Introduction

Find useful information on college tennis for athletes, parents & junior coaches
# Introduction

## FUTURE STUDENT ATHLETES

Chances are you are one of the thousands of teenagers who have looked into playing college tennis at least once during their tennis career. If so, you might be from the USA and you already know a great deal about college sports. Or you are from another country – just like ~19% of all male and ~27% of all female tennis players who play collegiate tennis (in 2007). Either way, this shall be a useful guideline on your way to college.

During the recruiting process, you might come across the term “Prospective student athlete” – which is the name used for players in their final year of high school.

## PARENTS

Welcome to you as well. As this is a major decision in the lives of young athletes, parents are always involved in the recruiting process. If your son or daughter happens to be looking into college tennis, the information in this guide is as much for you as it is for athletes.

## HIGH SCHOOL/JUNIOR COACHES

If you are active in the development of young tennis players in their junior careers (under 18 years), you really do play a major role in the choices your players make.
Introduction

That role comes with huge responsibility as it entails that you prepare and guide your kids in the right direction: Once they graduate from high school...

- Will they continue playing tennis?
- Will they apply for college or enter the job market?
- What if one of your players has a realistic shot of going pro?
- When is the right time to do so and could a college tennis season or two help the player develop further?

This college tennis guide shall help coaches like you understand what implications this “career path” involves and what amazing opportunities it has to offer.

7-STEP GUIDE TO COLLEGE TENNIS

This guide will inform you about:
- #2 US College Tennis
- #3 Athletics
- #4 Academics
- #5 Recruiting Process
- #6 Signing
- #7 Life After College

7-Step Guide to College Tennis
US College Tennis

Understand how the college sports/college tennis system actually works
UNIVERSITIES/COLLEGES
There are more than 10,500 universities in the United States, of which more than 1,700 currently sponsor tennis programs. Once you surf the web searching for a college that suits you, you come across public and private universities; the latter charging higher tuition fees.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE UNIVERSITY
The higher education system is divided into public and private colleges. Public universities are financed by the government. Private institutions are funded by the tuition fees of its students. A general rule of thumb, public schools offer a larger selection of degrees at lower costs than private schools.

Different from other countries, attending college is not free – it's in fact a very large investment for families.

FINANCIAL AID
Colleges grant a variety of financial aid to applicants:
- Need-based (family's financial background)
- Merit-based (academic/athletic)
With costs of studying high, it's great news for athletes that a good level of tennis can get them a scholarship.

COLLEGE SPORTS
Depending on the size of the institution, sports facilities are usually provided for and are an integral part of the university campus.
While this may serve purely recreational purposes for an institution's student body and staff, any university has the possibility to organize sports activities more formally by setting up different sports programs for its student body. By doing so, an institution has the option to join any of the existing sports-governing associations, which organize, regulate, and sanction intercollegiate sports competition. These associations are the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA. You can find more information on their difference in section #3 Athletics. With a school participating in intercollegiate competition, its athletic department is responsible for the bureaucratic requirements a membership in one of the above-mentioned associations entails.

Depending on the size of the school, it runs several sports programs besides tennis, such as football, hockey, baseball, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and many other. This variety of college teams and different athletes really makes student life on campus a special experience.

**COLLEGE TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS**

There are two different forms of scholarships for **headcount** sports and **equivalency** sports:

- Headcount sports foresee the provision of full-ride scholarships per athlete.
- Equivalency sports allow the coach to divide the available scholarship money among the team members.

The value of one full-ride scholarship is equivalent to 100% of all costs which occur during a regular year, comprising tuition, housing, meal plan, fees, and course-related material.
The athletics department is subject to limitations concerning the maximum amount of granted scholarships. Tennis is an equivalency sport in all divisions, except in NCAA D-I women’s tennis and NJCAA, where tennis counts as headcount sports.

Scholarship agreements are for one academic year and may be renewed or cancelled by the coach at the end of the year. Typically, students maintain their scholarships for the time of the entire bachelor’s degree, unless they decide to transfer school. However, the athletics department has to notify you in writing about your financial aids agreement for the next season.

**COLLEGE TENNIS UNIVERSE**

College Tennis is a spring sport. In other words, the main season is set to happen in the first six months of the year.

