You're planning to go to college someday, and yes, you think it might be nice to play soccer in college, but college coaches haven't been knocking at your door, you're not quite sure how to attract their attention, and maybe you're even a little intimidated by the whole college soccer recruiting process. If you're a player at FPSC Fury, you're in luck. If your dream is to find a good school and continue to play soccer in college, you are in a good place to make that happen. There are definitely opportunities for our players, and as with any dream worth dreaming, you can get there with a little hard work and willingness to take advantage of club resources and suggestions.

"Everyone can play in college if that is what they really want and are willing to do the work, The true test, however, is being able to find the right school, one that fulfills the needs of the student athlete. And, to find that, students need to know their true motivation for seeking higher education." This to explore the possibility of playing in college, and how to make it happen.

Yes, There's Opportunity

To frame the discussion, it's helpful to know there are roughly 1,000 men's college soccer programs and 1,200 women's programs across the country. Colleges rosters boast roughly 28,000 men and 33,000 women players, and in any given year, 15,000 soccer players (7,000 men and 8,000 women) must be identified and recruited to college soccer teams to sustain them. (College Soccer Connector) Bottom line, schools need soccer players. And, if talent were spread evenly across the country, that would mean roughly 300 soccer players would be recruited from high schools in each state in any given year.

Fortunately, Washington state is known for strong soccer programs. "Washington has produced great players," "including current pro players Hope Solo, DeAndre Yedlin, Lamar Neagle and Marcus Hahneman. Current pro players Kate Deines (Seattle Reign), Sydney Leroux (Seattle Reign and US National Team), Kathryn Reynolds (Western NY Flash)

A Few Thoughts Before You Get Started

Very few people realize that the average career span of a NCAA Division I college athlete is less than 2 years. Many drop out because of lack of playing time, lack of interest or injury. Coaches change; passions change; things happen. Many students find that the demands on their time at the DI or II level are too enormous, often likened to a full-time job. Thus, many students opt to play at Division III or NAIA schools, or even at community colleges, with a shorter season, freeing up more time to enjoy the full college experience. Every level, whatever the division, has it's post-season championship series. It is worthwhile to investigate your options fully before diving in. Know how much of a commitment you're willing to make. Ultimately, it's important to find a school you really like for reasons other than soccer.

Players and parents just starting to think about college athletics often have the misconception that the principal reason to play college sports is to finance an education through an athletic scholarship, but there's much more to consider. The truth is that you are more likely to receive an academic scholarship than an athletic one. Division III schools don't even offer athletic scholarships, only academic ones, and the amount can easily meet or exceed the amount provided by Division I or II athletic scholarships. What's more, NCAA athletic scholarships are given on a yearly basis. Many athletes and their families make the mistake of believing athletic scholarships last all four years in college, but that's not true. They are re-evaluated at the end of each year, and are re-upped, modified or rescinded. Academic scholarships are more likely to be offered for the full four years. Bottom line? Academics, academics, academics. Don't rely on athletics to get you into the school of your dreams. A great academic record will open more doors to more opportunities. Indeed, coaches in most soccer programs won't approach players whose grades don't meet a minimum requirement.

What do you do if you want to get into an academically rigorous school, but your grades are middle of the pack? Some soccer players find that being able to play their sport benefits them in the college application process, where coaches can have some influence. Lots of applicants may have great grades and impressive qualifications, but all things being equal, being able to play soccer at a high level might be just the thing that tips the scale in favor of getting admitted.

Benefits of the Search

You'll need to go through the college search process if you intend to go to college, whether or not you intend to play soccer, but there are benefits to going through the search along with your teammates regardless of your intent to play. Often, high school students don't begin their college search in earnest until their junior year; but to be a college athlete requires getting a head start. Top NCAA Division I schools are scouting during your sophomore year in high school, and finalize their offers early during your junior year. Division II and III schools follow shortly thereafter. We recommend girls begin their search as early as U15, while boys can begin a year later," Going through the process gets athletes thinking about which school they plan to attend ahead of their peers, giving them more time to find the best fit.

Getting to know your school earlier can make the transition after you graduate from high school that much easier because you have a better idea about what to expect as a freshman. As a college soccer recruit, you've probably had a campus visit, met the coaches and gotten to know a few players before the school year even starts. College soccer players who have to arrive on campus ahead of the general student population in the fall often find their transition into college life even easier because they've had time to form bonds before other students arrive.

Finding the right school and seeking a spot to play in college means identifying a list of 15-20 potential schools when you start out, and narrowing the list over time. Except for a very elite tier of soccer players, coaches don't magically find you without you first reaching out to indicate your interest. You'll find during your search you'll be e-mailing lots of college coaches and inviting them to your games, whether during regular league play or at college showcases and other tournaments. If your teammates are doing the same thing, more college coaches are likely to show up at your games, increasing your exposure, and increasing the likelihood someone will be impressed with what they see. It is not uncommon for a coach to show up at a match intending to watch one player, but finding he or she is impressed by another to whom he or she extends an offer.

Follow-on articles in this series will offer tips and advice on how to identify your initial list of potential schools and winnow it down until you're left with real choices when it's time to make a decision. The process, you'll learn, involves communicating with lots of coaches over an extended period of time and taking advantage of valuable resources to help you along the way, including your Club Coach, the and Coordinator, and your high school counselor. Following the process, players learn the importance of managing it themselves. College coaches are simply not interested in hearing constantly from parents; they want to know a player is motivated and interested enough in their program to reach out directly. Players who go through the steps, do the research, create the list, prepare their player resume, create their player video, make the contacts, organize college visits to find the right school, ultimately feel empowered: they create their own destiny.