

COLLEGE-BOUND, PART ONE
ASSESSING GOALS, MANAGING EXPECTATIONS
 USTA COLORADO'S GUIDE TO PLAYING COLLEGE TENNIS.

Story by
DENNIS HUSPENI

WHERE CAN I PLAY COLLEGE TENNIS?

Such a maddeningly simple question, yet the answer for many junior players may take years of self-exploration and research before they arrive at a definitive answer.

And many, many other questions are going to have to be answered first.

High-school aged tennis players need to start the process of answering that question sooner, rather than later. Did you catch that, sophomores? And while every student will complete the process in his or her own way, experts agreed there are key steps to make it less daunting.

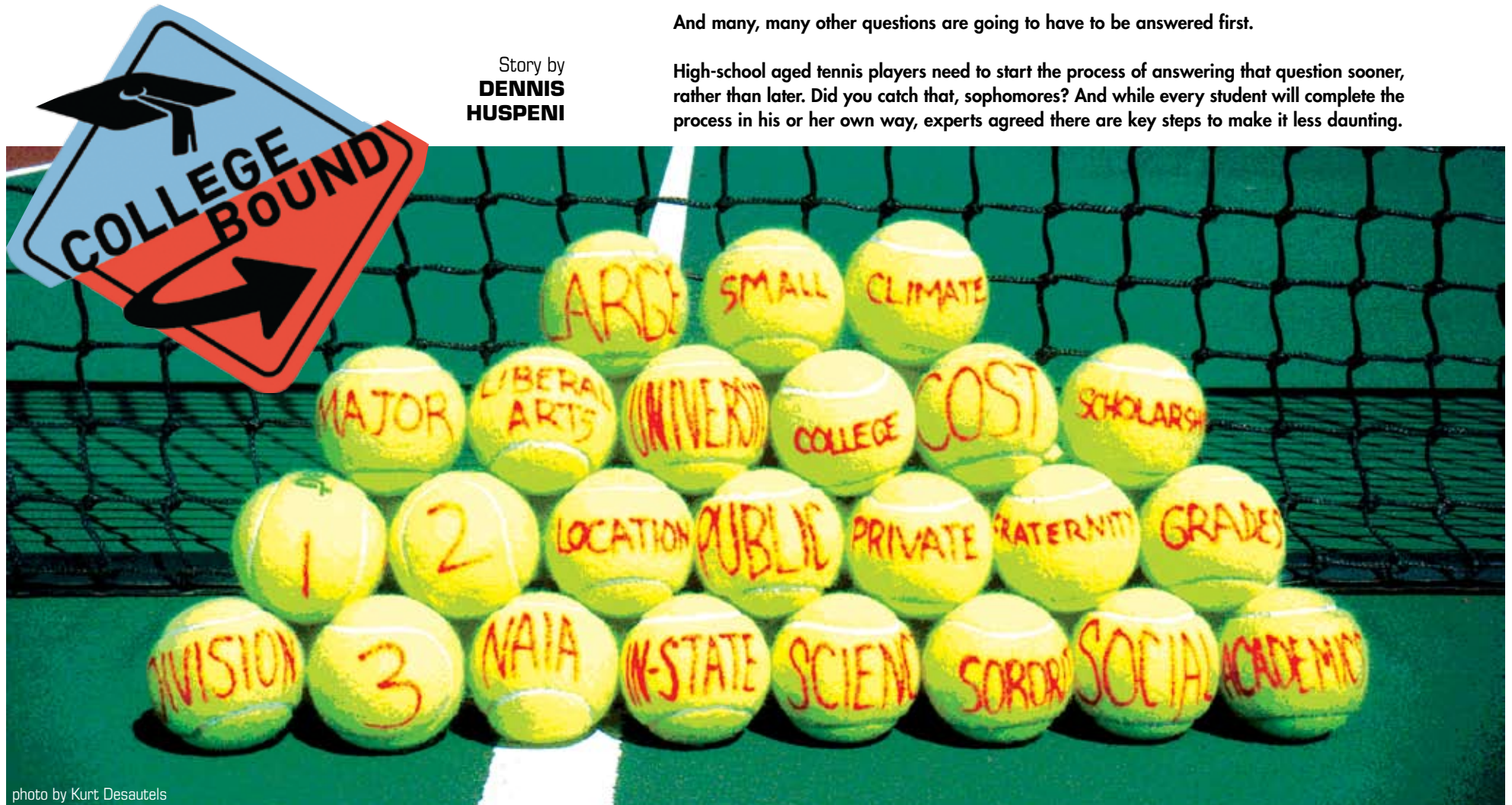


photo by Kurt Desautels

ASSESSING GOALS, MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Invariably, the first step is going to be differentiating between where the high-school athlete wants to play versus where s/he can actually play.