**FALL SEASON**

The off-season in the fall is used by coaches to prepare their team on and off-the court. Friendly Invitationals”) enable players to adapt to the new environment, such as surface, level of play, or climate while at the same time the individuals could be placed in the line-up. Important questions to be answered are…

- How is the development of the players during the fall?
- Do the players work hard in practice sessions?
- How strong are the players in singles?
- How strong are the players in doubles?
- Which players team up best in doubles?
- Against what type of opponent can the players excel?
- How do the players deal with stress and pressure?

**SPRING SEASON**

The spring season is then all about competing against other tennis programs within the same conference. A typical “dual-match” looks something like the graphic on the next page: 3 doubles are followed by 6 singles. The team winning 4 points first, takes home the victory.

The better a team does - especially so against stronger teams - the more it may improve in the rankings. When we say rankings, we need to explain the way college tennis is set up in a bit more detail.
CONFERENCES & DIVISIONS
Divisions are all the organizations we have covered above: The NCAA D-I, NCAA D-II, NCAA D-III, NAIA, and the NJCAA. Within each of these divisions, there are several conferences, such as the Southland Conference in D-I or Golden State Athletic Conference in NAIA.

Now in each of these conferences, a number of teams play against each other to determine their champion. As a result, you have a team ranking within each of the various conferences, as well as a ranking for the division as a whole.

The result of this set-up is that there are a lot of winning programs. Once you start talking to coaches of different parts of the country, they will attempt to sell their tennis program to you and part of that is obviously how successful the team has been in the past.

The best teams meet at the end of the season to crown the national champion.

MAJOR TOURNAMENTS
As in all sports, there are a few major events, which are among the most prestigious tournaments to win for the college elite; both on the individual and the team level:

FALL
- All American Championships
- National Indoor Championships

SPRING
- National Team Indoor Championships
- National Team Championships
- Singles & Doubles Championships

✔ Dual matches see a total of 9 matches: 3 doubles followed by 6 singles

Structure of a Dual-Match
Former ITA-#1 Sebastian Stiefelmeyer – University of Louisville ‘15

Athletics

Get an understanding of the college divisions & where your future might be…
5 College Divisions – Which One Will Be Yours?

COLLEGE DIVISIONS

Now here’s where the fun part starts – the various college divisions. How strong is the level of play? And what should you expect from a NCAA school compared to a NAIA school? It depends.

Teams in the same division and even conference can have completely different levels. We will explain a bit later why that is, but for now the graphic below should help get a rough idea of how to look at the 5 divisions:

Strength of College Divisions

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION - NCAA

NCAA D-I

Division I in the NCAA is by far the strongest college league. Here’s the place for all the top players in junior tennis, who want to play college tennis. Think James Blake or John Isner and you understand that D-I tennis has brought forward really excellent players. But there’s a lot more to it with plenty other tennis programs, which are by far not as strong and even comparable to Division II (D-II) tennis.

NCAA D-I schools are generally the largest schools and, very often, major public state universities. Sports teams are a huge part of the universities’ college life.
plenty of athletic scholarships available and chances may even be higher, as many of the top kids tend to focus on D-I schools only.

NCAA D-II schools very often have an outstanding academic reputation. As they are smaller in the number of students, studying at such a college can mean a more personal experience; a fact which many students value highly.

NCAA D-III

NCAA D-III schools are often the most academically renowned ones. However, there is one major drawback: there are no athletic scholarships available. As a result, it is a rather unusual choice for Internationals, as it is slightly more complex to receive funding. BUT, academic scholarships and other financial aid are available.

If you consider yourself an average athlete, but an outstanding student with high aspirations, you should definitely see what D-III coaches and universities have to offer...

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS - NAIA

The NAIA as division is comparable to the NCAA D-II in the level of tennis. There are extremely strong NAIA teams, which can easily compete with NCAA D-I schools. And there are other teams, which are below the level of NCAA D-II schools. You see, quite a variety, but with good scholarship money available, a very attractive option for to-be student athletes.

The broad range is due to the fact that players are not subject to the same strict eligibility rules as with the NCAA. As a result, there are some stronger and slightly older players who have decided somewhat later than others to study, and the NAIA is

It’s these teams people cheer for and even watch on TV.

Upcoming professionals in sports such as basketball, football, or ice hockey very often come from D-I colleges. Ivy League schools, such as Harvard, Princeton, or Yale also compete within this division, but differ from other D-I schools in one significant aspect: they don’t award any athletic scholarships.

