

THE COLLEGE COMMITMENT

Kallie Corbin, May 12, 2009

After three years of college volleyball, I've noticed something among incoming freshman players—they lack a real understanding of what is expected. Coaches can send out as many workout plans as they want to ensure physical preparation, but nothing can prepare freshmen for the level of commitment needed. Many high school players underestimate just how much time is taken up by college volleyball. To help players who are college-bound, I have compiled a list of things to expect.

ACADEMICS

What many student-athletes need to remember is that they are a student first. In order to be eligible, players must maintain a minimum GPA. Every school is a little different but your coaches will let you know—believe me, they will not let you forget it. According to NCAA guidelines, every freshman athlete must complete at least one semester of study hall. Study hall is a place that the university has specifically sanctioned for student-athletes to get homework done, get help from tutors, and study. Normally a freshman would have to complete at least 6 hours of study hall a week, but this number varies with different universities. My coach set the rule that in order to get out of study hall you must have 3.0 GPA. Each coach will be different, but the expectation will always be high.

There is a major myth that student-athletes get “special treatment” from professors, but this cannot be more wrong. In many high schools the athletes ran the school and had free range on campus, but in college it is a little different. Athletes may be known on campus, but professors expect the same if not better work in the classroom as any other student on campus. The student-athlete must turn work into the professors before she leaves for an away game or tournament. This also goes for tests and exams. Athletic events are never an excuse to why an athlete cannot turn in a paper or take a test. The athlete is also in charge of informing the professors of all dates in which they will miss class. The athletes are responsible for meeting with both their athletic academic advisor and their major of discipline academic advisor. These meetings are mandatory. If the athlete is struggling in a course, it is expected by the coach that you take care of it. This would entail study sessions with a tutor, meetings with the professor, and doing extra credit. Basically, the athletic program takes the student-athlete's education very seriously and it is that athlete's responsibility to live up to the expectations.

VOLLEYBALL

Every coach has a different way of running things, but there are some things that are universal. At the beginning of each fall season there is pre-season. Pre-season consists of 3-a-days. The day begins with weights and conditioning and follows with two volleyball sessions. The pre-season lasts for almost two weeks. An athlete is required to get treatment if there is an injury before every practice. Our trainer required us to be in the training room at least an hour and a half before practice. We had to be on the court at least 10 minutes before practice. It is the athlete's responsibility to inform the coach about any injuries or limitations that might affect the practice.

The practice is primarily the same as a club practice; however the practices are longer and the intensity is much higher. During the season, players normally get to a match three hours before game time. The home team has the first 30-minute pre-game practice, followed by the visiting team. Both teams take the court for the hour-long warm-up, which leads into the start of the game.

When we had away matches we had a strict set of rules to follow. These rules were different for different scenarios. If we traveled on the same day that we played, we were not allowed to sleep on the bus. We also have to do study hall on the bus until coach says stop. When we fly we can sleep on the plane. This is normally due to that fact we don't pay on that day usually. Most coaches have strict diet rules. In my case, in-season sweets, fried food, caffeine and soda are not allowed.

College volleyball is an all year round sport. In the spring season the coaches are allowed 20 hours a week of practice. This is very demanding for a student athlete, because athletes tend to take their harder course load in the spring. Spring is harder than season because coaches want to prepare you for the following season. This includes longer practices and much more intense drills. What many freshmen forget about college volleyball is that winning and losing will affect the coach's position and the university's reputation. This means that the mental aspect of the game becomes much more prevalent. Incoming freshman must be tough mentally. This is the part of the game that causes athletes to quit. The psychological demands that are put on athletes are the toughest thing to adjust to as a freshman. I would recommend all high school players to play for a "tough" coach early on, so that when they get to college it is an easier transition.

WEIGHTS AND CONDITIONING

This is the aspect of volleyball that many high school athletes are not familiar with. Most volleyball players have weight lifted and conditioned in high school, but high school lifting is NOT the same as college lifting. In my case, my team lifts at 5:30 am every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. These workouts include Olympic style weights, squatting, power cleaning, dead lifts and push jerks. This is just the beginning. The rest of the workout includes other strenuous type weight lifting drills. The work outs end with basic training; burpees (killer!), 3 types of mountain climbers, iso abs, 5 second push ups, sits ups, sprints and jumping jacks. The weights and conditioning is not just expected of the athlete during the season and spring, but also during breaks. Every summer, winter and spring break the athlete is given a work out schedule and manual. The athlete is required to do all the work outs in the manual. In my case, I am required to pass a 300 yard shuttle when I return after summer break. I must have run two 300 yard shuttles and average at least 64 seconds. If I do not pass I must keep testing till I pass, until then I am not allowed to practice. My team is also required to complete a vertical jump program. This is so we can increase our vertical jump for the following season. Just to put it in perspective I went from touching 9'1" to now touching 9'7½". We test our weight maxes after fall season, after winter break and after spring season. Coaches expect each athlete to have increases on the weight maxes. Overall, the weight and conditioning facet of volleyball is very important. Each coach wants their team to be stronger, faster and last longer than any other team. No coach wants to lose because of those reasons.

SOCIAL LIFE AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

The ongoing joke on my team is that when we talk about having a social life we say, "What social life?" The truth is that an athlete's social life sometimes gets intertwined with her volleyball life. The athlete is around her teammates so often that her teammates will become her best friends and sometimes even her "sisters". There are times when an athlete cannot differentiate a social event and a volleyball event. Athletes have a great platform to do community work and work with charities. Each university has a type of student government for athletes; this is called SAAC (Student Athlete Advisory Committee). SAAC members consist of 2 representatives from each school sponsored sport. The committee basically comes up with ways to get involved with the community. As an athlete you are obligated to attend, work or set up the charity events. These events can take all day or sometimes a few hours, but it is just another part of being a college athlete.

Outside activities are up to the athlete. It is possible for an athlete to find time, but going into college the athlete has to be realistic. Athletes cannot always participate in average student activities. The athlete must make smart decisions on whether the activity is safe or if it might ruin their career. This could be in the form of snowboarding or drinking. With Facebook becoming so popular it is important to remember that pictures are worth a thousand words. Coaches may or may not be on Facebook or MySpace, but it can take just one picture to destroy a reputation and career; aka Michael Phelps. Overall, the social life of a student-athlete is definitely there, but it may just come in spurts. I have found that a life outside volleyball in college is a necessity in order to stay sane. I mean that in the best way possible.

Being a student-athlete may take a ton of time, but you get to experience something that only a handful of people get to experience. Entering my senior year as a college athlete I am so honored to have been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I would not change a thing about all the different facets of being a student-athlete because all that work and time is what separates us from just a normal student. Being a college student-athlete is not for everyone, so it is important to know exactly what you're getting into.

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