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25 Questions to Ask During the College Baseball Recruiting Process

Written on June 21, 2012 at 7:37 am, by Eric Cressey

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When I got into the strength and conditioning field, I always assumed my job would just be about getting athletes bigger, stronger, faster, leaner, and healthier. And, I was right that those would be constituents of my job, but I failed to realize that there was actually a lot more to consider if I wanted to be successful in the private sector and working with up-and-coming baseball players.

Those unexpected responsibilities included learning about the Major League Baseball Collective Bargaining Agreement, interacting with advisors/agents, helping kids plan out their competitive year, creating a solid physician and physical therapist network, and even jumping in to catch some bullpens.



However, none of these tasks could possibly be more important than the interactions I have with a lot of high school baseball players as they work to select the right college/university for them. While there are a lot of college advisory services out there, very few of them truly understand the athletic side of things; they're more heavily focused on the academic and social components, as there is no way they could ever possibly keep track of what each college baseball (or football, hockey, basketball, or whatever) program is doing. Coaching staffs change, universities move to different conferences, new facilities/fields are added, and new training methods are established. With that in mind, here are 25 questions I ask of all our kids who approach me about the college recruiting process:

1. Will you have an opportunity to play right away? If not, are you comfortable waiting?

It's very easy to fall in love with a campus and the thought of playing in front of thousands of fans, but "s**t gets real" when you've been riding the pine for your first two years of college. Find out who is on the team who'll be playing ahead of you, as well as who else they are recruiting in your class at your position.

This, for me, is also a roundabout way of asking a kid if he is really good enough to play at a school. If you didn't even pitch for your high school team, chances are that you aren't going to be able to pitch for a College World Series team. In this instance, you'd be better off going to a team that will provide the innings you need to develop.

2. Do you have aspirations of playing baseball after college?

Will this program facilitate that objective? If it's going to do so, you need to see a history of players drafted.

3. Have you spoken to alumni who have played at these colleges (or for these coaches at different schools)?

Do they speak highly of their experiences, or do they rip on the coaches? Do they go back to their college town to visit often?

4. How would the coaching staff describe their approach to coaching to you?

Some guys do well with the "in your face" coaching style, and others struggle with the regular confrontation.

5. What is the program's track record of success with developing players like you?

What do they do that will make you a better left-handed pitcher, second baseman, or catcher? Do they have examples?

6. What (if any) scholarship or financial aid amount are you being offered?

College isn't cheap. While full rides are rare in college baseball, the difference between a 25% scholarship and 50% scholarship can work out to \$60,000 over the course of four years. Don't forget transportation costs to and from campus several times per year, too.



7. How tenured are the coaches, and do they see themselves leaving the school in the next few years?

At the Division 1 level, while you have some wiggle room (usually) in leaving a school if the head coach that recruited you leaves, you don't get that luxury with pitching and hitting coaches.

8. How tenured is the team athletic trainer, and what is his/her approach to treatment?

Does he/she just fill Gatorade buckets and stay out of the way, or get involved with manual therapy and individualized rehab programs?

9. How tenured is the team strength and conditioning coach, and what is his/her approach to training both in-season and off-season?

Do guys get bigger and stronger over their four years, or do they just run poles and waste away? Observe a lift: is he/she a respected figure in the players' lives? Also, is he/she considered a true part

of the coaching staff to allow for maximum synergy, or does the head coach never interact with him/her? Are players on unique programs based on their positions and injury history, or does everyone do the same?

Hint: if the answer to every question is "clean, squat, bench," run away. Quickly.

10. How successful are the coaches in placing players with competitive, well-managed summer teams?

Sadly, summer baseball becomes less and less developmental every year. Fortunately, there are still some good summer coaches out there; is your coach placing you with those coaches?

11. How are the facilities, and will there be any construction going on during your college experience?

If they're building a new field, you might be playing elsewhere for your home games. New weight room? You might be pushing cars in the parking lot in the middle of winter (although that may be a good thing for some of you).

12. What is a program's track record in terms of injury rates?

Are they blowing arms out left and right? Or, are guys avoiding surgery while pitching more effectively than ever?