That means a healthy dose of assessing goals and managing expectations.

"You have to have a good idea of your level before making your list," said Danny Westerman, the University of Denver men's tennis coach.

Rankings are just part of that equation.

Ross Greenstein, president and chief operating officer of Scholarship for Athletes, suggests getting in front of some college coaches for a true assessment. His company, SCHOLARSHIP-FORATHLETES.com, does consulting for student athletes and their families.

"Don't ask anyone else," Greenstein said. "Take a lesson from them. (The college coaches) are really the only ones that matter since they're the only one's hiring. They determine the kid's market value."

If it's not possible to get a lesson from a college coach, many colleges have summer tennis camps. While the camps are helpful in building skills, they can also get you in front of a coach for an honest assessment, Greenstein said.

Don't worry too much about what that level turns out to be. After all, there are but a few scholarships available to top-tier college tennis programs.

"No matter your ability, there is a school for everyone who wants to play college tennis," said Jason Colter, director of player development for USTA Colorado. "There is a perception in high school tennis that if you're not playing singles, then college tennis is beyond your reach. The reality is, now matter where you play in the lineup, there is a college for you."

That brings up the most important part about finding a good college. The experts were unanimous: don't look at the school's tennis program first.



COLLEGE COACHES WILL ASSESS WHAT KIND OF PLAYER YOU ARE, IT'S UP TO YOU TO ASSESS WHAT KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE:

Do you feel dejected if you don't get playing time?

Do you rise to the level of your competition?

Do you have the patience to slowly work your way into the lineup from the bench, or do you need to play right away?

Do you want the glamor of being a big fish in a little pond, or do you prefer to work hard to be a little fish in a big pond.

Every player has to identify their own expectations, and assess where they stand on things like academics, public vs private schools, social atmosphere, proximity to home, climate, liberal arts or science and business, and many, many more.

You are a student-athlete – in that order. Understanding this makes it easier for you to find the right college to fit your personality, and your game.

"Ultimately you're going to college to get an education," Greenstein said.

So the academic qualities of a school should be first on the priority list. Then there is a dizzying array of school factors to consider: public or private; large or small; in-state or out; liberal arts, science or business-based. Even the climate where the college is located is an important factor.

"You have to assess what kind of person you are, what kind of student you are and what kind of athlete you are," Colter said. "You must answer those three questions to start the process."

"It's important for kids not to underestimate the academics," Westerman said. "Don't just think about the tennis piece. ... If it's not a good fit academically or socially – say the academics are too tough or not challenging enough – it ultimately will affect your tennis."

Not to mention the ever-present risk of career-ending injury, loss of interest or shifted priorities.

"Most kids don't play the whole four years," Greenstein said. "So you have to make your choice based on off-the-court reasons."

THE SELECTION PROCESS BEGINS

Obviously the high-ranking players who are being heavily recruited will quickly have a short list of schools. It's those middle-tier players who will have to whittle the list on their own, Colter said.

"It can be overwhelming and stressful," Colter said. "To avoid that, try to narrow your list as much as possible at the beginning."

With that short list in hand, it will be a lot easier to make the next move: contacting the college's tennis coach.

While the next article in the College 101 series will deal exclusively with players marketing themselves and making connections, it's never too early to start, Greenstein said.

"They need to pick up the phone, call the coach at the college they're interested in, and ask them: 'What grades, test scores and athletic level do I need to be a part of this team?'," Greenstein said.

continued

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It's part of a three-pronged approach Scholarship for Athletes uses for its student athletes: teach them how to build relationships, network and gain job interview skills.

"We're not a marketing company," Greenstein said. "In today's economy, in order to get a job and be successful, the number one biggest quality of the most successful people is unbelievable networking. It takes work, time and skill."

Getting the information about what it takes to play for a given college's tennis team will help narrow the list and prevent a lot of frustration trying to reach an unattainable goal.

The experts also agreed that using tools like TENNISRECRUITING.net can be helpful – for both the student athlete and college coaches.

"The rankings don't matter and they're not accurate, but it's good at telling you where the junior players are ending up at college," Greenstein said.

The reasons the rankings don't matter, he said, is because every college coach is going to base her decision on watching the player – not an internet site's rankings.

"It's a great tool," Colter said, noting the site's resources for answering a whole slew of questions from the student athlete and his or her parents.

"It's also a great way for coaches to track a player's progress," Westerman said. "They can add him to their recruiting list and it's a great way to keep in touch."

To summarize: do the leg work and do it early.

"You can't do enough homework and you can't ask enough questions," Greenstein said.