While many future student athletes aim for D-I schools only, you should not limit yourself to these only. There are plenty of excellent schools both athletically and academically which compete in D-II and provide the same - and maybe even better - location, atmosphere, and experience.

NCAA D-II

NCAA D-II schools are on average a level below D-I schools when it comes to athletics. The top NCAA D-II schools could compete and win against NCAA D-I teams - and they also do so in dual matches. There are 8 of the most renowned universities all run tennis programs, but do not award tennis scholarships


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the only remaining option for them to play collegiate tennis and have their studies financed.

The college experience is likely to be similar to that of NCAA D-II or NCAA D-III schools, as schools are smaller in size and student enrolment, but spread all over the country. A great option for you if you:

• Are not the strongest in your sport, but still play at a very good level
• Wouldn’t be able to compete in the NCAA
• Are on the lookout for a smaller university with a good reputation

NATIONAL JUNIOR COLLEGE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION - NJCAA

The NJCAA differs somewhat from the other divisions. A junior college is a two-year institution, which you complete with an Associate degree. After that, students move on to another college, which could then be any four-year institution, like a NCAA or NAIA school. It is important to

know that you are able to transfer your grades from the first two years at college, leaving you with another two years before graduating with a bachelor's degree.

It is certainly not the most usual way of getting a foot into the college sports system, for foreigners in particular, but definitely one to consider for various reasons. For instance, if you feel like interest is not yet picking up from larger schools' coaches; it will be easier for you to find a team after two years, as coaches can have a look at your results on a college level.

You might not have heard so much about people getting recruited into NJCAA schools, but there is much interest out there from coaches, so make sure to keep your eyes open and be open-minded about this option as well.

Bowdoin College – Brunswick, ME (NCAA D-III)
HOW DO YOU FIND THE RIGHT TEAM?

Do you like the college you picked in the end? This is a key question and it’s typically the result of 3 different factors:
1) Do you like the school, generally speaking?
2) Are you happy with your degree choice and the academic level?
3) Do you get the athletic challenge you had wished for and do you receive enough playing time?

As we’re still in section #3 Athletics, let’s take a look at the following questions and issues:

How can you ensure to get a good match athletically?

Why do people end up unhappy?

HOW TO GET A GOOD MATCH

On page 10 we mention that teams can be of very different quality. But how can you find out about this if you’ve never before seen a college tennis match?

There are essentially 3 options:
1) Go through the roster (line-up) of the teams and read about the six starting players. How have they done in their junior careers? Have they played nationally only or internationally as well? How successful were they? Chances are you find some useful information, which will enable you to compare yourself against them. Thanks to Youtube and passionate college tennis followers, you also find a vast number of video material online to get an idea of the level of play.
2) Sign up on Universal Tennis Rating (UTR) for free.

The team behind UTR has created a system, which helps tremendously. The Rating calculates a player’s number on a scale from 1.00 to 16.50. Look at it like the golf handicap, which enables you to compare your game to that of pros: Roger Federer for example has a UTR of 16.22.
Former college player and ATP #11 John Isner a UTR of 15.80 (ATP, UTR - March 12, 2016).

3) Ask us 😊
If you face any difficulties – drop us an e-mail – we’re happy to help! Find our e-mail to the left

What is your UTR?
Once you got your Rating, you have the option of also looking up all the college teams. You can find out the UTR of each of the team members and get a really good idea if you would have a realistic chance of getting playing time or not.
Let’s assume you are a girl and you really want to play at Ohio State. Let’s say you have a UTR of 10.5. With that Rating you would play somewhere at the bottom of the line-up, considering the current #5 player has a UTR of 10.7.

WHY DO PEOPLE END UP UNHAPPY

There are two major reasons for freshmen to realize that they might have made the wrong choice by signing with the particular college team.

Because as college athlete, you want to do one thing: compete.

If the coach decides you don’t make the line-up and has 6 other athletes play instead – you have a problem. Coaches want their strongest team to compete. So, do your homework well by talking to the coach and researching the team to understand if you have a realistic chance of playing.

Because you don’t get along with the coach.

Get to know the coach. Do you like him/her? Do you get along well? How is the communication? Do you trust the coach? Follow your instincts and talk to family and friends about it.