13. What were starting pitchers' pitch counts over the past year?

Are they consistently sending guys out there for over 120 pitches? While it's not exhaustive, [this is a cool pitch count page](#) that looked at D1 programs across the country back in 2014, but it hasn't been updated in recent years.

14. How tough of an adjustment socially will it be for you?

If you're a New Englander headed to the Deep South, expect it to be an adjustment. The adjustment is similarly challenging if you're a Southerner headed North. Are you prepared for that? A new social scene at the same time as a new coaching staff can overwhelm some guys.

15. Do they have the academic programs you want?

Sorry to burst your bubble, but only 2% of guys drafted actually make it to the big leagues. That essentially works out to one guy per team per year. And, among the guys who make it to the big leagues, very few play there long enough to be financially set for life. In other words, there is a 99.99% chance you'll be employed in some capacity after baseball, so you need to prepare for it. Regardless of what our guys opt to study, I encourage them to take some finance courses, as everyone needs to understand money management.

16. Do they have a solid academic support staff in place if you need it?

Do you have a learning disability that warrants special assistance? Do you need organized study halls to help with getting your work done? Or, do you just want people to stay out of your way?

17. What is the alumni network like?

Will it help you to get internships or employment after graduation? Or, will you have to head to the local prison to interview them?

18. Does the coaching staff get out and attend different conferences to improve at their craft?

Are they teaching the same things they taught in 1978, or are you being introduced to more forward-thinking concepts? "New" isn't always better, though, so that's why you ask the questions: it gives them a chance to provide rationale for their methods.



19. Are the hitting/pitching coaches more hands-off, or do they want to start tinkering with mechanics to solve problems they already see with your swing/delivery?

College coaches always see more things that need to be addressed than high school coaches ever can. They get more hours with you, and they see you against better competition that may expose your weaknesses. These weaknesses obviously need to be addressed. However, how much will you be abandoning the horse that got you there in the first place? Is it going to be tinkering or overhauling, and which are you willing to commit to?

20. How is the food on campus?

The food always tastes good...for the first month. Then, most people get sick of it. Don't become one of those people.

21. Who is the team doctor, and what is his background and accessibility?

If you're there four years, chances are that you'll roll an ankle or get hit by a pitch at some point. Is the team doctor readily accessible, or do you have to book an appointment and then wait three weeks to see him? Also, does he have a solid understanding of the management of overhead throwing athletes? Many doctors don't.

22. How competitive is the conference in which you play?

If you can go out and hit .500 or have a 0.00 ERA as a freshman, you probably aren't being challenged.

23. Have you watched this team play a game and practice?

Does the team go through a thorough warm-up, or do they just roll in, do ten seconds of arm circles, and then get to it?

Do players look coaches in the eye when they're being coached?

Do players cheer in the dugout, or is it completely silent?

I had one college kid tell me that his head coach didn't show up for a single fall practice; the assistant coach ran the entire thing. Unbelievable!

24. What kind of throwing programs and pitch selection does a team use?

If you're a long toss guy, go somewhere that does long toss. If you've thrived with weighted baseballs, go somewhere that integrates them in the throwing programs. If you like to chuck ninja stars, go somewhere that you can fight crime.

If you're a guy with a history of elbow pain, don't go to a school where all pitchers learn sliders and are forced to throw them 60% of the time.

25. What is the team's graduation rate?

Graduation rate can definitely be impacted by a number of factors, including how many guys are drafted, but don't return right away to complete their degrees. As an interesting (and scary) fact, only 4.3% of those who have played in the big leagues this year have a college degree. Still, graduation rates are something about which you should ask because it's a question that gives a coach a chance to show you what emphasis he places on academics.

In typing this up, I rattled all these questions off in under five minutes, and the truth is that there are a lot more. The set of questions one asks will always be unique to one's situation. The only commonality is that kids should ask questions - and lots of them, as this is going to be 3-4 years of your life.

As an important addendum, it's important to realize that there isn't a single program in the country that is going to give you the exact perfect answer you want on all these questions. Your goal is to find the best fit, not the perfect fit. With that said, though, you are committing to the program *as a whole*, not just the parts of which you approve. To that end, you'll need to prioritize certain things depending on your circumstances:

If money is tight in your family, the scholarship/financial aid question might be most important.

If you have a history of injuries, the athletic trainer/strength and conditioning coach/team doctor questions might be the most pertinent.

