

College Recruiting: What Coaches Want Traits most coaches look for in a swimmer

from USA Swimming

To improve chances as a college applicant, it is important to consider the recruiting process from a coach's perspective. In doing so, potential recruits are able to understand a coach's desires and make themselves more attractive candidates. While not all coaches seek the same swimmers, talents, and characteristics, they do share common needs. The following is a list of traits (in no particular order) that NCAA swimming coaches might find desirable. Assess yourself in each of these categories and attempt to improve in weaker areas to enhance your appeal and attractiveness.

Success

Obviously, coaches pay close attention to a swimmer's past results. Certain coaches only recruit swimmers at the Senior National level; meanwhile, other programs seek swimmers of varied success. Past results are indicative of a recruit's talent and ability to compete and contribute in the NCAA atmosphere. In studying meet results, each coach attempts to fill the needs of his or her team and will certainly look to fill team weaknesses first. A team lacking a breaststroker might overlook a strong freestyler, hoping to build a strong and solid program overall.

Potential

Many coaches are attracted more to a swimmer's potential than his or her achievements. In addition to looking at a recruit's best times, coaches also track yearly progress in an attempt to assess a swimmer's development and potential. Coaches want to see that in the course of four collegiate years his or her recruits will improve and remain enthused and dedicated swimmers.

Versatility

Swimmers capable competing and contributing in several events and strokes are more attractive than one or two event specialists. Versatility is highly rewarded in the NCAA dual meet format where athletes are allowed to swim numerous events and relays (depending upon the meet's format). Additionally, versatility is more highly prized by smaller teams that struggle to fill lanes during dual meets. Larger teams are able to be more selective and recruit stroke specialists with greater ease.

Leadership

Coaches seek talented swimmers and leaders. Leaders are not necessarily the fastest swimmers; they are, however, important ingredients to a team's success. Team captains, for instance, are highly regarded for their leadership, dedication, and ability to motivate. Coaches recruit swimmers who exude such traits.

Work Ethic and Dedication

Similarly, coaches desire swimmers with strong, consistent work ethics. A dedicated swimmer is not only bound to improve and contribute, he or she will motivate others to train and compete with more intensity. Dedication and hard work are necessary ingredients for swimming success, particularly for distance and middle-distance swimmers.

Academics

Coaches seek recruits that are motivated both in the pool and in the classroom. Recruits must meet the academic requirements of a particular college or university. Furthermore, a coach wants to be sure that each recruit will remain academically eligible throughout his college-career. Thus, coaches desire recruits who can succeed both in and out of the pool.

College Recruiting: The Big Trip Tips for taking official visits to colleges

Recruiting trips to universities are one of the best ways for you to find out where you will best fit in, and where you want to study. The rules regarding official visits differ from division to division. For Division I, II, and III official visits, the university can pay for your transportation and 48-hour stay. You are allowed to take official visits to five (5) different Division I and II universities or schools. There is no limit to the number of official visits you may take to a Division III school.

Plan Your Time Wisely

If you are going to apply early, make sure you plan your trips as early as possible, to leave yourself enough time to make an informed decision. You only have 48 hours to visit the campus, so make the best of every minute. Try to plan your trip so that your official visit starts on a Friday morning. This allows you to go to some classes and see what a typical weekend is like. If you plan your visit far enough in advance you should make sure you can sit in on some of the classes that interest you. Make sure to inform the coach which classes interest you.

Balance of School & Swimming

While attending classes, notice the size of the class. Notice the ability of the professor. Would you feel comfortable learning in this situation? Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. Ask about which classes are interesting or fun. Ask about how difficult it is to balance academics, swimming, and social life. Ask the swimmers about the practices and about dryland and weights. Ask them if they have improved while at this school and whether or not they have enjoyed themselves. Ask what other schools they applied to and why they ended up at that particular school. Keep your ears open... you may learn something important.

Swim Smarts?

Ask the coach what the average GPA and SAT is on the team and the university as a whole, and see if you could handle the academics of the school. Try to see if the coach's style is compatible with your personality and with your goals. Make sure you see the pool and try to meet as many people on the team as you can. Look into how your times would put you on the roster and in the conference championship. Be sure to talk to your fellow recruits.

Four Year Commitment

Most importantly make sure you are happy and you can see yourself living at the college for the next four years. Ask the coach what percentage of swimmers stay on the team all four years. Look around you and see if people are enjoying themselves. Some universities have completely separate men and women's swimming teams. See what the relationship is between the two and make sure it is appropriate to what you want.

Be Yourself

Don't feel pressured into to being someone you're not. Just be yourself and have fun!