Universal Tennis Rating Applied
Read which academic tests it takes to become a college tennis player
It’s been all about sports so far, hasn’t it? And many young future student athletes often like to keep it that way 😊

But you will be a full-time student at a university soon after all, and chances are you will get in touch with academia sooner or later.

But while few focus heavily on tennis only, there is the very large majority of people who put a great deal of concentration on their studies and how they perform at college.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

But let’s take a step back for a second. This guide is about the recruiting of athletes into college teams.

So let’s not get ahead of ourselves and speak of studying in your freshman year yet. There’s actually quite some academic requirements you need to fulfill in order to be recruited by a coach.

For starters, you need to be able to show that you have graduated from an accredited high school in your home country.

Let’s walk through the other must-haves step by step:

A very important fact first. Most of you will know that you need to be formally accepted by the college’s admissions office. But many are not aware of the fact that both the NCAA and the NAIA require that recruits meet certain minimum requirements.

While you might not care so much about your grades in high school and whether you are admitted to a good college, NCAA and NAIA do care & make the final call on your eligibility to play college tennis!

GRADE POINT AVERAGE – GPA

The GPA is the result of your performance in high school. Depending on the country where you went to school, your GPA can be for each class individually and your graduating degree.

During the process of identifying your eligibility, the NCAA and NAIA calculate the GPA of the final 4 years of high school.

In other words: Don’t be lazy for 3 years and go “all-in” in the last year – you can’t cheat your way around the GPA, as all 4 years count equally.

Some students care a great deal about their GPA and will know their exact record on the spot, while others know it approximately or not at all. However, applying for college requires you find out about how you are/were doing.

Coaches will ask you for your GPA as part of their checklist of facts they want to find out about you.

WHY GPA MATTERS TO COACHES

Coaches recruit you to compete for their team. In order to do so, you need to be eligible (=permitted to compete by the NCAA) both athletically and academically. If you’re a weaker student, there’s a certain amount of risk attached, coaches need to take into consideration.

If you don’t know your GPA yet, don’t worry about it too much; the NCAA will calculate the core-course GPA for
you once you have submitted all of the relevant transcripts.

**SCHOLASTIC TESTS**

Prior to your acceptance to a college, you will have to show proof that you meet the academic criteria and the necessary skills as an applicant. You may show proof of your academic skills by passing any of two different tests - the "SAT" or the "ACT". If English is not your mother tongue, most universities will require you to take the "TOEFL" test as well, in order to evaluate your level of communication skills.

Good thing you need SAT or ACT anyway to register with the NCAA (and potentially also the NAIA). As long as your scores are missing you will not receive the green light to play college tennis. You may use them for the NAIA to show proof of your academic eligibility, but it is not a key requirement as is for the NCAA. Besides the obvious level of difficulty of the test questions, both SAT and ACT can be quite a challenge if you are an International, depending on your level of English.

**Which Test Scores Do You Need?**

**SAT**

The New SAT test (since March 2016) is divided into two sections:
- Reading/Writing
- Mathematics

With 200-800 available points in each section, the test measures your ability in both of them. You can't fail the test, but instead you attempt to get as many of the maximum 1,600 points as possible.

There are a total of 7 SAT test dates available throughout the year with a “summer break”, so make sure you plan ahead.
ACT

The ACT is currently the #1 college admissions test in the US. Its structure is slightly different from the SAT with four sections on:

- English
- Mathematics
- Reading
- Science

The final composite score (0-36 points) is calculated as the average of all sections.

It doesn’t matter whether you decide to take the ACT or SAT. Some colleges may have a preference for one of the test formats, but as you’ll likely talk to several coaches and apply to more schools you should go for whichever test you prefer. Because SAT and ACT scores are widely used by colleges, it is vital for you to take the test early on in your recruitment process. And don’t worry: it’s more than common and in fact recommended to take the test multiple times. There are 6 available test dates each year.

TOEFL

The TOEFL is particularly relevant to international students, seeking to receive an athletic scholarship. While some of the test elements are similar to what’s being tested on SAT and ACT, the TOEFL is somewhat easier and contains these 4 sections:

- Speaking
- Listening
- Writing
- Reading

The test offers a maximum of 30 points in each section (total 120) and like the other tests, you can’t fail the TOEFL either. It’s important to note that the TOEFL is not a requirement to obtain NCAA or NAIA eligibility, but most colleges’ admissions offices will require TOEFL scores. There are significantly more international test dates available as is the case with SAT and ACT.
YOUR COLLEGE EDUCATION

Once you start your college education you are able to focus 100% on the things you are most interested in. Sure, some classes in the first year or so might not be exactly what you had signed up for, but they’ll help you develop anyway.

