



Players' Perspective to College Recruiting

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (June 7, 2007) - Ah, the good old days...back when afternoons were spent sorting through shoeboxes full of letters from college coaches, all dangling opportunities and dreams within arm's reach.

Though at times both flattering and exciting, the deluge of interest from college coaches puts all kinds of pressure on club and high school players to decide where to go in an increasingly prompt fashion. Such is the beauty and the beast of competitive sports: having options.

A few of college volleyball's top sophomores were in the same situation just two years ago. Megan Hodge (Outside Hitter, Penn State), Anna Nyhoff (Outside Hitter, UC San Diego), and Michelle Morchesky (Opposite, Juniata) are all preparing for the 2007 season at some of the top programs in NCAA Divisions I, II and III. These young women are proof that the recruiting madness will eventually end...and volley goes on.

Hodge, an American Volleyball Coaches Association All-America First-Team selection, was also named the 2006 AVCA National Freshman of the Year and Big Ten Freshman of the Year, leading the Nittany Lions to the NCAA Regional Final in Seattle, Wash. The 2006 National Gatorade Player of the Year took unofficial visits to Penn State, Washington, Nebraska, Texas and Florida before declaring her allegiance to the Nittany Lions.

She insists it had nothing to do with the weather.

For Hodge, it was about finding a diverse school with a top volleyball program. On top of that, she wanted a quality education. She says that the most important part of making a decision is to avoid heading down a one-dimensional path.

"Don't just go to a school based on one characteristic, for example, just because of the volleyball," she advises recruits. "Make sure all aspects of your life can fit there."

Having to turn down scholarship offers from some of the best programs in the country is something Hodge remembers as being the most stressful.

"Recruiting is hard," she said. "There's going to be really awkward and uncomfortable situations and you have to put the work in yourself. Nothing is going to be handed to you. If you are trying to get your name out there, make videos, send letters and make sure you always keep up with emails and really get a feel for the coaches. Find out if they like a lot of talking and correspondence or if they're comfortable not communicating on a daily basis. But ultimately, make the decision for you."

Sometimes making the right decision means you have to pay the price...or the tuition.

Anna Nyhoff, a redshirt freshman at UC San Diego, had several offers to play at NCAA Division I schools. But in the end, she couldn't shake the feeling that she belonged at UCSD, a non-scholarship program.

"I wasn't looking for money. I was looking for a school that fit," said Nyhoff, who spent her first year recovering from back surgery. "It doesn't have to be one of the top programs in the country for you to develop as a player and as a person."

She said that at the start of her senior year at Cheyenne Mountain High School in Colorado Springs, Colo., she didn't have as many options as she would have liked. When she decided to take a closer look at some smaller programs, Tom Black, head coach of the Tritons, was very active in recruiting her and she took equal interest in what UCSD had to offer.

After taking an official visit to the school, Nyhoff discovered that UCSD was a great school in a great location and she saw herself fitting in well with the team. Throughout the recruiting process, she talked to Black often enough to know that he was the kind of coach she wanted to play for.

Nyhoff was officially off the market. Next year, health permitting, she will contribute to the success of the fifth-ranked NCAA Division II team in the 2006 AVCA final poll.

While some recruits are looking for great volleyball, others are strictly looking for great academics and end up stumbling upon some great volleyball along the way.

In the tiny town of Huntingdon, Pa., the Juniata College women's volleyball team is busy celebrating its second NCAA Division III National Championship. Morchesky, a sophomore from Greensburg, Pa. on a full academic scholarship, focused all of her energy on looking for the top science programs in the country. The national championship is, of course, an added bonus.

With a full year of experience at the college level, Morchesky reminisces about the pressure involved in recruiting, particularly having to perform in front of college coaches at tournaments.

"I tried to ignore them most of the time to maintain my focus while playing," she says.

While playing for the Renaissance Volleyball Club and Pittsburgh Elite, Morchesky sent skills and highlight videos to all of the schools she was interested in. In the end it came down to Juniata, Duke, Lehigh, Lafayette, Bucknell, and Rider.

She says the biggest difference in recruiting between NCAA Divisions I and III is that when athletic scholarships are not an option, as is the case with NCAA Division III programs, coaches tend to highlight the qualities of the school more so than the athletics.

"Juniata's impeccable science program and great athletic reputation allowed me to narrow it down," she said. "It's really important not to let sports dictate where you go to school. Realistically, it's not likely that you're going to play volleyball once college is over, so a strong academic background is important."

There it is - scientific proof that hard work pays off.

Then you have to decide what colors you want your dorm room to be.