

## Chapter 7

# Some important questions you might not know to ask

Before you start contacting coaches (or being contacted by them), take the time to put together a list of questions that you want to ask the coaching staff and the other players on the team. Keep it by the phone and on a home computer or PDA so you'll always have access to it. The reality of coach conversations is that you may be nervous and forget everything you originally planned to ask unless it's written down in front of you. There are also lots of great questions you would probably never think of on your own. So here are some to consider including on your list:

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### **Question 1: When are competitions typically scheduled and how much travel time is involved?**

This can vary tremendously by school. Some schools compete in a conference where all of the schools are within a few hours bus ride of each other, while others are spread across the country and the team flies on a commercial airline which tends to take a lot more time. Weeknight games will demand a much greater percent of time away from the classroom than weekend games. Ask about how much class time is typically missed and how athletes manage.

**Question 2: Would you say your program is more demanding, about the same, or less demanding than other programs?**

This is to try and get a handle on how much of a commitment a program will require, because every athlete has to decide what the right academic/athletic/social balance is for him or her. For some athletes, the more sports, the better, and the coach who says their program is more demanding is the perfect fit. But if you're hoping to get involved in other (non-athletic) activities, or you're more academically focused, this kind of program might not be such a great fit for you. By the way, don't expect a coach to tell you their program is less demanding than others.

**Question 3: How often do you play freshmen and what are my chances of playing as a freshman?**

Most kids want to know if they're likely to play as a freshman. Any astute coach will tell you that playing time depends on performance, attitude, and other "you" things that they won't know until they see you in action. This is an easy (and fair) way to deflect the question. But if you ask a coach how often they have played freshmen in the past five years, they can't hide their record, and history will speak for itself. With this question, you'll get a very good idea of how likely any given freshman is to get playing time.

**Question 4: In the past five years, how many players have transferred to a program at another school?**

Players quit a team for all kinds of reasons that aren't necessarily reflective of poor coaching. If non-scholarship players reach junior year and the writing is on the wall that it's never going to happen for them, they may decide to quit and pursue other activities before their college years are over. Or players may decide they don't want to compete anymore and other schools are a better fit for them if they're no longer playing their sport. But when scholarship players give up a year of eligibility so they can transfer, or non-scholarship players transfer to another program, it's an indication that they still want to play but something wasn't working for them. A few transfers here and there are fine. But a coach who has kids transferring out year after year has something else going on that you better figure out before you say yes.

**Question 5: What would your players tell me they like most and least about you?**

This is just a fun question to ask. Throw out the bait and see what you reel in. It will give you a sense about what this coach takes pride in, and what they're less comfortable with. While you're at it, ask the team members you stay with during your campus visit what they like most and least about the coach. And be prepared to answer the same question about you (what did your teammates and coach like most and least about you?)

**Question 6: How many players are you considering for my position and where am I on the depth chart?**

Good luck getting an answer to this one, but you should still ask. If you are their "number one beyond any shadow of a doubt" recruit for that position, they'll probably emphatically let you know. But if you're anywhere else on the depth chart, you will get a less definitive and not very revealing answer. It's not in a coach's best interest to treat you as anything less than someone they really want. Just know that if it's not obvious that you're their number one, you're probably not and your chances of getting an offer there will depend on the decisions of the athletes stacked in front of you on the depth chart.

**Question 7: Will I be able to go home for Thanksgiving/Christmas/spring break? Will I be able to do a semester abroad? Do I have to be at school during the summer?**

This may not be a big deal to you but lots of kids don't even think to ask and are devastated to find out they only get thirty-six hours for Christmas or they can't go home for Thanksgiving at all. Many programs require kids to take summer school so they can bankroll some credits and take less demanding course-loads during their sports season. If you play a winter sport that spans across two semesters, forget about a semester abroad. Do you care? If you do, you'd better ask the question.

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**Question 8: Do the players eat/study/room together?**

Again, you might not care. But while some kids truly identify with their teammates and are happy to spend all their waking hours with them, others need some space and distance. Know the living conditions before you commit.

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**Question 9: If I'm seriously injured during competition or practice, is the university responsible for all medical expenses, and for how long will my expenses be covered once I've exhausted my eligibility?**

This is another thing people seldom think to ask about because most assume the university will cover all sports-related medical expenses. Technically, the NCAA rules don't mandate that athletic programs provide medical coverage for sports-related injuries although most do. But even if they do, they may limit the coverage to expenses incurred while a student maintains their five years of eligibility. A catastrophic sports injury could generate medical costs for life. Make sure you know the policy of the school you're planning to commit to.

**Question 10: What is the fan support like?**

Some schools have rabid fan bases that always show up for home games and travel with the team; others have a campus full of disinterested students. If your enjoyment of playing is dependent on large and loud crowds, make sure your school has them.

**Question 11: Is this team a well-oiled machine or is it going through a re-building period?**

This has a lot to do with what motivates you. Some kids are only happy competing for the best of the best, while others are highly motivated by the prospect of helping build something. If a program has a lot of graduating seniors, a coaching transition, or a change in division level or conference, it is more likely to be re-building. Are you up for it?

# Instant Replay:

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