BACCALAUREATE DEGREE

There’s a huge selection of different degrees you can pick from. Depending on the college you will literally find everything from Archaeology to Zoology at the large schools, and a more narrow offer at smaller school. An undergraduate degree takes 4 years, after which you will graduate and are ready to move on into working life or continuing your studies.

REMAIN ELIGIBLE

Most students decide to study at college because they want to educate themselves and get a foundation for reaching their goals in life. Some care more about their grades than others and that’s totally understandable. But there is one key dimension of college sports in the broader sense you need to keep in mind:

You are required to
- Maintain a certain Grade Point Average to remain eligible and compete alongside your team.
- Pass a certain number of classes per semester/trimester

Too bad a GPA + failing classes

Risking Eligibility

That can be tough at times, especially so during the intense season with lots of travels to all corners of the country. But the entire team is in this together and that alone should be motivation enough for all members to not let their fellow team mates down.
The Recruiting Process Implies Talking to Coaches – Hopefully a Lot of Them

#5

Make sure you have a clear plan when to do what on your scholarship hunt
You Need A Clear Plan When To Do What

GET STARTED

Truth to be told, getting everything ready for your college experience as collegiate athlete is no walk in the park.

Quite the opposite, it’s actually a massive amount of work you are facing.

You really want to be on top of things, as your plans can otherwise easily go the wrong way. Some players handle this just fine all by themselves whereas others need help from their parents or a recruiting service.

The recruiting process is also the most exciting part of the whole ride before arriving at your new school.

Let’s get to it and look into the key milestones for you to take care of.

#1 PREPARE A RECRUITING PROFILE

Roughly 16-17 months before your expected start at college

Coaches are extremely busy people. They take a glance at the profiles of prospects and decide quickly whether they would be an option for their team or not.

You can put yourself in a better position by “helping them do their job”:

Later on you can either send them an e-mail with all the main information about yourself and a link to a platform, where you have stored your video.

Student Athlete at University of Nevada - Reno, NV (NCAA D-I)
Or you address them with all the relevant information about you as a player and student by setting up a free recruiting profile on Smarthlete. That way coaches click on your profile and can learn about your grades, tournament results, and rankings in an instant. And best of all, your recruiting video can also be uploaded easily!

You can start your profile early on in the process and fill it with life as you move ahead.

#2 SIGN UP FOR SAT/ACT

**Roughly 16-17 months before your expected start at college**

Here’s where the SAT or ACT comes into play. Flip back to page 17/18 to get more information on the difference of the examinations.

Why 17 months ahead of time you might ask? Well, for one part there’s a summer break and no tests are available. That means if you don’t take one of the tests on the May or June date, you’d have to plan for the September test – with the processing of the scores taking some weeks, you are really getting close to the first early signing period in November. It’s good for coaches to see you’re ahead of things and academics won’t be the deal breaker.

#3 SIGN UP FOR TOEFL (INTERNATIONALS ONLY)

**Roughly 11-14 months before your expected start at college**

There are significantly more test dates available throughout the year. As TOEFL scores do not play any role in the NCAA’s and NAIA’s assessment of your eligibility, you are not as pushed to take the test as early on as the SAT or ACT.

#4 REGISTER WITH NCAA/NAIA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

**Roughly 13 months before your expected start at college**

In order to be able to compete at college all future student athletes at NCAA D-I, D-II, and NAIA schools need to undergo a screening process (academic and athletic) by either of the two main organizations, NCAA and NAIA.

The evaluation procedure requires that you:

- Provide answers to all questions regarding your academic and athletic past
- Have your grade transcripts translated and certified if they are issued in another language than English
- Send certified copies of all documents in original language (and translated, if applicable) by mail to the NCAA or NAIA
- Order your SAT or ACT test result copies to be sent (9999 - NCAA Code, 9876 - NAIA Code)
- Pay the registration fee

Here is why we recommend you start this process early on: It can take quite some time for the two organizations to determine your eligibility; especially so if there are complications or missing documents. Starting well ahead of time, you cover yourself against potential delays. Maybe you’re wondering if you should register with NCAA or NAIA. Paying the fees and sending documents and scores is quite a lot of money and work after all.

