

Junior Golf Timeline

Stay ahead of pace in the recruiting process by understanding where to go...

By Mike Smith, ForeCollegeGolf



In a very competitive world of junior golf, there seems to be much confusion and frustration hovering around the question, When is the “right time”? The right time, however, is subjective to each and every player. For the best players, it might make sense to start taking unofficial visits to Power 5 conference schools (SEC, ACC, Big10, Pac12, Big12) during their freshman year. Other players, for example, might not start the basics of the recruiting process, like organizing a list of schools to reach out to, until their sophomore year.

This article will help you understand how to stay ahead of the recruiting curve at every stage of the game. We outline the complexities of the recruiting process vividly and give you insight into how to tackle the process in the most efficient ways possible.

First, we will take you through the NCAA Rules and Regulations as they pertain to your recruiting year. Then, we'll touch on a few focus points you should be aware of each year in the process. And finally, we'll bring it full circle and help you understand if you're ahead, on pace, or behind where you should be in the recruiting process. At the end of this article, you should be equipped with the tools and knowledge to put together a "to-do" list for yourself to understand your current position.

Key Terms

- **PSA:** (Prospective Student-Athlete) You are considered a PSA at the start of 9th Grade classes
- **Contact:** A contact happens any time a college coach says more than hello during a face-to-face meeting with you or your parents off the college's campus.
- **Dead Period:** A college coach may not have any face-to-face contact with a recruit/player or his/her parents on or off the college campus at any time during a dead period. However, a coach may write and call a recruit/player during a dead period.
- **Evaluation:** An evaluation takes place when a college coach observes you practicing or competing, anywhere/anytime.
- **Official visit:** During an official visit, the college can pay for transportation to and from the college for you, lodging and meals (Division I allows for up to three meals per day) for you and your parents or guardians, as well as reasonable entertainment expenses, including up to six complimentary admissions to a Division I home sports event or five complimentary admissions to a Division II home sports event. Before a college may invite you on an official visit, you must provide the college with a copy of your high school transcript and register with the NCAA Eligibility Center.
- **Recruited:** If a college coach calls a player/recruit more than once, contacts them off campus, pays their expenses to visit the campus, or in Divisions I and II, issues a National Letter of Intent or a written offer of financial aid, then the player/recruit is considered to be recruited.
- **Unofficial visit:** An unofficial visit is a "trip" taken by the recruit/player and his/her parents to a college campus. All unofficial visits are funded by the recruit/player. The college and/or coach may not pay for any expenses (except to provide complimentary



admissions to campus athletic events). We encourage ForeCollegeGolf clients/players to make as many unofficial visits as they can and to take those visits at any time during the recruiting process. *(The earliest date a player can take visits with a Coach is August 1st before their Junior year)*

- **Verbal commitment:** A verbal commitment takes place when a player verbally agrees to play for a coach before he/she is eligible to sign a National Letter of Intent. The commitment is between player and coach not necessarily between player and college/university.
- **NLI:** National Letter of Intent, legally binding contract signed by a student-athlete verifying commitment to an NCAA institution. Once signed, other coaches cannot recruit the player.
- **Preferred Walk-on:** A recruit who does not receive a scholarship, but who is placed on the team roster as a full-time student-athlete just like the scholarship athletes.
- **Personal Marketing Plan:** your personal marketing plan is made up of a few components you will be utilizing during your college recruiting process. Traditionally, the marketing plan is composed of a resume, a bio, an introduction letter and a swing video.

Freshman Year

Many student-athletes make the mistake of not preparing for the recruiting process during their freshman and sophomore years. Personally, I encounter far too many families that come to me during the PSA's junior *(or even senior)* year expecting to get their college recruiting process started. Many act as if they haven't missed out on any opportunities and will be just fine beginning the process during the latter half of high school. Unfortunately for many, it doesn't work out that way and their initial thought process about being "ok" couldn't be farther from the truth. If you are a freshman or a sophomore, now is the time to get started!

Below is a checklist for you to follow throughout your freshman year.