College Recruiting: Narrowing the List Going from many potential colleges to just a few

Narrowing a field of hundreds of colleges and universities into a list of five to eight schools can be a tough process for swimmers. Student-athletes must consider each potential school from both academic and athletic perspectives. There are few colleges that perfectly meet all the necessary personal criteria of a college-bound swimmer. Student-athletes are concerned with more than just academics, as the college must also provide a compatible swimming and diving program.

Five to Eight School List

College-bound athletes should compile a list of five to eight schools by the end of their junior year. All of the schools on the list should be well researched and meet the athlete's necessary criteria both academically and athletically. Consider the size, location, reputation, and cost of each university. Colleges provide statistical profiles of current students and admissions criteria. Compare your GPA and SAT scores to assess compatibility with these profiles

Do Your Homework

Swimmers must also consider each program's coaching staff, history, size, and funding. Similarly, research each team's best swimmers and assess your ability to compete and contribute. Make note of those colleges that fulfill both your academic and athletic needs.

Focus

This preliminary list should then be carefully focused and narrowed. The goal is to develop a list of five to eight colleges placed into two distinct tiers: reaches and safeties. Those schools that will most likely admit you based upon academic and athletic quality and skill are considered safeties. Reaches, which may or may not be stronger academically and athletically, are schools that have lower acceptance rates. Your list should include three or four safeties and four or five reaches.

Get Help

Be sure to develop this list in conjunction with your parents and college or guidance counselor. Remember, while each school on your list might be markedly different, you should be content attending and swimming for each one. Developing such a list is difficult, and perhaps burdensome, but it is a necessary step towards finding your ideal match.

College Recruiting: Marketing Yourself How to stand out from the competition

College-bound student-athletes often struggle to effectively market themselves academically and athletically. Even supremely talented and attractive student-athletes encounter difficulties in promoting their abilities. Two student-athletes of the same academic and athletic caliber might be separated by a strong initiative for successful self-marketing. This article focuses on how to stand out from the other swimmers.

Athletics

The first ingredient of successful marketing is an attractive product. Just as an automobile company spends years perfecting a new model, exert the necessary effort and time to better your swimming skills and results.

Do college research early and often and create a tentative list of probable colleges. Gather the email addresses of these colleges' swimming coaches and inform them of your interest and athletic and academic ability. Persistence pays off! If a coach does not respond, be sure to send a follow-up email. Many coaches will then send (via mail) an inquiry form; be sure to complete and return the form immediately. Start relationships with these coaches, but be careful to stay within the guidelines of NCAA regulations

Inform the coaches of more than just your best times. Alert them of any progress you have made either in the pool or in the classroom. Between two comparable swimmers, a coach will find the one demonstrating marked improvement most appealing. Remember to constantly update coaches of recent results. When talking to coaches, sound interested and remain honest.

Having your club coach contact collegiate coaches is an excellent way to convey your interest and provide him or her with another useful source of information.

Plan and take recruiting trips. They are an excellent opportunity for you to learn about a particular school and for that school and swimming program to learn about you. Be attentive, aware, and interested. Be sure to interact with the coach and to reiterate your interest in his school and his program. Ask the coach if he has any questions for you.

Register with beRecruited.com. With over 100 registered college and collegiate coaches from Divisions I, II, and III, beRecruited.com does the marketing for you!

Academics

Colleges place great importance on and pay close attention to grades and standardized test scores. Prepare for standardized tests such as the SAT by hiring a tutor or taking a local course. You can also buy books and audiocassettes geared towards improving SAT scores. While training in the water, be careful not to neglect your academics.

Unfortunately, the SAT tends to overshadow the PSAT. The PSAT, however, is an excellent opportunity for students to market themselves academically. A high score on the PSAT not only generates interest and recognition from colleges and universities, it provides scholarship opportunities.

Many students overlook the importance of the college application. Take time and care when preparing applications; fill them out thoroughly. Write essays that admissions officers will find interesting and insightful. Get recommendations from those teachers who know you both (as a student and a person) personally and academically.

College Recruiting: Tips for Choosing the Right College Finding the right fit for you

The process of selecting a college is both challenging and consequential. When forced to consider swimming as well, the task becomes even more daunting. While attempting to find the ideal fit academically and athletically, it is necessary to set certain criteria for potential colleges and swimming programs. Perhaps overwhelmed by the plethora of possibilities, high school swimmers must focus their college search by first assessing their abilities and desires. After reading this article, begin to formulate your very own college criteria and hopefully even find several matching colleges and/or universities.

