

Overview of Athletic Choices at the College Level

The world of athletics at the college level is broken down into various athletic associations and each one has its own eligibility rules and recruiting processes. Just to give you a starting point in case you want to make athletics an important part of your college planning, I'll give you a little information about each athletic association and some resources to check out.

NCAA Schools: The biggest and best colleges in the athletic world are regulated by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and they have information posted at www.NCAA.org for your reading pleasure. Here you will find all you need to know about each division. Go to www.NCAA.com for details about participating schools. Next, go to www.EligibilityCenter.org for information about becoming a Student-Athlete. This site is where you must register if you intend to try for athletic scholarships at **NCAA Division I or II** schools. Also, under the Resources tab within the Eligibility Center, you will find a link to their Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete which should answer most of your questions. It is important that you start this process as a junior so you can be aware of the requirements you must meet by the time you graduate. For **NCAA Division III Schools**, the focus at these schools is primarily academic while providing students who have a desire to continue to participate in their sport a place to compete. There are no scholarships that specifically relate to athletics, but a student can earn other awards based on academics or need.

NAIA Schools: These schools regulated by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics offer a wide range of athletics without quite as many restrictions on eligibility and recruiting. These will be smaller schools with more focus on education and character building. See www.NAIA.org and look in the box titled Play Sports in College and click on either Just for Parents or Scholarship Opportunities. There you will find lots of details, especially under their Quick Link that says NAIA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete. This guide will fill you in on everything you need to know. You will also have to register at the NAIA Eligibility Center at www.PlayNAIA.org before you can play for these schools. Scholarships are available, but are controlled by each institution's scholarship committee and limited to tuition, mandatory fees, books, room, and board.

Junior or Community Colleges: Here is another option for students who want the opportunity to prove their abilities both athletically and academically. These 2-year colleges regulated by the National Junior College Athletic Association give you a chance to play with a possibility of transferring later to a 4-year college. Students who find it hard to qualify academically for other levels of schools may still be able to attend at this level. [Go to www.NJCAA.org](http://www.NJCAA.org) for information on member and eligibility rules. These schools also offer scholarships for athletes within the first two of their three divisions, just like in the NCAA.