

A FEW COMMENTS TO SUCCESSFULLY UTILIZING MAPS / MSSL SHOWCASES

MAPS & MSSL sponsor three major **SHOWCASES** each year. The **Winter Showcase** occurs the last weekend in November and/or the first weekend in December, permitting many high school seniors a final opportunity to be seen before college applications fall due. The **Spring Showcase** occurs on Easter Weekend, on Good Friday and Easter Saturday (leaving Sunday free), and gives many high school juniors their first opportunity to encourage coaches to come out and watch them perform. The **Summer Showcase** occurs the first weekend in August.

Facilities such as Joint Base (Fort Dix) are utilized, that allow coaches to access 18 fields worth of players at a time, all within line of sight and an easy stroll from each other. Unlike other showcases which often fixate on promoting only the most elite teams, our experience in MAPS has shown that college varsity-quality players fill the rosters of six to eight teams per major state association such as in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, with many more individual college-worthy players found on other teams as well.

Therefore, we believe that the opportunity should lie with the player (and not be limited to the elite teams), and that it is our mandate to provide an opportunity for as many quality players to be on display as reasonably possible, and let the scouting coaches sort out for themselves which ones they need to see.

Consistent with the stated philosophy, all timely-applying MAPS teams are guaranteed a spot at the Showcases, so players on MAPS teams can always be confident that they can highlight their appearance at these events when contacting coaches. We also round out our participants with other quality teams from the region to generate as much interest and excitement as possible.

As always, the showcase appearance can be made significantly more successful by conscientiously doing the necessary preparation:

- ⊕ Players must contact coaches at schools in which they are interested. Contact information for coaches and soccer departments is available online for every college by finding the college's website, then searching out varsity soccer programs under "Athletics" or "Student Life".
- ⊕ Players should forward a "resume" to the coach contacted, listing their high school and club soccer history; positions played; honors awarded; ODP, select and all-star selections; significant experiences such as championships won, major tournaments entered and noteworthy camps attended; soccer references for club, school and special training; academic background including GPA, class standing, SAT and SAT2 scores, AP and honors courses and possible areas of academic interest. Remember, coaches like to see that players have "big game" experience and can handle pressure whatever the level, and coaches like to see that a recruited player has the academic background to stay away from eligibility problems.
- ⊕ Players should then advise coaches as to locations such at the MAPS WINTER SHOWCASE where they will be playing, providing initially the dates and site, then at a later date game times, fields and opponents as that information becomes available. Email makes such prompt updating of information easy, and multiple email contacts spaced over time allows players to display their genuine interest in the school and its program to the coach.

The earlier coaches are informed about player interest and expected showcases to be attended, the more likely coaches are to schedule their own attendance at an event. Don't wait for your senior year to start: coaches are hard-pressed to get around to seeing everyone who expresses interest during the narrow window of time between the end of the college soccer season and the date that college admission applications are due.

Also, don't be misled by the number of coaches at an event. Mere attendance does not mean they will be watching your game. Coaches attend those games, and focus on those players, that have laid the groundwork

beforehand to assure a coach's presence and attention. Your job is to get the coach in attendance to attend and watch YOUR game, and preferably to look at the specific player interested in his or her school.

Many college coaches pre-register through GotSoccer.com and are already visible through that means. Go to the Showcase Homepage, find the BOYS SCHEDULE BY AGE BRACKETS button (or GIRLS), and click on it. When you see the application, click on COLLEGE COACHES ATTENDING in the black navigation bar at the top.

However, there are also additional coaches that do not register through GotSoccer that have sent us emails, that are not showing on that list. Often, those coaches have enough players to evaluate with whom they have already been communicating, and don't want to invite a deluge of emails with a public listing.

Therefore, these lists should exert limited influence over your preparations for this event.

Most coaches in the Northeast know about the event, and attend based upon their need to see certain players. So last year's list is a good initial indicator as to who is pre-disposed to be here again.

Our experience has shown that about 15% of the coaches that eventually attend only register in the last week before the showcase. Another 30% never pre-register, but just show up unannounced. In other words, if you fixate on the posted list, you will miss contacting attending schools that you may be truly interested in.

You are well-served to also check the lists of attendees from previous MSSL Showcases, especially the same event the previous year. (Links are on the 2011 Winter Showcase Homepage and on the Archives section of the Navigation Bar.) The list is more extensive and inclusive, shows coaches that are familiar with the Showcase, and are likely to come again (the vast majority of coaches attending in the last year have been to three or more of our Showcases by this time). These evaluators are predisposed to return if provided a compelling reason to do so. That reason is provided by a determination that there are players in attendance interested in their program that need to be evaluated.

