

1. Details and definitions

Defining the territory

Who gets recruited? How does the recruitment process work? What kind of financial aid might be involved? The answers depend on the college and on the college's membership in a collegiate sports organization.

Two organizations oversee sports at the majority of four-year colleges in the United States: the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The NCAA is by far the largest of these organizations and the vast majority of college sports scholarships are awarded for NCAA participation.

What is the NCAA?

The NCAA has an active membership of almost 1,000 colleges and universities. It was established to govern sports competition at the college level. NCAA rules define three college sports divisions based on the extent of athletic programs, the level of competition and the kind of financial aid available for athletes. In this book, when we speak of Division I, II or III we are talking about NCAA divisions.

How are the divisions defined?

NCAA Division I schools generally offer the greatest number of sports for the largest number of participants. Division I also represents the highest level of college sports competition. Most important to our subject, Division I schools are permitted to offer the greatest number of sports scholarships. Division II schools compete in fewer sports, compete at an intermediate level of competition and offer fewer sports scholarships. Division III schools compete in fewer sports and at a less competitive level than Division II. Division III schools do not offer sports scholarships but do offer other kinds of financial aid.

Additional confusion arises because Division I is divided into two subdivisions (I-A and I-AA) based on different rules applying to football. Division I-A is the more competitive division, consisting of the

colleges and universities that compete at the highest level of college football and that grant the most scholarships.

The NAIA

Whether NAIA schools offer sports scholarships depends on the rules of the individual conferences. The number of scholarships in the NAIA is small and shrinking and therefore we will concentrate on the NCAA. Nonetheless, many of the issues about how to choose a school and a program will also apply to the NAIA.

How does this relate to you?

In the next two chapters we will look more deeply into defining your needs and priorities. The sports affiliation of the colleges you are interested in will have a significant effect on the decisions you make. Thus, it will be useful to know whether the school belongs to the NCAA or NAIA. If the school is in the NCAA, you also need to know which division of the NCAA it belongs to.

NCAA Student-Athlete Guide

We have already mentioned the *NCAA Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete*. This booklet contains much useful information and advice about sports scholarships and recruiting. It is available free from high school counselors. You can also get a copy by calling the NCAA (800) 638-3731, and it downloaded from the web at <http://www.ncaa.org>. Although much of the information in the Guide will also be covered in this book, I recommend that you get and read the NCAA Guide. The latest version of the NCAA Guide should always be up-to-date with any NCAA rule changes that might affect scholarships and recruiting.

Some definitions

NCAA literature, including the *NCAA Guide for the College Bound Student Athlete*, other NCAA rule books, and the manuals for coaches and recruiters, all use a particular set of terms to describe recruiting and financial aid. At this point we will take a side trip to define some of these terms as they are used by the NCAA. You will run into these terms later in the book and you will hear them as you move through the recruiting process.

Prospective student athlete

According to NCAA rules, you are a *prospective student-athlete*, or *prospect* once you have entered the ninth grade. Actually, you are also a prospect before the ninth grade in the unlikely event that a college has given you or your family financial aid or other kinds of benefits that are not normally given to other prospective students. You remain a prospect until you become enrolled in a four-year college. Being a prospective student-athlete does not mean that you are eligible to be recruited. Generally you are not allowed to be recruited until after your junior year in high school. We will cover being recruited in a great more detail later on in this book.

Initial eligibility

Initial eligibility refers to the academic eligibility status of incoming freshmen. Under NCAA rules incoming freshmen must be certified as eligible by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse before they can be involved in college sports. To be certified you must have taken a defined number of what the NCAA calls *core courses*. Your eligibility is determined by achieving an acceptable grade point average in these core courses along with a correspondingly acceptable score on either the SAT or the ACT exams.

Qualifier

If you meet the initial eligibility standards set by the NCAA you are called a *qualifier*. It is important to realize that qualifying is not as simple as having a good high school grade point average. Your qualifying grade point average needs to be in the right courses and those courses need to be properly registered by your high school with the NCAA. We will go into initial eligibility requirements in detail in the next chapter. Start now to make sure that you are on the path to obtaining initial eligibility, since everything else we will be talking about depends on it.

Partial qualifier

In NCAA Divisions I and II, if you do not meet the initial eligibility standards to be a qualifier, you may still meet the lower requirements to be eligible as a *partial qualifier*. A partial qualifier is allowed to practice with the team, to receive an athletic scholarship, but is not allowed to participate in competitions during his first year in college. Under

new Division I standards that take full effect for students starting college after August 1, 2005, the partial qualifier status has been eliminated. We will go into more detail about these eligibility standards in the next chapter.

National Letter of Intent

The National Letter of Intent is a standardized form used to convey the official offer of financial aid to athletes. The Collegiate Commissioners Association, an organization made up of athletic conferences, produces the form. An official offer of a sports scholarship from most NCAA Division I schools and many Division II schools will come as a National Letter of Intent. To accept the scholarship the National Letter must be signed by the athlete and returned to the college. Essentially, the National Letter of Intent is a standardized contract. It commits the athlete to play for the school for one year and it commits the school to give one year of scholarship aid in the amount offered in the letter. Once the National Letter is signed, other coaches must stop all recruiting efforts. We will talk more about the National Letter of Intent and how it works later in this book.

Full grant-in-aid

This is the amount of scholarship that sometimes is referred to as a *full ride*. It includes tuition, fees, room and board, and required books for courses. It does not include all of the expenses necessary to attend the school.

Full cost of attendance

In addition to tuition, fees, room and board, and books, NCAA colleges are required to come up with an estimate of supplies, transportation and other expenses of attending school. In reality, this number will vary depending on whether the student is in-state or out-of-state. It may also depend on things like a student's major subject if there are special supply costs or other special fees. Nonetheless, for students with similar situations, taking similar courses, the number should be the same. The importance of this number to us is that it places an upper limit on the total amount of aid from a variety of sources that a student-athlete may receive. We will go into this point in more detail later.

Counter	An athlete is a <i>counter</i> if according to NCAA rules his financial aid must be counted against a college's financial aid limitation in his sport. Determining who is a counter can be complicated. Involved are whether the athlete was recruited and the specific source of the financial aid.
Head-count sport	Each sport has a limit on the total number of scholarships that can be granted to athletes. You might think that all sports scholarships are alike. However, depending on the sport, the NCAA defines two ways of counting up the total amount of scholarship aid awarded. In Division I the sports of football, men's and women's basketball, and women's volleyball, tennis and gymnastics are called <i>head-count sports</i> . That means that in these sports there are limitations on the total number of players receiving scholarship aid, regardless of the amount of aid that each athlete receives.
Equivalency	An equivalency is the measure of the actual amount of scholarship financial aid granted. An equivalency of 1.0 is financial aid equal to a full grant-in-aid. Scholarships are often granted in fractions of an equivalency. Thus, 0.3 equivalencies would be an amount equal to 30% of the monetary value of a full grant-in-aid.
Equivalency sport	In Division I, sports that are not subject to head-count limits are called <i>equivalency sports</i> . All sports in Division II are equivalency sports. For each of these equivalency sports there is a limit to the total amount of aid that can be awarded to athletes. However, that aid can be distributed among athletes in fractional amounts. For instance in Division I golf, the total limit to aid is 4.5 equivalencies. On one school's golf team there may be 10 athletes receiving fractions of a full grant-in-aid whose total equivalencies add up to 4.5. On another school's team the 4.5 equivalencies might be divided among 12 golfers.
Sport limit	As you can see from the discussion above, each NCAA sport has a limit to the number of scholarships a college's program can award. How many student-athletes can receive scholarships