If you want to play baseball in college, but not beyond, the questions about graduation rates and alumni networks will be significant.

If you have a very funky delivery that's worked well for you and are afraid a pitching coach will change it, you need to ask those pitching coaches if they are open to that arrangement. This scenario was made famous when Tim Lincecum headed to the University of Washington with his unique delivery.

There really are no right or wrong answers - but there are definitely a lot of questions that should be asked along the way. One friendly suggestion I make to players is to make sure that these questions come from you and not just your parents. Parents will have questions of their own, but they should never dominate the conversation; young athletes need to take a proactive role in learning about what could be their lives for four years. It not only shows maturity to the recruiting coaches, but also makes sure that you get the answers to the questions that are most important to you.

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14 Responses to "25 Questions to Ask During the College Baseball Recruiting Process"

1.



Matt Says:

[June 21st, 2012 at 8:07 am](#)

Thanks, Eric! This will really help my brother out as he is considering his options after a 2-year school. Which DI programs have the best pitching coaches and/or strength coaches?

2.



Brandon Says:

[June 21st, 2012 at 8:30 am](#)

Good information. Is there any good information out there about the recruiting process to help young players do things properly and at the correct times?

3.



Travis Says:

June 21st, 2012 at 8:57 am

Great points, especially the last one about open communication. As an assistant at a college, it really doesn't impress me when the kid just sits there and the parent asks every question. What's going to happen if the kid has a problem or question during the school year? Will their parents call us up? I know it might seem tough for the kid at first, but communicating clearly and effectively is an important life skill they must learn eventually, so it's great that you encourage them to get out of their comfort zone.

4.



Rob Jackson Says:

June 21st, 2012 at 9:38 am

Eric great stuff. Running a competitive summer program with 14 top teams across the country we have the opportunity to coach some really talented players. However, with that said, the number one thing in my opinion after going through the recruiting process with over 100 players in the last 7 years is the player must be REALISTIC. We had four players last year go to major universities (against our advice) to only sit and lose out on development, because that was the school they always wanted to go to. Now, they are transferring to JUCO's so they can play and develop. If you are a player, look at the player playing your position on the college team you are wanting to go to and ask yourself a question, "What makes me better than him?" If you can't answer that question realistically, "I'm faster, stronger, bigger, have better arm strength, hit with more power," then you aren't going to get a chance to play until you can. Bottom line, "WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT?" BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF. It will make the recruiting process easier and you will be happier in the long run because you are playing instead of sitting.

5.



John Says:

June 21st, 2012 at 9:56 am

I'm a college assistant as well, and I agree with what Travis said. I'll also add that the majority of players will not play beyond college ball—make sure the school is the right fit for you. The most important question I think is, "can you see yourself LIVING here for 4 years?" If not, it isn't the right school for you regardless of baseball.

6.



fred4945 Says:

June 23rd, 2012 at 12:54 pm

I've coached for 35 years – mostly college players in summer, and at jucos, and in Europe. I've recruited (which I hated) and placed our players with 4-year schools.

This is an excellent list. It covers the basics and, with one exception, is very pertinent.

A couple of points: The academic question should be higher on the list. Question 25 should be in the top 10 and 15 & 16 should be in the top 5 questions. Even a drafted player has a poor percentage of sticking in the Big Leagues; the education has the most impact on one's life.

Question 23 is the ALL-TIME GREAT ONE. Lord, I wish I'd asked it before I coached a couple of places!

I think the playing time question is misplaced and irrelevant. Just a tiny percentage of freshman at good D-I schools play. "Will I play now?" strikes me as a greater comment on the player's integrity than the coach's. If a player isn't willing to learn and grow – to pay those dues – I wouldn't want him even if he's a draft.

The tenure questions sound nice, but think about it. You'll never get an answer. Few Division-I head coaches are tenured. Virtually no assistants nor trainers. They'll all tell you they're there to stay – and mean it – until a better offer comes along.

Overall, though, congratulations on an excellent list.

7.



Eric Cressey Says:

June 23rd, 2012 at 2:47 pm

Thanks, Fred! This was actually random list...not in order of importance. However, your feedback is absolutely spot-on; thanks for taking the time to comment.