In other words, contact, contact, contact! Players need to be in continual communication with schools they are interested in. Your time is better invested contacting a coach from a school the player truly wants to attend, than writing to coaches from schools of marginal interest to the player just because they pre-registered.

Remember, also, it is not enough to merely say that there were "coaches in attendance". The value is in convincing those evaluators to attend YOUR team's games. And evaluators will gravitate to games where they feel they have a legitimate chance of landing some of the talented players on the field. Players must identify their interest in a school through clear and crisp communication.

This is especially true for schools coming from out of the area. At the majority of schools, coaches will feel that landing a recruit from out of the area is remote, and not worth the investment of time, unless that player first expresses interest in attending the academic program, and then playing soccer as part of that interest. Conversely, though, coaches will go out of their way to see players interested in their school, if the likelihood of the player's team playing again in this area is limited. The same consideration can be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the effort the player puts in!

A "showcase" merely provides a venue where coaches and players can attend in respectively large numbers, and a context in which players can display their abilities under meaningful competition. MAPS / MSSL showcases have been successful because the large number of teams competing within line of sight and easy strolling distance permit coaches to observe a large number of players that have contacted them within a single weekend. But the key word above is CONTACT!

How To Get the Attention of a College Soccer Coach

One of the most common questions we get is, "So, what is the best way for a player to get the attention of a college soccer coach?"

Yet the answer is really quite simple. Go up to the coach and ask!

Admittedly, the pathway of choice will often be an initial email, and the player may be diverted along the way to fill out a form or two for NCAA compliance purposes. But the fastest way to start the process is to simply initiate communication. Tell the coach: "I am interested in your program. Please evaluate me."

'Top 40' NCAA Division One varsity soccer coaches can approach any gifted high school athlete they covet, with a fair shot at swaying them with the allure of high-profile programs, championship prospects, scholarship funds and other resources unique to those schools.

That still leaves 'The Other 960': the remaining teams at the NCAA Division One level, plus Division Two, Division Three, NAIA, NJCAA, and so on. These programs must scramble to field competitive programs after significant talent has been cherry-picked off the top, and the coaches at these programs need to identify players prepared to come to their school. Often, they must do so with a limited amount of time and a minimal expense account for recruiting trips.

So it is critical to take the perspective of a college coach at one of 'The Other 960'. The coach understands that players choose their colleges for a myriad of reasons besides the fact that a coach is trying to recruit them. A small handful of those reasons are in the coach's control. For example, if athletic scholarship funds are available, the coach can use that as an inducement. However, most factors remain frustratingly outside the coach's control.

Desirable players may already have their minds set on the type of college experience they seek: A prestigious academic reputation or a specific course of study not universally available elsewhere. An urban environment or a sprawling tree-lined campus. An intimate New England liberal arts college or a warm-weather university with everything a large school could possibly offer. A school previously attended by a parent or relative. A varsity program where the player knows he'll be able to start.

So how does a coach know that their college would be a good match for any given player? So that time isn't wasted pursuing a player headed elsewhere? The player tells them! "Coach, I am interested in your program."

Of course, the player should offer the coach a reasonable context for that statement. "I am interested in your school because it has a ceramics engineering program I want to major in, and my uncle is an alum who always speaks fondly about his experiences there. I just spent the last two years on my club team anchoring a flat-back four formation like you use (and from which I note that a few seniors are graduating)." The coach receiving this type of message now has a reasonable belief that this player will actually accept an offer of admission.

The coach is now more likely to invest the time and effort to attend a game, evaluate the player, shepherd the application through the college's admission process and get the player admitted.

College coaches have a limited amount of time to spend evaluating talent. They have to choose carefully how to invest that time. Players predisposed to attend a given school can make a coach's life easier. But they have to let the coach know!

Academic Success is Vital Part of Recruitment

Want to get recruited for college varsity soccer? Think you've done everything you can on the field but still looking for an edge? Attack those schoolbooks! Rack up those grades! Go, scholar, go!

Academic success is a vital part of the process, and in far more ways than most players realize.

First and most obvious, the soccer athlete has to get through the admissions process. The varsity coach can help at the more stringent schools, as long as the player is at least academically "on the bubble."

What does "on the bubble" mean? Once Admissions decides which applicants are academically unquestionable, and which are academically impossible, it is left with a large middle group of applicants that are academically viable if admitted. However, that number usually exceeds the remaining spots available in the entering class.

An additional push from some direction can get the player in. A varsity coach can usually provide that push, but players have to show the grades and test scores that land them on the bubble to begin with. The better the grades, the less capital the coach has to spend on a player with his admissions liaison. Even better are players that require no prodding at all from a coach to get through the admissions process academically.