This question is hard to answer on a universal basis, but it depends on your contact with coaches. Are you clearly going for a NCAA D-I school?
Then there is no need to register with the NAIA. Are you unsure whether you’re strong enough for a D-I school, but you’re confident D-II or NAIA could work out? Then you can either go ahead and get started with both of them or you wait first how the talks with coaches from NCAA or NAIA programs are proceeding before getting started.

Most of the times, coaches are very helpful in this matter and assist you. At some point interested coaches will also ask you for your NCAA ID number or your NAIA ID# - your unique identification number, which coaches can use to look up your eligibility status.

**#5 RECRUITING VIDEO**

*Roughly 12 months before your expected start at college*

Unless you are among the very small group of players who are either Top 10 in the country or internationally and thus reached out to by coaches directly, you need a video. And you need a good one.

Coaches have seen players come and go and paired with their vast experience on the court, they can get a real quick feel of players’ potential by just watching them play for a few minutes.

Based on our experience a recruiting video should include:

- Brief presentation who you are
- Strokes displayed from different camera positions
- Games against a comparable player
- Keep it short – ~10 minutes
- Use a proper, stable camera – no cell phones!

**#6 CONTACT COACHES**

*Roughly 11 months before your expected start at college*

You could say that you’ve been working all your tennis life for this period of time to come: talking to coaches, getting to know them better, and finding out where you want to spend the next 4 years studying and competing for a tennis squad.

**GET THE COACHES’ ATTENTION**

That’s the part of the recruiting process that really depends on your level of play and you as a person.

*Top Juniors*

The top juniors in the US and internationally will be contacted by the coaching staff of the best tennis programs in the country. These players have a wide selection of attractive offers to choose from – if they want to play collegiate tennis at all. It is a tiny group of players however who enjoy this convenient situation. The remaining large portion of interested teenagers needs to invest in attracting coaches’ attention:

*Be Active*

Be active? What is that even supposed to mean?

It resembles the fact that coaches like to see initiative. They appreciate to be contacted directly by young athletes.

It says something about their mindset and attitude. It shows that you are independent and able to get things done on your own.

To be active typically translates into writing a message to college coaches. You can get this project started in two ways by:

- Looking up various college teams and writing the coaches an email, including important key facts about you as a player and student.
Or you open up a free recruiting profile on Smarthlete. Having done so, go ahead and reach out to coaches directly on Smarthlete or send them the link to your public profile!

Get Help
Another decision young athletes and their families’ take is to get assistance from a recruiting service. Typically, the player gets guidance and help in all things related to the recruiting process. From aggregating relevant information on the player, registering with the NCAA/NAIA to making the final choice which college to commit for.

We believe that with the right tools and knowledge every prospect can achieve finding a scholarship on his/her own, but in case athletes need assistance we are happy to function as a full recruiting service as well.

E-MAILS & PHONE CALLS
Getting the coaches interested in you and being in touch is exciting, but you have got to make sure to get a little bit of homework done upfront. On the one hand coaches will have questions, such as below:

• Describe yourself as a player. What are your strengths, what are your weaknesses?
• What is your personality on the court?
• What are things you like to do in your off-time?
• What are your goals for your game?
• What are your goals academically? What would you like to work with later in life?
• Have you competed in any other sports apart from tennis?
• Have you been away from your family for a longer time before?
• What do you like about our college and the tennis program?

On the other hand, you should take the opportunity and have questions ready. This shows you are interested and passionate about this opportunity:
• How does a typical practice day look like?
• Could you describe your coaching style?
• What do you value the most in your players?
• Where do you see the team going over the next 4 years?
• Where in the line-up do you see me compete? In the first season and in later seasons?
• How do you plan your team’s fall-season?