8.



jerry weinstein Says:

August 7th, 2014 at 5:34 pm

EC

Good stuff. A couple thoughts/strategies.

#1 Go to some games anonymously & sit in the parent's section. LISTEN!!!! If & when appropriate strike up the type of conversations that will answer your questions.

#2 Ask the coaches for a phone list of players & parents of players. Be sure to talk to those who are playing regularly & those that are not playing regularly. Understand that you will get some biased responses based on playing time.

9.



Eric Cressey Says:

August 8th, 2014 at 4:53 am

Great additions, Jerry!!

10.



Andre' Says:

August 11th, 2014 at 5:09 am

As a father I would emphasize the importance of learning of the parents experiences, good and bad and learning of the S&C, player development and coaching philosophies. As always, great article Eric

11.



Ted Browne Says:

August 12th, 2014 at 4:23 pm

Cross-posted to <http://gotoball.blogspot.com/2014/08/cressey-on-being-recruited.html>

Thanks Eric!

12.



Eric Cressey Says:

August 12th, 2014 at 6:16 pm

Thanks, Ted!

13.



Karl Avdek Says:

May 20th, 2016 at 8:41 am

Great article. My partner and I have run an advisory/consulting service for several years placing players at appropriate schools and even in professional baseball. We have an information site; <http://www.allballsnobull.com> and have begun a 501C3 nonprofit foundation in order to aid and broadcast this process; by raising funding and awareness for education, scholarships, and equipment. We operate on a very small and intimate basis (which I believe is actually what most student athletes and their parents not only need but are looking for) and have a 100% success rate; interestingly enough mostly with student athletes who have dropped out of the current industry which is dominated by travel ball.

Selecting an appropriate college and baseball program boils down to some very simple points:

1. COMMITMENT. Is the student athlete aware of the commitment level that is required at this "next" level. Almost all programs are a five hour work day. College athletics is a wonderful once in a lifetime experience but it requires a huge amount of work and sacrifice. Are you willing to make that commitment? Do you have the passion? If not ... it's okay. I wish for you that you find something that does trigger that passion but it is probably not college baseball. Be realistic and not what your dad and mom want for you ... but what do YOU want.

2. FIELD OF STUDY. Does the school have a strong program in the field which you want to

pursue.

3. MONEY. Can your family support the tuition costs. DO NOT COUNT ON A SCHOLARSHIP!!!

3. GEOGRAPHY. Do you want to live away from home or close.

4. BIG or SMALL. Does the student want small/intimate or go to the "big game" on Saturday afternoon with 80,000 people in the stands and the big halftime show?

5. BASEBALL.

Baseball is the last component of the discussion. Several issues but probably boils down to a couple of questions: (1 – Will I be able to compete for playing time. (2 – I am comfortable with the coaching staff in all aspects; their knowledge, their ability to teach, their commitment to me and my game so that (3 – I can "improve" during my time in the program.

6. HAPPINESS. College is an incredible experience; an increasingly "necessary" experience in our society. The student athlete WILL NOT PERFORM in ANY and EVERY ASPECT OF THIS EXPERIENCE if he/she is not happy. Total picture. Not just baseball.

The baseball choice is a composite of all the issues you raise. What we have observed is that there is a HUGE mass of mis-information pervasive in the industry; so called "professionals" who feed fantasies in exchange for dollars invested in dreams. I have been a baseball professional for well over 20 years; have coached in college, have a degree in physical education and am certified as a cpt with two national organizations. One cannot teach fitness without a certification. In fact, one cannot run a deli and spread tuna salad on rye bread without licensing and yet people illicit (the youth baseball industry is a NINE figure industry) dollars from families (many of whom probably cannot afford it) for the "Make a Wish Foundation" that youth baseball has become.

These academies and instructors are prostitutes; telling people what they WANT to hear so ... first and foremost; FIND AN HONEST ... and perhaps BLUNT ... professional who will evaluate your current skill level and projections and help place you at a school and program that considers all of the factors mentioned above and advise.

There is

4

14.



kelli Says:

May 22nd, 2016 at 4:25 am

This is a great article for parents and players to read! There are so many factors in play going into a college program and the clock is ticking! Also I have had to consider the age of my son being he's on the younger side of graduates. Development is key! Thanks for another great passage!

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