Academic *(use checkboxes)*

- Make an appointment with your guidance counselor to ensure you are taking the appropriate courses to fulfill all NCAA and NAIA academic requirements by the time you graduate and at an appropriate challenge point and rigor. Modify your class schedule as necessary.
- Take honors/AP courses, but only if you can maintain a high GPA and continue to do well in the classroom.
- Take note of next year's dates for the PSAT and Pre-ACT so you can start preparing. Look into Standardized Test tutors/specialists if you need extra help. (i.e. Magoosh, Preptly, etc.)



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Athletic *(use checkboxes)*

Begin gathering info from college coaches & programs – Begin to request to be added to their mailing list. Fill out each program’s recruiting questionnaire and begin to research information about their golf program – like head coach, players on the team, facilities, and tournament schedule. Follow along on GolfStat.com throughout the college golf season.

Travel, Play in ranked events, don’t rely on HS golf - If you are succeeding at your local level and not currently playing in regionally or nationally ranked tournaments, make it a point to sign up for some. Coaches like to see you becoming as competitive as possible and gaining as much tournament experience as possible. Besides, playing tournaments year-round will help your skill level, keep you in golf shape, and provide coaches with more statistics to evaluate you.

Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses – Look for in-depth statistical analysis where you need improvement in your sport and identify your opportunities and threats.

Develop a practice “system” – Evaluate your game from a holistic perspective and create a solid long-term practice plan with your Coach(es).

Attend a few college golf tournaments - While attending events, look into the talent level of the players, player/coach relationships, and the overall atmosphere at the event. You can search for college events near you using GolfStat.com.

Start recording your tournament finishes - from each and every event you play in. Soon you will be sending coaches “update emails” about your recent finishes and details about how you played.

Plan “unofficial” college visits – it is never too early to start visiting different campuses to see what type of school environment you are most attracted to. Eventually, this initial information you gather will assist you with determining what your “best-fit” school looks like.

Other Thoughts *(use checkboxes)*

Put Together a Family Budget - for recruiting. Include travel expenses and them time and resources you will have to use to gain exposure to college coaches.

Google Search – Do a quick Google Search for your name, hometown and maybe even include the word golf if you have a common name (ex. John Smith) Do this to make sure that all references, images, and videos on the internet portray you in a respectful manner.

**Social Media is the most readily available and accessible medium on the internet today which makes it extremely easy for athletic department officials and college golf coaches to find information on you. Understand that even though you might not think your posts on sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat can be seen by coaches, there is someone out there watching. My #1 Rule is if you wouldn’t show it to your mother, don’t post it online.*



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- Review the NCAA/NAIA Rules and Regulations** (Guidebook for the College Bound Student-Athlete).
 - Set Goals & Stick to a Weekly Structure** - Set personal, academic and athletic goals while constantly tracking your progress.
 - Be Realistic** – keep your expectations in check and don't only reach out to schools that are beyond your athletic or academic abilities.
 - Use Helpful Resources to Learn More** –Junior Golf Scoreboard, PING College Golf Guide, AJGA College Recruiting Page, GolfStat.com, [ForeCollegeGolf Links & Recruiting Manual](#)
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Sophomore Year

Your sophomore year is the best time to start contacting coaches and be proactive in the recruiting process. It's important to understand that the recruiting process isn't something that happens overnight. Most often, the players and families that are proactively patient are the most successful during the process. At this point, you should have one year of high school athletics under your belt and hopefully a few years of local, regional or national competition. That being said, you should have a good grasp for what tournament golf is all about and a good starting point from a competition standpoint to strike up an initial conversation with coaches.

Players should accomplish the following throughout Sophomore Year:

- Play 8-15 nationally ranked events in the past calendar year. Quality > Quantity
- Start contacting college coaches by sending them introduction letter and pieces of your personal marketing plan (see above). Tell your STORY!
- Speak with your guidance counselor to ensure you will be "on track" to graduate by fulfilling all NCAA and NAIA academic requirements. (i.e. NCAA D1, 16 core courses in English, Math, Social Science, Science, & electives) If you are behind in school, make arrangements to make-up classes in summer school or possibly even at a local junior college.
- Start to build upon your marketing plan by creating a recruiting email address. (ex. MikeSmith2024@gmail.com, or MikeSmithGolf@gmail.com)
- Look into taking honors/AP courses, but only if you can maintain a high GPA.