There are of course plenty of more questions to ask and likely to be asked, but the above ones shall give you a good starting point. Talking back and forth with various coaches is a process that takes time and you should take your time until you’re entirely certain which offer is the most attractive for you.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

ELIGIBILITY
Because of the huge importance of getting things right with the Eligibility Centers, we will highlight what it is the two institutions are looking at. The NCAA Division I imposes the strictest rules, which will therefore be the focus in the following section:

Athletic Eligibility
Since student athletes are not allowed to receive salaries they need to be classified as amateurs. In order to obtain amateur status, the NCAA assesses students' prior athletic activities.
The NCAA will specifically check whether the players:

• received prize money, exceeding their expenses
• received benefits from agents or prospective agents

• signed an agreement to be represented by an agent
• delayed initial full-time collegiate enrollment to participate in organized sports competition

Since the above are considered indicators of competing in professional sports, those elements determine whether a tennis player will gain amateur status or not.
The above is applied for D-I and D-II eligibility. D-III doesn’t require that athletes are cleared by the NCAA. The NAIA applies similar, though not as strict rules. Click on the link to the left to find out more about NCAA and NAIA.

Academic Eligibility
In addition to athletic eligibility, students also need to be cleared academically. Since this is already determined by the university which accepts the student you might be wondering why the NCAA also double checks this.
The reason is that the NCAA wants to make sure the academic standards are maintained across college sports, and thus also college tennis.
By checking students’ academic abilities, the NCAA ensures and enables a level playing field for all universities. A more detailed description of the tests that need to be taken to be academically eligible and get accepted to college can be found in the previous section "#4 Academics”.
You will need to show proof of fulfilling the academic requirements in a number of ways:

NCAA D-I
• Core-course GPA of at least 2.3 on a 4.0 scale
• SAT score of at least 400 (Reading & Math combined)

NAIA Eligibility: http://bit.ly/1Su03Re
NCAA Eligibility: http://on.ncaa.com/21nkkZ4
NCAA D-I, D-II & NAIA require academic & athletic eligibility
• ACT score of at least 37 (sub scores English, Math, Reading, Writing combined)

Note that the requirements for NCAA Division II differ and are stricter until 2018.

If you have a low GPA you must do proportionately better on SAT or ACT.
If you have a high GPA, you can afford to do worse on the test(s).

NAIA

• Minimum overall GPA of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale
• SAT score of at least 860 (Reading & Math combined)
• ACT score of at least 18 (composite score)
• Class Rank in Top 50%

To be eligible for NAIA competition, you need to fulfill 2 out of the 3 criteria above. Hence, you don’t necessarily need to take any test, but it is extremely likely admissions offices at colleges require you do.

UNOFFICIAL/OFFICIAL VISITS

Coaches have to follow a number of rules according to the NCAA and NAIA. As a prospective student athlete, you are not required to know them all, but the one about visiting colleges is worth to be aware of:

One of the best things you can do is go and visit the school(s), you are considering to commit to. While that’s not an easy thing to do for Internationals, athletes from the US should certainly consider this opportunity.

Coaches can either invite you and cover parts of your travel-related costs. That would be defined as an official visit.

Or you can visit the school on an unofficial visit – paid for yourself and on your own initiative.

Either way, it is a fantastic opportunity to get to know the school, campus, the facilities, and dorms – you will probably make a decision for the next 4 years of your life after all...

FINANCIAL SITUATION

What’s your annual budget? Remember we spoke about financial aid in section #2 US College Tennis?

That’s a really important topic and most athletes will receive this question at some point.

Yes, there are many full-ride scholarships for girls available. But in lower college divisions and for men in general, a 100% scholarship package is a very rare thing.

If you haven’t yet spoken with your parents, talk to them and find out if they would be willing to help you finance your college education. If so what is the maximum budget you could afford for a full year?

Once coaches drop the question you are prepared and the coaches know what it would take to get you to their school.

SLIDING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core GPA</th>
<th>SAT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
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#6

Signing

Check whether you know the most important facts about signing a financial aid agreement

Your Signature on a “NLI” – You Are All Set
Signing with a team stands for committing to attend the signing institution for one academic year. Signing officially ends the recruiting process as coaches are subject to the “recruiting ban”; they are not allowed to recruit you any longer. Now there are several ways how the act of signing could look like. Let’s bring some light into the dark, but bear in mind that you will be very close to the coach by the time you are about to sign – the coach will help you with all your questions centering around the signing procedure.

NATIONAL LETTER OF INTENT - NLI

The National Letter of Intent is a binding written agreement, issued by the member school and accompanied by the financial aid agreement, which contains your athletic scholarship details.

ADVANTAGES OF NLI

You will realize that it’s tough competition out there. Many kids looking for a scholarship and many
coaches trying to add the best available players to their teams. Signing a NLI often happens good time ahead of starting enrollment at the college. As a result, you and the coach get security and predictability for the upcoming season.