"Planning early is the key to all of this," Colter said. "It's overwhelming as it is. The longer you wait, the quicker a decision is going to need to be made and that can cause more stress and anxiety." ☺

This is the first article of the series Colorado Tennis newspaper will publish in 2010 for junior tennis players seeking information about collegiate tennis. Here's the upcoming schedule:

Spring: Assessing Your Goals, Managing Your Expectations

Summer: Marketing You: Making Connections

Fall: What College Coaches are Looking For

Winter: Finding the Right College: A Parent's Perspective



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COLLEGEBOUND

COLLEGE-BOUND, PART TWO

MARKETING U: HOW TO STAND APART FROM THE CROWD

USTA COLORADO'S GUIDE TO PLAYING COLLEGE TENNIS.

Story by
DENNIS HUSPENI

If junior tennis players think about getting on a college tennis team as a job hunt, not just "picking a college," then developing a marketing plan makes a lot more sense.

Yes, there are thousands of colleges with tennis programs in America. But look at openings with scholarships attached and the availability just shrunk dramatically. Plus there are more than 300,000 varsity high school tennis players potentially vying for those scholarships, according to the USTA.

And it's safe to say with the price of college tuition, books, coaches, facilities and travel – that "job" can be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. So college coaches are sure looking at the process as adding a valuable employee.

The junior players with skills usually don't have problems getting attention. Tournament winners find their way on to ranking lists, either via the United States Tennis Association or private companies like Tennisrecruiting.net and collegetennisonline.com. Coaches find those lists and watch top players either virtually online or by attending tournaments.

But for those students without a national ranking – and that's obviously the majority – a little marketing can go a long way towards getting on a coach's player radar.

But there's a right way, a wrong way and an extremely expensive way to market yourself professionally.

In the last decade, the marketing industry for junior tennis players has blossomed into a multi-million-dollar industry. Players today have their own websites, video producers and recruiting agents to supplement the high school and private coaches' contacts.

Here's what one of the state's best junior players, a university tennis coach and a Colorado college player and her parents say about the process.

Go national

Rocky Mountain High School's Casey MacMaster never had to worry about getting attention from college coaches. His potent skills and blisteringly powerful 130 mph serve gave him a top 20 ranking on any mainstream list.

So MacMaster was in the rare spot of not even having to produce a video.

"I didn't do any of that," MacMaster said. "I traveled to tournaments I knew the college coaches would be at. ... Of course, I had to fight to get my ranking high enough to get into those tournaments and get that exposure."

University of Colorado Women's Tennis Coach Nicole Kenneally agrees, saying tournament exposure is invaluable.

"This may make some recruiting companies mad, but you could save money as well," Kenneally said. "Think about spending more money on tournaments and travel."

MacMaster attended four national tournaments in the summer before his senior year. But Kenneally said Colorado high school students can get plenty of experience and exposure at more regional events like the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's (ITA) summer circuit and college camps.

"Players not looking to go pro have an opportunity to compete and get ready for the school year," she said.

MacMaster, who recently signed

SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS

NUMBER OF DIVISION 1 COLLEGES THAT OFFER TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MEN: 274

NUMBER OF DIVISION 2 COLLEGES THAT OFFER TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MEN: 164

NUMBER OF DIVISION 1 COLLEGES THAT OFFER TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS FOR WOMEN: 316

NUMBER OF DIVISION 2 COLLEGES THAT OFFER TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS FOR WOMEN: 211

NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS:

MEN – DIVISION 1: 4.5 DIVISION 2: 4.5

WOMEN – DIVISION 1: 8 DIVISION 2: 6

NUMBER OF MEN'S SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE: 1,971

NUMBER OF WOMEN'S SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE: 3,794

NUMBER OF VARSITY HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS PLAYERS (BOYS & GIRLS): 334,758

MARKETING U

IN ORDER TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD,
YOU NEED TO BE DIFFERENT.
A VIDEO IS A GREAT WAY TO
SHOW WHO YOU ARE.



with Harvard, said he started the process with a simple email to the coaches of the handful of colleges he was interested in.

"You've got to reach out to the coach," MacMaster said. "Making the first move is truly beneficial."

With the internet, it's easy to find current contact information for college coaches via the ncaa.org web site, or pay web sites like collegetennisconnect.com and the previously-mentioned collegetennisonline.com. For a fee, users can generate lists of colleges and programs that suit their needs.

But most players don't achieve the "blue chip" or "four-star" status MacMaster earned.

Those junior players have to be a little savvier about attracting attention.

Become a movie star

Morgan Forsyth of Parker went through the process in 2008 and has the benefit of hindsight from her spot on the Colorado State University-Pueblo's women's team.

"The first major thing I did was make a recruiting video," said Forsyth, who graduated from Ponderosa High School and earned a tennis scholarship to CSU-Pueblo.