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- Attend a least one college golf tournament and evaluate the talent gap between you and college athletes and start to understand how college coach/player relationships work.
- Plan “unofficial” college visits – it is never too early to start visiting different campuses to see what type of environment you are most attracted to.
- Review the NCAA/NAIA Rules and Regulations (see Resources)

Academic

- Take the PSAT and/or Pre-ACT** – Take these pre-tests seriously. You should gain some insight while taking the tests as to which test might fit you better and which test you feel more comfortable with.
- Register with the NCAA/NAIA Eligibility Centers** – get your name in their system early. Simply sign-up and enter your personal information Sophomore Year.
- Look at next year’s dates for the SAT and ACT so you can start preparing** – it’s best to take these exams in your junior year so that if you are not satisfied with your score or you need a higher score to gain admission to a school of interest you can have a chance to retake it your senior year.

Athletic

- Begin contacting college coaches** - send them a marketing portfolio (introduction letter, swing video, and resume/bio) – because this is your first year in high school, you don’t necessarily need to send them a resume or swing video yet – but your goal here is to have them put you on their mailing list and send you materials such as a recruiting questionnaire and information about their golf program.
- Record a swing video** – you might even consider adding a personal interview, your latest Trackman combine report or something additional to showcase your assets. Most times these video files are too large for an email or regular electronic communication so I would suggest uploading this video online to a platform like YouTube for easy viewing.
- Start contacting college coaches** – by sending your personal marketing plan via email. Email Coaches bi-weekly with updates and information about you.
- Attend College Golf Tournaments** – begin to attend college golf tournaments near where you live, while learning more about what college golf is like and showing your interest to Coaches.
- Get comfortable speaking with college coaches** - To get ahead of the curve, begin to reach out and make a few short introductory follow-up phone calls to a few of the coaches



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you send emails to. You can also “role play” with your friends, parents or a college recruiting consultant like Mike from ForeCollegeGolf to feel more prepared for these phone calls. **Note: D1 Coaches aren’t permitted to initiate contact with you until June 15th after your Sophomore Year.*

Other Thoughts

Reach out - to friends/acquaintances or industry professionals that are former/current college golfers and ask questions relevant to college golf and the recruiting process. Seek help and ask questions.

Be a good role model – Coaches are seeking leaders for their golf programs. It’s important that you learn to become a self-confident individual if you want to impress coaches. Be someone who makes those around them better.

Emphasis on Player Development – Sophomore year is when most Male players are growing and going through their physiological life changes. A primary emphasis on technical, mental, personal and competitive development should be highlighted.

Be realistic – keep your expectations in check and don’t reach out to schools far beyond your athletic or academic abilities.

Junior Year

Your junior year is the most important in the recruiting process, both academically and athletically. This is when coaches expect you to peak athletically during high school, and it is extremely important to perform at a high level both on the golf course and in the classroom. Make sure you are narrowing down your schools of interest so you can start booking “official” visits and talking seriously to coaches.

By Junior Year, you should:

Practice how to speak with coaches – role-playing, making introduction phone calls or just practicing your communication skills at home.

Take the PSAT and or Pre-ACT. Been preparing for the SAT and or ACT exams.

Plan “unofficial” college visits – by this time you should be visiting different campuses to see what type of environment you are most attracted to.



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Attend a least one college golf tournament and evaluated the talent gap between you and college athletes and started to understand how college coach/player relationships work.

Academic

Decide what schools are at the top of your list - and most attractive to you academically, athletically, and socially. Then add schools to the list that are actively recruiting you.

Know the important dates/deadlines - for the application process for the schools you are most interested in.

Request letters of recommendation from Teachers – ask them before Summer break, these letters will be an important part of your application process.