COLLEGE

Academics/Reputation

The most important aspect of a college is its academic program and philosophy. Students must find a college or university that best matches their academic abilities and goals. For instance, potential architects should seek colleges that provide an architectural program or the opportunity to explore this discipline. Many schools only offer a liberal arts education; thus, those pursuing unique degrees (like engineering) must find schools that cater to such interests. Furthermore, colleges provide statistical profiles of current students and admissions criteria. Compare your GPA and SAT scores to assess compatibility with these profiles.

Size and Location

Size and location are integral components of a school's character. State universities, for instance, tend to be rather large, while liberal arts colleges tend to be much smaller. Class sizes can range

anywhere from a couple of hundred to several thousand students. Often, smaller colleges offer a more intimate classroom setting and a lower teacher-to-student ratio. Classes at larger universities are frequently taught in a lecture style.

A school's location is as defining as its size. Many students attend in-state colleges while others travel across the country each semester. Decide where you are most comfortable geographically. Furthermore, the potential college student must choose either an urban, suburban, or rural setting.

Price

Tuitions range from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars. Explore academic as well as outside, privately-sponsored scholarships. Furthermore, research the possibility of student employment, as many colleges offer work-study positions. Most importantly, though, many schools offer financial-aid through both grants and loans.

SWIMMING

Coaching

Much of a team's success relies on its coaching staff. Because each staff is different, be sure that their philosophies are compatible with yours. Ask coaches to describe a typical practice and week. Meanwhile, try to assess each coach's style and personality. Furthermore, some teams have the same head coach for both the men's and women's teams; others have completely separate staffs. Be sure that you are comfortable around and with each coach. After all, you are commencing a four-year relationship.

Program

All collegiate swimming programs are markedly different. A program consists not only of swimming but also of weight and dry land training. Some teams work exclusively with weights, yet others use various tools such as medicine balls, power racks, and stretch cords. Moreover, some programs completely separate men and women. Also, pay careful attention to a school's facilities. Are the pool and weight room adequate? Is there ample lane space? Is there a separate diving well? Be sure to comprehensively research each swimming program before assessing your compatibility.

Scholarship/Division

There are collegiate swimming programs of varied ability. By comparing best times, develop a list of colleges with programs that suit your skill level. Many swimmers are content to compete on the Division III level; others desire Division I competition. Whatever your ability may be, there is certainly a matching program. Remember, however, that only Division I and II schools may offer athletic scholarships. If college appears a financial burden or impossibility, contact programs that provide scholarships.

Begin to formulate a list of schools and programs that are compatible with your academic and athletic abilities.

College Recruiting: A Coaches' Perspective An interview with the Head Coach of American University

Excerpts from a USA Swimming interview with Mark Davin, the Head Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving Coach at American University in Washington, DC. Davin was recently named Colonial Athletic Association "Men's Coach of the Year," his second consecutive honor.

What is the best advice you would give to a high school swimmer hoping to compete in college?

The best advice I can give is for the high school swimmer to search for and find the University that is the best total fit.

I think that some swimmers and parents might be looking for a simple answer, and the truth is that there is not going to be a simple answer because there are a lot of different schools and each university has its own unique advantages, athletically and academically. Along with academics and athletics, I think that students should also consider the geographic location of the university, the financial costs involved and certainly if they fit into the philosophy of a program. Finding the correct university for each individual high school student requires some work and I think that the earlier and more complete the search is that the student makes, the better the decision will be.

Part of each swimmers search should involve discussion with that swimmers club coach / high school coach. A coach that has worked with an athlete for a number of years is certainly going to be able to assist in pointing their athlete to a number of schools where that athlete would be able to be a success athletically. The other areas of consideration: academic areas of focus that the student is looking towards, costs, geographic location of the university; those are certainly topics that others, like guidance counselors and certainly parents, can assist the student with in narrowing the number of schools to look at.

A good way to start is by getting a copy of the Swimming in College Directory from the American Swimming Coaches Association. It contains a solid amount of basic information on each university in America that offers swimming as a collegiate sport.

It seems as most high school students look to a Division I university when they begin their search and certainly within Division I there is great diversity. Even within a specific conference within Division I, like the Big East and the ACC, for example, there is a wide range. There is also Division II, III, Junior College, etc. So it really depends what the student athlete is looking for.

People are drawn to our university because they want to be affiliated with what all that our university offers within the city of Washington.

There are other people who want to be in very different parts of the country. Again, there are a number of things to consider: the swimming program and the athletic program as a whole, what is available academically, where it is located within the country, and cost considerations. There are just so many potential variables.

How does a NCAA coach know when a recruit is a good fit for his program and university?