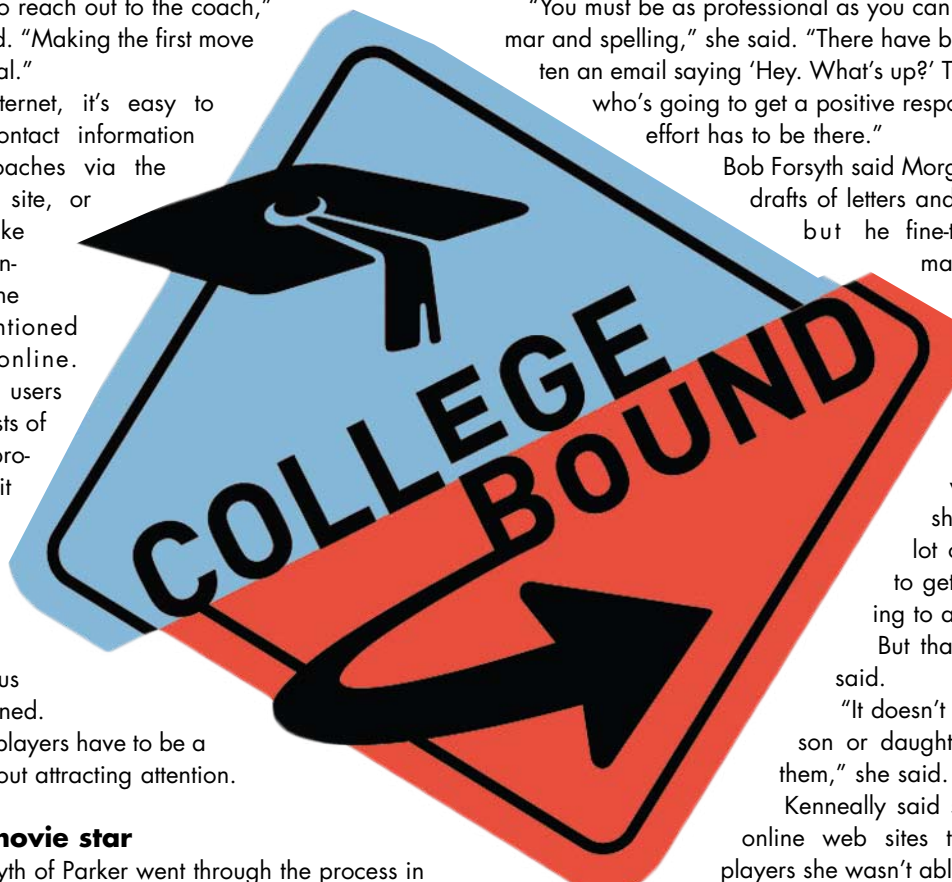
With the help of her parents, Bob and Vicki, Forsyth sent that video with a cover letter to some 25 colleges she was interested in. They found the colleges on NCAA.org.

Kenneally said she looks at every DVD or video that comes across her desk. Many prospective student athletes have also been posting videos on Youtube.com and just sending the coach an email with a link.

"That's been really popular and cheaper," she said.

She also warns against over-producing a DVD. Coaches are smart enough to see through the bells and whistles.

"The biggest thing on the video is to show everything," Kenneally said. "Show the mistakes. Too many times I've seen videos that have been sliced, diced and edited to show the player making every shot. When I see 500 forehands and one backhand, well I know what the player's weakness is. Be honest and up front with the coach."



Kenneally suggests the student take control of the marketing process, but the parents continually look over his or her shoulder.

"You must be as professional as you can with all the grammar and spelling," she said. "There have been times I've gotten an email saying 'Hey. What's up?' That's not someone who's going to get a positive response from me. The effort has to be there."

Bob Forsyth said Morgan did all the first drafts of letters and correspondence, but he fine-tuned them "and made sure she hit the right points."

Morgan made all her own calls to coaches.

"At first, it was very intimidating," she said. "It took a lot of getting used to to get comfortable talking to a coach."

But that's key, Kenneally said.

"It doesn't bear well on your son or daughter if you call for them," she said.

Kenneally said she also used the online web sites to keep track of players she wasn't able to see at tournaments. She was not able to mention any specifically because of NCAA rules.

But it's no secret TENNISRECRUITING.net is one of the major players.

"It was cheap - like \$20 a year," MacMaster said. "You can get a list of college coaches looking at you. Coaches can choose to reveal their name and school. I'd say 95 percent of colleges do that."

Go door-to-door

Another great marketing technique - and a way to get some possible face time with a coach - is unofficial visits.

If the family is traveling this summer, stop at the local college campus. Even if the prospective student athlete doesn't necessarily want to play there, it can be good to get a feel for different programs and college campuses.

"Unofficial visits are a huge missed opportunity by most," Kenneally said. "They are way under-used. A coach loves to

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COLORADO TENNIS asked Alex Davydov, the founder of Peak Your Game, LLC, to name the most important features of an effective college recruit video. Here's his top 5:

FIVE KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE RECRUIT VIDEO

Know Yourself

Before heading to the courts with your camcorder, take time to determine your strengths and how you can make them stand out in your video.

