position.

Q: What should players send to college coaches as far as videos?

A: Ask the coaches of the schools you are interested in what they want from you as far as tapes. It is best to know what to do before taking a video of a player. Find out what the coaches want highlighted in the video before doing the actual video.