Getting in is one thing, staying in school is another. Coaches usually get minimal value from most freshmen, and are investing a roster spot based on a four-year projection. It is very annoying to find a player academically ineligible after just one. Again, coaches study academic performance in making decisions, as much as they look at the skills on the field. Solid grades, good work habits, a display of maturity --- all go a long way in convincing a coach he should bring a player on board.

One NCAA DI coach from a mid-level academic school indicated he preferred to see a student who had an uninterrupted string of "C+'s" on his report card, rather than one with nothing but "A's" and "D's," even if they averaged out to the same overall grade. For him, the C+ student was a "plugger," a student who steadily plugged away at his grades and made sure he got his work done.

The student with big highs and lows was suspect, someone with the ability but not the discipline. Put into a college environment where students have to be ever more self-motivated, the student could easily become an early burn-out. In short, academic consistency is a virtue unto itself, regardless of the level.

Another concern is funding a college education. Few students can afford college today if required to pay the full costs without financial assistance. Athletic scholarship money only goes so far on a roster, if available at the school at all. But there are other possibilities.

Another NCAA DI coach advised that he could find academic scholarship funds for his players if they entered with at least a 'B' average and maintained it through college. Coupling a 50 percent academic scholarship with a 30 percent athletic scholarship got a lot of his players over a massive hump. But, again, the student had to perform academically.

There are other considerations as well. Some school and conferences require their athletes to be reasonably representative of the student body as a whole. A couple of high-achievers on a varsity

team can help pick up the overall GPA. Sound like a silly way to run a sports program? It's out there, so take advantage of it if you can!

The NCAA has also started tracking the graduation rate of the athletes at its member schools. If a school lags behind, it can temporarily forfeit the number of athletic scholarships it can offer, obviously weakening it competitively. Again, there is a premium for a coach to fill out his team with academic performers. Given the choice between two equivalent players on the field, the coach certainly has incentive to go with the one with the better academic record.

So get those grades up and keep them up! But if you are reading this too late to change your fate before you graduate, don't despair, there is always the possibility of that final chance. At one of our MSSL College Showcases, we observed three coaches chatting and increasingly salivating at a New York City prospect playing on the field in front of them. The Patriot League coach finally checked the Player Profile binder provided by the tournament, and looked at the attacking midfielder's GPA and SAT scores. The Big East coach next to him stated the sad conclusion: "You and I can't touch this kid." The junior college coach next to them finally spoke up: "I was wondering why you were wasting your time here. This is MY territory!"

Just remember, it was a junior college transfer who scored the winning goal in the championship game for a recent Big East national champion! So there are ways to get one's grades straightened out, and move on to the next level. But why wait and go down that path unnecessarily? There is more than just your soccer game that will benefit!

How Early Should a Team Start the Showcase Process?

When should players start to attend College Showcases in earnest? My inevitable answer is: "Earlier than they think they should." Because by the time the player gets everything right, it could be too late.

Like virtually everything else the high school student-athlete is going through, the showcasing process is an invaluable learning experience. And like most things, you get better at it the longer you do it. (And I am not referring to the play on the field, which many players have spent their whole life honing.)

First, players must learn how to contact colleges they are interested in attending. But too often I hear players wail that they have no idea where they want to go. Exactly the point! Players have to start sifting through the possibilities at some point. A Showcase provides the focus to do that!

Once a player starts investing the time, money and effort to attend a Showcase, a mentor should help the player realize it's a lost opportunity if they aren't contacting schools. But identifying potential programs, drafting player resumes, composing emails --- these are all off-field skills that don't just happen overnight, they need time to be learned and improved.

Job seekers are often told to go for their first job interview with a company they are indifferent about receiving an offer from. The theory is that the jobseeker sharpens their skills in a low-pressure situation, and only then seeks out the interview that matters to them, after they are better prepared for the interview that counts. The analogy applies here: a player needs to get comfortable with the process before it is actually critical for them.

The player must create a rhythm for their emails to the college coaches of their choice. The emails should sequence: to express interest in the school, to advise of a Showcase being attended, to notify of the released schedule of games, to alert of any schedule changes, to follow-up after the event.

Even if a school does not attend the Showcase in question, the fact that a player displays such communicative discipline and persistence can still impress a coach. It may lead to a commitment to evaluate a player at a future event. Obviously, players that start showcasing late in their senior year leave no room for such relationships to gestate.

Finally, think about what the end of high school life is like. The student-athlete is taking SAT exams and filling out college applications. Possibly learning to drive and working to save up for a car. Preparing for the excitement of junior and senior proms. Visiting colleges. Captaining their high school team, attending team banquets, accepting awards and playing in senior all-star games. And just trying to get through their normal school work while maintaining a semblance of a social life. Obviously, having the Showcasing process under control and in motion before everything else piles on allows the student-athlete one less thing to be unduly worried about.