Polish Your Introduction

The introduction is your first (and sometimes only) chance to make a good impression on a coach. Be sure you come across as personable, enthusiastic, and confident.

Avoid The Temptation To Produce A "Highlight Reel"

If all a coach can see are the top 50 shots you caught on film, he/she cannot make an accurate assessment of your game. Instead, be sure to include some unedited point play in your video.

Focus On The "Intangibles"

In addition to big strokes, coaches look for less tangible attributes such as footwork, shot selection, attitude, leadership, and coachability. Scoring well in these categories can pay off in a big way. It can be helpful to work with an experienced tennis professional to bring these attributes to light in your video.

Place Your Video In The Right Hands

While it can be helpful to post your video on YouTube or TennisRecruiting.net, the most effective way to get exposure is to make a list of schools that interest you and send your video to the head coaches.

Alex Davydov is the founder of Peak Your Game, LLC, a Colorado-based program designed to help players of all ages and abilities realize their tennis potential. Peak Your Game specializes in customized workout routines and college recruiting videos.



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see 500 players. The coach also loves these visits because it's exposure for the school. Even if the player doesn't go there, they may tell their friends about it."

In all of this, be aware of NCAA recruiting rules – none of which apply before Sept. 1 of a junior tennis players' junior year in high school.

If a coach doesn't respond to an email before this time, it's because they can't. Coaches can only answer email after that Sept. 1 date. They can also send information on the college or program after that date. After July 1 of a high school student's junior year, a coach can then make personal contact via telephone up to once a week. Coaches are forbidden from talking to students at a tournament, but may talk to the student's parents (which counts as one-of-three allowed official recruiting visits), according to NCAA rules.

Everyone interviewed suggested starting the marketing process sooner than later – like sophomore year.

"We crunched it all into my senior year and that made things a little more stressful," Morgan Forsyth said. "Take your time to do it right. No later than junior year. Graduation seems so far away, but that time goes so quickly!"



THE STORY BEHIND TENNISRECRUITING.NET

One of the most popular websites for junior tennis players and college coaches is TENNISRECRUITING.net. Though "recruiting" is in its name, the site is more of an informational clearinghouse with detailed, independent, rankings and a massive database with customizable search capabilities.

Dallas Oliver, the company's vice president of business development, said more than 1,200 college coaches created an account with the service. Thousands more visit the site and use only the information available for free, he said.

"We have every player, even if they don't work with us to do their profile page," Oliver said. "Every year we get more users."

The service's rankings, which factors in head-to-head play, are valuable for players who can't afford to travel to national tournaments, thus compile points to boost a USTA ranking.

"Coaches know the ranking is a good predictor of performance," Oliver said.

The coaches can also use the "coaching advantage" to create lists – i.e. all sophomores interested in Division III schools with a certain GPA or SAT score.

The company originally developed tournament management software for the USTA. But in 2003, the USTA took over that job, moved it in-house and tennisrecruiting.net was born in 2005.

"There was a niche there," Oliver said. "We mainly wanted to show things could be done differently.... We don't necessarily consider ourselves a recruiting site. Most recruiting services act as agents. We don't."

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

Here are some key websites to help junior tennis players get more information and exposure.

www.NCAA.org

www.USTA.com

www.ITATENNIS.com

www.COLLEGETENNISONLINE.com

www.COLLEGETENNISCONNECT.com

www.TENNISRECRUITING.net

www.JUNIORTENNISNEWS.com

www.JUNIORTENNIS.com

www.BERECRUITED.com

www.SIMPLIFYATHLETICS.com

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COLLEGEBOUND

COLLEGE-BOUND, PART THREE

MATCHING UP WITH THE RIGHT COLLEGE COACH

USTA COLORADO'S GUIDE TO PLAYING COLLEGE TENNIS.

Story by
DENNIS HUSPENI

Do you know what it takes to get the attention of a college tennis coach? Four current coaches share their perspectives about what they look for in a recruit.



SOLVING THE COLLEGE TENNIS PUZZLE:

Finding the right fit is important for both the recruit and the coach:
Players are looking for opportunity.
Coaches are looking for compatibility.

Most high school-age tennis players, parents and junior coaches know the primary key for a junior player to land a spot on a college team is to constantly improve their skills.

But perhaps just as important as gaining power in that serve, fore-hand and backhand is gaining the power of knowledge. Understanding what college coaches expect of junior tennis players will go long way in helping those players better market themselves and earn a coveted roster spot.

To that end, four college coaches shared those expectations: from the very first contact with a junior player right up through the signing of a letter of intent.

