



Official and Unofficial College Recruiting Visits

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College Connection

School is back in session and seniors are narrowing their list of prospective colleges. By now, you should be registering for the NCAA Eligibility Center to make yourself eligible to compete in college.

In the last addition of *College Connection*, I discussed the steps you need to take to grab a coach's attention. In this fourth and final installment, I will discuss the difference between Official and Unofficial college visits.

OFFICIAL VISIT

If a coach is intrigued by your shooting performances, he or she may invite you on a recruiting trip with all expenses paid. Before we get into the specifics, it is important to note the steps you have to take to be eligible for one of these trips. Step one is to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center, formerly known as the NCAA Clearinghouse. Step two is to take, or be scheduled to take, the ACT or SAT. Step three is to provide the school with a copy of your high school transcripts. Only then can you go on a recruiting trip.

An official visit to a college is a trip with all expenses paid by the school. This includes a plane ticket, housing and meals. Prospective athletes are allowed a maximum of five official visits during their recruiting phase. If you take a sixth, you or the school could be penalized. While on your recruiting trip, you can spend a total of 48 hours on campus. Before you and the coach schedule a trip, be sure to tell the coach if you have any kind of academic scholarships because that may determine if you should go on an official or unofficial visit. Your academic scholarship money could count against the rifle team.

From the moment you arrive on campus, to the moment you leave, every minute of your trip is going to be scheduled. The coach's job is to "wow" you by showing you everything their school has to offer. At the start of your trip you can expect to be in meetings with the coach and athletic department. This is the business portion of your trip. The head coach will probably present a four year plan that includes where you will fit in on the team and what to expect with your studies. Your next meeting will probably involve the compliance office. Their job is to run through all of the rules that pertain to your trip. This meeting is particularly important because you can learn the basics of being a student athlete.

When the meetings are over, the fun part of the trip begins. One of the first things you will do is tour the campus. Some of the team members may accompany you to give you a chance to get to know them. The team will take you out to dinner and possibly to a football or basketball game.

It is very important that you keep an open mind during the trip. It is your recruiting trip, but you are also being evaluated by

the coach and shooters. If you don't make a positive impression with them, then there is a good chance they will not offer you a spot on the team.

UNOFFICIAL VISIT

Unofficial visits are freebies for a coach. If you decide to visit a school at your expense, coaches will not hesitate to show you around and answer questions. Unlike official visits, there are no limits to how long you can stay on campus. The only time you cannot take an unofficial visit is during a "dead period." Dead periods are the couple of days before a signing period, this prevents coaches from contacting you while you and your family make a final decision on which school you will attend.

Unofficial visits give you the opportunity to make your own schedule for the trip. Below, is a list of things to do:

1. Meet the coach and team – The most important factor of whether or not you want to shoot on a college rifle team is to determine if you will fit in with the team.
2. Tour the Campus – It is very important to determine whether or not you like the campus. Visit the rifle range, library, dormitories, athletic department, etc.
3. Meet with College Advisors – If you know what you want to major in, schedule a meeting with an advisor who can go over your course work and better prepare you for the years ahead.
4. Sample the campus cuisine – Be sure you know what the food is like. This can be a big determining factor in how much money you invest into campus meal plans.
5. Look into joining a club – Everyone needs a way to escape from their day to day life and joining a club is a good way to do that. It is also a great way to meet new people.

When your visits are all said and done, you and your family should sit down and determine where you want enroll. Academics should be your number one priority. There is a saying about student athletes, "The student comes before the athlete," and you cannot be an athlete without the grades. Only then should you consider the other factors. By prioritizing your needs, there is a good chance you will choose the school that is right for you.

Brad Donoho is a graduate of the University of Kentucky where he shot for the Wildcats Varsity Rifle Team for four years. He was a Team Captain his junior year. Subsequent to his graduation, he also served as Assistant Rifle Team Coach.