What To Do During Warm-Ups and Downtime at a College Showcase

It's Saturday morning, your team has arrived at the college showcase it has been eagerly looking forward to, and your games are at 11:00 a.m. and at 3:00 p.m. Those 120 minutes your team will be on the field is all you have to concern yourself with, right?

Well, yes and no.

Clearly, on-field performance dominates all else. But there are other considerations more pronounced at a showcase than in a regular tournament.

Perhaps surprisingly, many college evaluators observe a prospect whenever they can throughout the day, not just within the lines. One NCAA DIII coach noted: "Between games, when I'm idling standing at the field chatting with a colleague, I'm often unobtrusively watching a prospect. I want to see what he does to get himself ready."

Coaches do note if a player uses warm-ups constructively, or just goes through the motions. Whether the player is laced up and ready to start drills, or is still searching for uniform parts. Whether he listens attentively to pregame instructions or lets his mind and eyes wander. Whether a player engages in positive camaraderie or just distracts his teammates from their attempts to get ready. Whether he is ready to play when he steps out on the field, or still needs the first five minutes of the game to be totally up to speed.

Goalkeepers are in a category all by themselves. Coaches know that a 'keeper may do a lot of things in a game, but making actual saves can vary greatly from match to match, opponent to opponent. So warm-ups can reveal things the game might not. Quickness and agility. Ability to go right, to go left, to extend high, to quickly dive low. Proper mechanics, good hands handling the ball, and so on...

Another unique note was sounded by a New England school coach: "When the season starts in September, the weather is perfect at the school. When we get to the playoffs in November, it can be freezing. I do a lot of cold-weather showcases. If I notice a player can't deal well with the cold, obviously that goes into my notes."

He went on to say that his observations will extend to between games, if he runs across a player he's evaluating.

Players reveal their abilities while playing on the field, but they reveal their character 24/7. Point is, you never know when and where someone might be observing you at a Showcase.

Red Cards at a College Showcase?

Red Cards happen. Sometimes to good people. But the leading causes of red cards at a college showcase are stupidity and lack of discipline.

I have watched Referee Assignors do their pre-tournament meetings with their assembled crews on numerous occasions. I have heard them provide showcase-sensitive instructions: To be aware of substitution requests at stoppages, knowing that coaches are already struggling to apportion minutes fairly to all their participating players. To keep the scheduled games on time so that evaluators can see the game they expect when they arrive at a field. To understand that showcases involve primarily older players, and to provide latitude for physical contact accordingly. And, to pull discretionary yellow and red cards out grudgingly, to give players every opportunity to be seen by the coaches that need to see them play.

Notice I said "discretionary" cards. Sometimes a player takes the discretion away from the referee. By dropping the "f-bomb" loudly enough for younger siblings three fields over to hear, or by cursing the referee, or by throwing a sucker punch at the back of an opponent's head, or by emitting a stream of wet spittle into an inhabited plane, or...well, you get the idea. The player has forced the ref's hand, and the red one comes out!

Notice that none of the listed examples involve the game on the field. They all involve boorish behavior extraneous to the game. In other words, avoidable behavior! *And this point is not lost on any evaluator in attendance.* If a player does not have the self-discipline to stay on the field when his or her college future is at stake, what can the coach realistically expect of the player when an NCAA playoff game is on the line?

The red card born of stupidity is also a selfish act. The sanctioned player has not only hurt themselves, but also deprived their substitute of valuable minutes at a showcase, since the team has to finish out the game a man down. Teammates can no longer show as well, since they are now scrambling to cope with a manpower disadvantage. Coaches have to adjust substitution patterns, possibly disproportionately hurting minutes at one position rather than another. In short, the whole team potentially suffers for the stupidity of one.

Ah well...it's now done, and the player has been sent off. Is there anything the player should do after seeing the red card pulled out?

First, clear the field without additional displays of poor judgment. Staring endlessly in disbelief, obscenely gesticulating with one's arms, dramatically ripping off one's jersey and flinging it to the ground are best reserved for the next WWE Wrestlemania broadcast. Such actions will not endear the player with the referees or evaluators present, and probably not even teammates who may be losing valuable showcasing minutes due to a prolonged stoppage of play.

Next, after the game, always check the policy for mandatory sit-out games following a red card. Go to tournament HQ, ask to speak to the Referee Assignor if possible, apologize for your conduct, and inquire about the post-game sanctions. Every once in a while, you may be pleased to discover it's less than anticipated. If not, at least it's a positive step toward rehabilitating one's self-discipline.