"You want great people to make a great team," said Greg Patton, who has coached the Boise State University men's team for 18 years. "I'm not talking about a great player. I'm talking about a great person. ... I've passed on great players who are selfish and self-absorbed."

Patton echoed a common theme among the coaches interviewed: the perfect junior tennis player is going to have a strong set of tennis skills combined with academic prowess and the character to be both a leader and a team player.

BUILDING SKILLS

"It's a pretty easy sport to judge talent because we have results," said Azusa Pacific University's Mark Bohren, who coaches both men and women's teams. "Some sports, it could come down to the difference between a batting average of .250 to .260 and the coach has a lot of leeway when choosing players. In tennis, it's so clear cut it takes that out of the equation. Every program will develop players. It helps when a (junior) player comes into a program with success already."

That's why the almost-universal starting point for coaches is the rankings of junior players, not only from the United States Tennis Association but also from TENNISRECRUITING.net.

"I want someone who's going to take me from zero to hero right now," said Syracuse University women's coach

Luke Jensen.

Jensen brings the perspective of a Division I coach, where the competition for the few scholarships and team spots is intense.

"Many juniors might think a Division I coach will show up at their high school or club to discover the next Venus Williams," he said. "To be perfectly honest, it doesn't happen that way. Our budgets are so small, we're not scouring the land looking for the diamond in the rough. We're looking for players that will win now."



Jensen worries that American junior players are being "out-hustled" by international players. "Seventy-five percent or more of the scholarships are going to foreign students. Look at the rosters," Jensen said.

The bevy of experience those players are getting from the international junior circuit, as well as their willingness to be flexible, is making it "easier to recruit international players," Jensen said.

That means American junior tennis players should get as much experience as possible, as early as possible.

Without exception, every coach said the recruiting process needs to start in the second year of high school. Those waiting until they're seniors will not only be behind the curve, but not able to enjoy their senior year as much if the uncertainty of where to attend college looms.

"A kid playing in high school who has not played many USTA tournaments I don't think will be ready or capable of playing the schedule we play," Patton said.

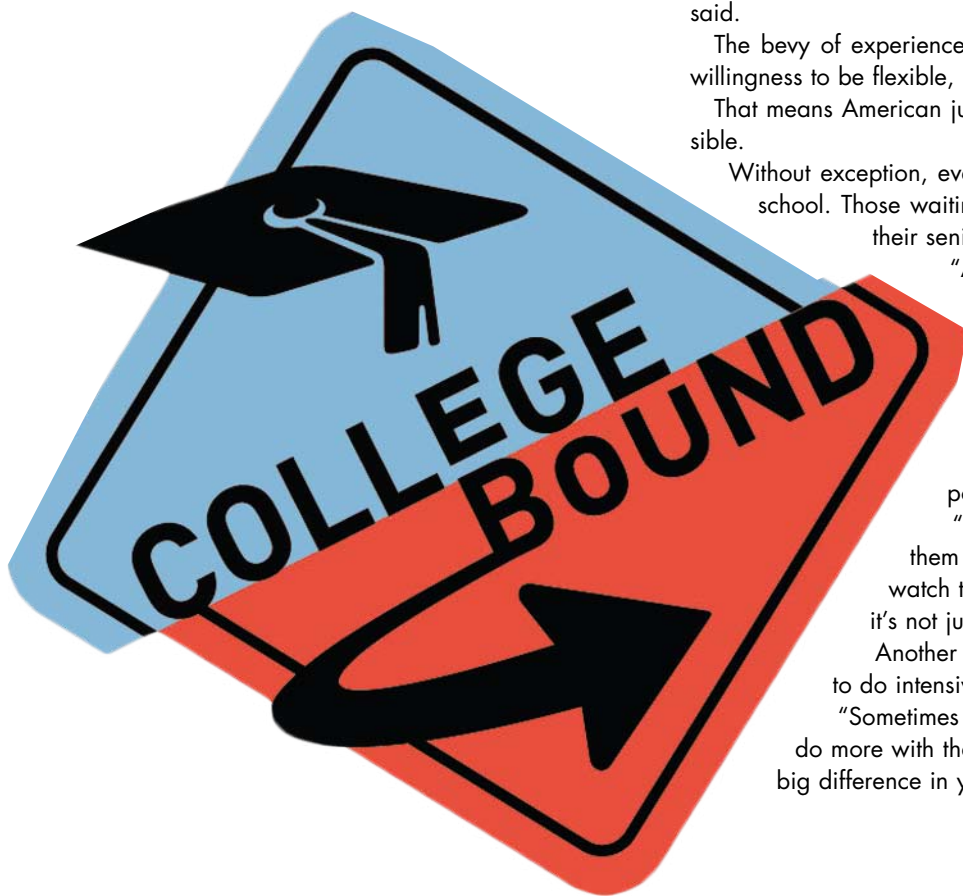
For Colorado players who can't afford to travel the country, there is plenty of experience for the grabbing in Intercollegiate Tennis Association's (ITA) summer circuit and even area college camps.