Take/Retake the ACT or SAT

Athletic

Be aware of all NCAA rules - regarding coach contact/interaction. Beginning, June 15th after Sophomore year College Coaches can begin to initiate contact with prospects. Beginning August 1st prior to Junior Year, you can begin to take campus visits with College Coaches.

Continue to play in nationally ranked tournaments – Junior Year, again, is the most important year of the recruiting process and you will likely gain the most exposure to coaches during this time. Because of this, it is recommended that you pick your tournaments wisely. Play in events where you will gain the most experience as a player and give you the most face-to-face exposure to college coaches.

Update your Personal Marketing Plan – with changes to your resume, swing video, and personal “story”.

Edit and update your School List – make necessary changes to stay organized and up to date.

Continue communication with college coaches – who you’ve already been speaking with and keep expressing your continued interest in their school/program.



Other Thoughts

- Be open, honest and vulnerable with Coaches** – Be open about your weaknesses, struggles, and the obstacles you’ve overcome in life. Tell them your story! Remember, Coaches aren’t expecting perfection.
 - Keep building relationships with coaches** - don’t expect to receive scholarship offers right away. Put an emphasis on building genuine relationships with Coaches and gathering more information about their program(s).
 - Be a good role model** – coaches are looking for confident, mature, and responsible individuals who exhibit strong-character traits.
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Senior Year

Your senior year is a balancing act between finishing out your playing career strong and preparing yourself for college. You will need to prioritize your time in making sure all steps are being taken to speak to coaches and keep up with your grades and athletics.

By Senior Year, you should:

- Narrow down your options & find your “best-fit” school - be proactive by sending emails, make follow-up phone calls and take a few unofficial visits to schools of interest.
- Be speaking regularly with coaches– calling coaches weekly and building relationships
- Take the SAT and or ACT exams. Make necessary adjustments and reach out for extra help if necessary.
- Register for NCAA/NAIA Eligibility Centers.
- Gather important dates for the application process for the schools you are most interested in.
- Be aware of all NCAA/NAIA rules regarding coach contact/interaction.

Academic

- Retake SAT/ACT** – if you are not satisfied with your score.



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GPA – keep your high-school grades up and stay focused in the classroom. Many Universities will require you maintain a certain minimum GPA during your senior year in order to be accepted as a Freshman college student.

Looking into different types of aid – the average scholarship in Division I Men’s Golf is ~40%. Understand that full scholarships are not “the norm” and ask admissions department officials or college coaches to investigate whether you qualify for an academic, financial, or other merit-based scholarships.

Apply to schools/universities of interest – keep a close eye on admissions deadlines and make sure you have the required documents to apply.

Athletic

Send info to Coaches - If you haven’t verbally committed, continue to call Coaches directly, send your updated personal marketing plan, and start discussing their recruiting timelines & need for your graduating class, how you might fit into their program, and the details of scholarship availability.

Signing Day – Be aware of dates for NLI Signing Day. Typically, NLI signing window opens/begins the 2nd Wednesday each November and closes August 1st following Senior year.

Meet the players - Begin to build relationships with the student-athletes on teams of interest and ask them about their overall college experience.

Take visits! – take unofficial/official visits to schools of high interest. This will exemplify your interest in a particular school and program. (*Official visits are only permitted AFTER Aug 1st of your Senior Year*)

Other Thoughts

Talk with each genuinely interested coach about verbally committing and eventually signing the NLI (National Letter of Intent)

Determine your best-fit school

Negotiate scholarship money

Verbally commit to a university

Thank the coaches at the schools you visited but decided not to attend and notify them of your decision



Sign NLI – www.nationalletter.org

Set a competitive summer schedule to prepare yourself for college golf. Keep your edge and prepare for high level amateur golf!

We hope you find this article extremely useful in your pursuit of college golf.

Best of luck on the recruiting trail!

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Mike is the Founder & CEO of ForeCollegeGolf and specializes in assisting junior golfers & their families through the college recruiting process. If you have any questions about the material provided above please email him @ mike.smith@forecollegegolf.com