I think that is one of the things that you hopefully learn through the recruiting process. Most coaches send a general information form / questionnaire to recruits and most high schoolers will reply. We use that to open the door to start making phone calls and writing more personal letters to decide if that student will fit within our University athletically and academically and for the high school student to learn more about us. I think some of "deciding on the fit" has to do with talking to other people too. I know other coaches, and myself, will talk to club coaches at some length, along with people in their family and high school. People do home visits or talk to their families on the phone to make sure that there is a real understanding between the coach and the prospective student-athlete.

How does a swimmer know when a certain coach or program is an excellent fit?

Hopefully one of the things they get with the process is not just spending a lot of time with the coach but also to take visits to the university. We have people that come and visit us as sophomores and juniors. They will come and visit the school, often without even talking to the coaching staff. They try to develop a feel for the university. Then they come on the formal visit to really spend time with the team. I think that it is extremely important that the high school student feels like they will fit in. And the same with the team; the team has to feel like that prospective student-athlete is going to fit in and they will all be able to work together. Every program is not for every person.

What should recruits be most aware of during recruit trips?

A lot. You want to see how the coach acts and how the assistants act with the students and athletes. In a lot of places it is not the head coach that works as the main coach with a specific student athlete; they are in a group and the head coach runs one training group and/or works with certain people more often. The athlete should be aware of this; will he or she be coached by just the head coach or under one of the assistants? If so, what are those assistant coaches like and how do they interact with the entire staff?

How do all of the athletes fit together? Are there team goals? Is there team purpose? Every team is different, but the high school student should feel that they fit in with the team's mission and feel that they will be an integral component.

There are a lot of things to look at. Are there social activities I will enjoy? Am I going to be able to have a complete collegiate experience? What is going to be available to me academically? I think high school students should go to college visits armed with many questions. Even if they ask the same question to many different people on the team and to many different coaches on the staff. They need to interview the program, so to speak, from the coaching staff, the assistants, and the swimmers; anyone involved with program and anyone they meet academically.

What would you tell a student choosing between a Division I, II, and III school?

I think it depends on the athlete's goals. From an athletic level, the competition in Division I is higher than in Division II and III. A high school student that is looking to compete at that higher level should begin by looking at schools in Division I. Also, there is a wide variety in Division II and even with Division III conferences as I mentioned before.

However, there are some very fast Division II and III schools out there. Looking at the results from NCAA Division II and III championships, you can see that a number of these swimmers would be very competitive in some Division I conferences. Some of those people in Division II and III could be getting assistance (grant-in-aid) at certain Division I schools. So, it really depends on what the student's individual goals are. Division II and III schools are typically a little smaller and offer a different environment with a different collegiate experience than a lot of the larger Division I universities. Again, each school has individual strengths and weaknesses so the high school student needs to really look at what a prospective school needs to offer. So I think that choosing between a Division I, II and III school is another part of the selection.

What do you as a coach look for in a recruit?

I really look for somebody that is going to fit in. I have a list of things for us, but again different programs are different. I would want someone that has a lot of desire and wants to make a run with it.

So to me it doesn't matter so much if they are already speedy when they get here. We have some people that aren't so fast when they get here, but we have talked at some length before they join us about where they are and where they need to be. I look for those people to really want to make a run at getting there. I think that is a factor in what separates the more elite athletes: at some point in a swimmer's career they really need to make a conscience decision that they want to be great and that they really want to do this sport, as opposed to "all my friends do it" or "I've been doing it so long that I don't know how to stop."

These aren't legit reasons, to me, to be involved with the sport at the collegiate level. Recreational swimming is tremendous and the sport itself is absolutely fantastic. But to be a competitive in Division I as a collegiate athlete requires a commitment to oneself that he or she really wants to do this. And I feel the same about the national and world class swimmers that are with us, that personal commitment to excellence is the key.

I also think that it is very important that swimmers want to be in an environment that is very open in terms of supporting each other. That doesn't mean that everyone has to be best friends, although I do expect some of that. But I expect on a daily and weekly basis that people are supportive of each other in training. When someone does something great in training, I expect other people on the team to acknowledge that. When someone does something great in competition, I expect other people on the team to acknowledge that. It is not possible for the coaches to do enough of that by themselves.

Our university is rather taxing academically. So I look for people that are going to be able to be successful here academically. I look for people that are going to fit in academically here, fit in athletically, who will bring things to the table that will help the team as a whole (not always necessarily athletically), and that they will really fit in. Every college coach wants his or her athletes to be successful. You want people to come in and swim well, do well athletically, and have a lot of fun, be a lot of fun, and be happy alumni. It shouldn't be less than that.