Jensen said college coaches are fully aware that "points-per-round" rankings have allowed "people with means and money to travel and gobble up all the points."

"Ranking is still just a starting point," he said. "In my case, ranking and results gets them in the door. But I want to watch them compete. I want to watch them practice. I'll watch them interact with coaches and parents. My investigation is so thorough because it's not just a scholarship. I'm investing my life in this kid."

Another way to build skills is to hit the weight room. While many used to wait until college to do intensive strength training, coaches said high school is now the time for that.

"Sometimes it makes a difference," Bohren said. "If they are bigger and stronger, they can do more with that physical condition. While some hit a lot of balls, getting stronger can make a big difference in your game."

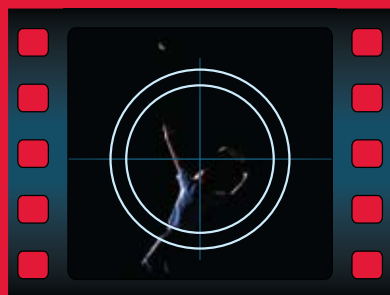


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GETTING ON THE COACH'S RADAR

The coaches contacted for this story love to be contacted via email. But not just any email. They universally hate the bulk email approach. "Some players send out massive emails to a lot of coaches," Bohren said. "I usually don't take too much interest. I much prefer a personal email, sent to me, with some background on the school and some expression in the letter as to why APU would be a good match." "The personal touch is huge," Jensen said. "I want to know they've done their research. ... I'm not taking an interest in anyone who has not invested their time to investigate my program." Don't worry about aiming too high – most coaches will be brutally honest about whether they think you can make it in their program. If that happens, just pick a program that better matches your skill level. "I have yet to see a player playing (at position) 7, 8 or 9 who is happy. They're miserable," Jensen said, warning student athletes not to settle for a program where they won't play. "They have to run the same miles. Lift the same weights, but they're not playing. I don't make the lineup. The best players play."

ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

After getting on the short list of junior players the coach is interested in, securing some face time is an absolute must for junior players. Even if an official visit is not offered – and there are so few of those to go around because of budget restraints – unofficial visits are a good way to meet the coach, other players on the team and get a feel for campus life. "A position on the team will be based on their attitude, grades, work ethic and the values they carry with them," Patton said. "I want someone on the team who I truly like. ... Don't bring baggage and don't bring drama. I want to see a great sense of wanting to belong and being affiliated with this team. This is a four-or-five year relationship that can go on the rest



of their lives." University of Colorado women's coach Nicole Kenneally said junior players are truly under the microscope when they are on campus – considering an official visit is like the final interview for a job. "Be yourself and be humble," said Kenneally, who has coached at CU for 12 years. "Be who your parents taught you to be." She's seen juniors texting during official visits, which is an obvious no-no. Kenneally reminds players that an official visit is in no way a guarantee that a player has a spot on the team. "You have to keep in mind that more players take official visits than we have room for," Kenneally said. Jensen has a horror story about having to retrieve a junior visitor from the campus police after the recruit was caught drinking underage – but that's the extreme. Far more often he's seen players just not think about the message they're sending with their actions – like ordering pizza, doughnuts or sodas for lunch. "My favorite recruits bring their notebooks and take notes – almost like they're an investigative reporter," Jensen said. "I mean this is their future – not their mom or dad's, not the coach's. ... Showing a coach you eat right, you're going to come in physically fit and that you've got a work ethic is what's going to get you over the top. Those intangibles are huge when it's between you and another kid going for the last scholarship available." ☺

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All interested applicants can download an application at COLORADOTENNIS.com and return it to USTA Colorado Player Development Director Jason Colter <mailto:jason@coloradotennis.com> at USTA Colorado by Monday, October 11. Please contact Jason with any questions, 303/695-4116 x205.

COLLEGE BOUND

COLLEGE-BOUND, PART FOUR

MEET THE PARENTS

USTA COLORADO'S GUIDE TO PLAYING COLLEGE TENNIS.

Story by
DENNIS HUSPENI



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For parents of junior tennis players, helping them find the perfect college can feel like a monumental balancing act.

On one side, parents want to provide their child with enough guidance to help them make the most informed decision possible.

On the other side, most parents know it's important to let their child own the process so they can develop maturity and truly take responsibility for their own fate.

The stakes, of course, seem huge.

"It's worth the effort, that's for sure," said Joe Vasos of Fort Collins, whose son Will Vasos is a junior at the University of Iowa.

The effort by Joe Vasos, and his wife Becky, paid off because their son found the right college to play tennis, earn an education and become a part of a team.