You know that you will get X amount of scholarship money and you start studying at college X in the fall of 201X. The coach in return knows that the team will be joined by you and X amount of athletic scholarship money has been awarded to you.

Plus, the coach successfully takes you off the market, preventing potentially better offers from other tennis programs to get you hooked.

**SIGNING PERIODS**

There are specific signing periods assigned to when you are allowed to receive the NLI from the athletics department of the Issuing institution and when you are allowed to sign it consequentially.

The signing periods typically are:

- 1 week in the fall semester – the “early signing period”
- From April to the beginning of August

**COMMITTING WITHOUT NLI**

**NAIA**

The NAIA does not foresee a similar formal Letter of Intent scheme for future student athletes. Instead, you and the college you are about to commit to are more flexible how to go about:

- Sign whenever you are ready to – even before senior year in high school
- The school is free to set up its own financial aid agreements, athletic letters of intent, or offers of financial aid.

**NJCAA**

Different from the NAIA, the NJCAA uses a Letter of Intent (LOI) scheme as well. Signing of a LOI is possible as early as having completed the junior year in high school. Signing officially ends the recruiting process, as it is the case for D-I and D-II recruits.

Different from the NCAA, the scholarship agreement must take the form of the NJCAA LOI.

**FROM SIGNING TO ENROLMENT**

**APPLICATION WITH COLLEGE**

As a prospective student athlete you will also have to go through the regular admissions process with the college of your choice. Upon signing, there might still be a couple of tasks that need to be completed, such as sending missing test scores.

**ELIGIBILITY**

As signing happens in the senior year of high school, you have not been able to submit your final grade transcripts to NCAA or NAIA. Once these have been issued it’s your job to have them sent to the Eligibility Center. The same accounts for any other documents that might be missing.

**INTERNATIONALS: VISA**

If you happen to be an international student, studying in the US requires you obtain a student visa (F-1) for the United States. In order to apply for a visa you will receive a document (I-20) from the college you have been admitted to, stating the exact starting date and when you are expected to graduate. Once you have obtained the I-20 form, you can take the next steps with the American embassy or consulate in your home country.
Life After College

Get inspired for your future after college sports – studies, work, or pro tennis…?
With an undergraduate degree in your pocket, the world is your oyster. Your options are wonderfully diverse and there's strong reason to believe you're well-equipped to meet the challenges and tasks ahead of you. Upon graduation, people embark on very different journeys. Let's look at your options.

**GRADUATE STUDIES**

A common future for many graduates is to top up their education with another degree, which is especially common among Internationals.

An excellent option for interested former college players is getting a position as assistant coach and having your graduate degree financed that way. As assistant coach, you work and travel with the team and support the head coach in his/her daily work as well as the scouting of future team members.

**DIVE INTO WORK LIFE**

The other very logical step is for people to get out into the real world and get a job.

Might be there are loans to be paid back or simply the temptation to try apply your acquired skill set in the real work environment.

One thing is certain: Former college athletes come with characteristics many other peers are lacking: year-long discipline and hard work in a competitive environment.
TURNING PRO

The third journey is the least probable, but potentially the most glorious one: taking your game to the next level and trying to break through on the ATP or WTA tour.

The number of people doing so is diminishingly small given how many people play college tennis. But those who make it through are stars on the tour today:

SINGLES

The last years have brought forward a number of former college players who are world-class:

John Isner (USA), Benjamin Becker (GER), Kevin Anderson (RSA) and Steve Johnson (USA) are the most famous ones as we speak. On the women’s side Irina Falconi and Nicole Gibbs (both USA) are currently ambassadors of college tennis. There are many more players who keep moving in and out of the Top 100, and who have successfully managed the transition.

DOUBLES SPECIALISTS

Owed to the high relevance of doubles at college, the doubles circuit sees an armada of successful doubles pros take home big titles.

There are the Bryan Brothers (USA) of course, Rajeev Ram (USA), John Peers (AUS), Robert Lindstedt (SWE) or Eric Butorac (USA), who came from a NCAA D-III (!) school by the way.

But whatever their background, college tennis proves over and over again that it is a great platform for players to develop their game in a very professional environment for a couple of years before making the move.

Noah Rubin (USA), who’s played one season (’14-’15) at Wake Forest University is the newest former college player who has managed to make an impact on the tour.
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