"He loves the team and the coach and just the whole scene there," Vasos said.

Vasos is one of three parents who shared advice on how to navigate the often confusing and overwhelming terrain of the college landscape.

Their stories show that persistence, good communication with potential coaches and exhibiting the qualities of a winner all play an important part of finding the right college.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Alex Lineberry of Sedona, AZ, is a freshman at the US Air Force Academy and a member of its tennis team. How he got there is a lesson on the importance of campus visits, said his father Larry Lineberry.

Alex was playing good junior tennis and it became obvious he would play college tennis somewhere, said Lineberry, a USTA master professional and director of tennis at the Sedona Racquet Club.

He had his eye on several colleges and began the process, like most sophomores and juniors, by sending letters and emails to the coaches of programs where he wanted to play.

"He had no clue where he wanted to go," Lineberry said.

But during the summer before his senior year, Alex Lineberry played a national juniors tournament in Denver. His mom, Debbie Pardee, took him to visit the USAF campus.

"He called afterward and said 'Dad, this is where I want to go,'" Lineberry said. "It was the most lucid statement I'd ever heard him make."

At that point, it was easy for Alex to let go of the search for other schools and concentrate on the "very complicated and very intense" process of getting into a service academy, Lineberry said.

"Once a kid makes up his mind, that's really what you want," he said.

Alex put himself into a strong position with good grades, solid high school tennis play and junior tournament success, Lineberry said. The visit helped him turn the corner.

"Touring a campus is key, probably the most important thing," Lineberry said. "For the kids, it makes it concrete and literal. They see the campus and can picture whether they see themselves there or not. It clarifies the decision-making."

HAVING OPTIONS

Natalie Dunn, a freshman at the University of Denver, expressed from a young age a desire to learn tennis so well, she would earn a college scholarship, said her mother Leticia Dunn.

"I told her that's not really necessary because by the time you get there we'll be able to afford to send you," Leticia Dunn said.

After she watched her daughter suffer some injuries while playing at Poudre High School in Fort Collins and lose a coach she liked, Leticia Dunn again told her daughter she didn't have to play tennis at a college level.

But Natalie Dunn never lost sight of her goal to play after high school. She played as



Photo by Dong Wang, TennisRecording.net

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many tournaments as she could while holding down the challenging rigors of Poudre's International Baccalaureate program.

Perhaps because she entered high school a year younger than most students, Leticia Dunn said, Natalie hesitated in making her final decision. Her success on the court – and in the classroom – had coaches reaching out.

"I just left it to her and figured if she wants to do it, she will find a way," Dunn said. "I took a step back."

The combination of having a friend that was going to DU, as well as clicking with one of the team's assistant coaches, finally set Natalie's decision.

"Her thing was looking for consistency of a coach," Dunn said.

Natalie had options because of her grades.

"Academics are huge," Dunn said. "There are academic scholarships out there for

kids."

And though she couldn't get to as many tournaments as some junior players, Natalie made the most of the ones she attended.

"We always told her it doesn't matter how many, but how you play them," Dunn said. "You do your best and try hard ... keep fighting hard and have good behavior on the court."

Dunn said often they didn't even know they were being watched.

"You never know who's watching," she said, noting coaches may be there to observe someone else but take notice of good effort and sportsmanship.

In retrospect, Dunn said she wishes Natalie had started the process sooner. She also advised parents to help students create a chart of different schools, complete with academic highlights, team information, contacts with coaches, etc. They should also familiarize themselves with NCAA rules surrounding recruiting.

USING EVERY ADVANTAGE

Will Vasos was lucky in his college search in that he had older siblings who had earned college athletic scholarships to help guide him, Joe Vasos said.

"It was invaluable to have an older sister who knew the ins-and-outs of the process," he said.

The 2008 state singles champion from Rocky Mountain High School sent a video tape showing his strokes and included an interview highlighting "who he is and what he wanted to accomplish," to mostly Big 10 schools.

Joe and Becky Vasos graduated from UI and the family has relatives living there, so Will Vasos focused his efforts on that school.

Building a good player profile was crucial, Vasos said, to shape "how he would be perceived as a teammate and a member of the institution."

Three integral pieces of that profile were Vasos' love of the sport, his desire to play at the next level and the importance of teamwork.

"Will had to sell himself and represent himself," Vasos said.

Getting to know his future coach was important to Will and Vasos said it should be a priority of any junior player before making a decision.

"They really saw life on the same plane," Vasos said. "It was just like that relationship existed from day one. It should feel right for the kids."

Vasos said it's a long road, for both the junior player and their parents, but "if you're serious, it can happen."

"It can be tough deal for student athletes. Even for so-called minor sports, the demand can be incredible," Vasos said. "But we've found out the rewards are greater for all that effort you put in." ☺



WILLVASOS

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