**GUIDE TO COLLEGE RECRUITING FOR ROWERS AND PARENTS**



Living on the West Coast, we were introduced to the college crew recruiting mystique through a different channel - casual carpooling. Driving across the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge one day seven years ago, my wife Patty learned that the son of a fellow rider had been accepted at Yale due, in part, to his rowing prowess. Of course, he was a very good student, but he also was one of four boys going to Yale, not just from the Oakland Strokes junior rowing club, but also from the same boat! That was the beginning of our involvement in crew.  Although the hook was college admissions, we have come to deeply appreciate the truly wonderful benefits of this sport.

Our older son recently finished his sophomore year on the varsity lightweight boat at the University of

Pennsylvania, noted for its venerable rowing tradition, and the younger will enter his senior year with high aspirations in crew, having been a member of the 2002 USRowing Junior Men’s National Team. In addition, I have been fortunate to mentor several junior rowers at the Oakland Strokes.  Strokes’ alumni are in respected programs throughout the crew community and row for powerhouse programs in each division. My experience includes conversations with a number of current and former coaches, college rowing alumni and parents familiar with the process.  They have been tremendously helpful and I would like to thank all of them for their insights.

Many junior rowers and their parents are attracted to the sport by its potential benefit in college admissions, as well as by the benefits of fitness, competition, and teamwork that it offers. The conventional wisdom is that both elite and non-elite rowers enjoy certain advantages in the admissions process:

* Highly competitive Division I programs actively recruit top junior rowers. Coaches can have a tangible impact on admissions as long as the applicant meets minimum academic standards.
* In Divisions II and III, all things being equal, many admissions committees try to ensure that they remain competitive in Olympic sports like rowing by having a number of experienced rowers to balance the walk-ons (just as they try for enough actors, oboists and student politicians).
* Non-elite and elite rowers alike benefit in admissions, as the demands of the sport demonstrate discipline, perseverance, time management, teamwork and ability to commit to an activity that generates little applause.

While this conventional wisdom has a great deal of truth, students should remember that:

* You can’t turn pro in this sport. Not everyone who participates in freshman crew rows all four years, for a variety of reasons. Ask yourself if you would be happy at a school if you weren’t rowing. Choose a college based on how it fits your educational objectives, the types of people you will meet, the location and other non-crew criteria.
* Only a few rowers will have both the academic and rowing credentials to be actively recruited by the most selective academic institutions in Division I. But if you love this sport, there will be many other schools where you can be admitted, row happily, learn a lot and prosper in adult life. Your rowing-learned life skills will serve you well.
* At the beginning of high school, you probably won’t know how good a student or how fast a rower you may become. If you follow the process described here, though, you will keep your options open.
* Admissions standards are rising at the most prestigious schools. The Council of Ivy Group Presidents, for example, recently raised the minimum Academic Index and the number of admissions spots for recruited athletes in all sports, including rowing
* Many Division I coaches now expect potential. recruits to make commitments very early in the fall of their senior year. Most recruited rowers will get only one “early” opportunity. Therefore, although it defies common sense, you should be prepared to select your top school by October 1 if you need athletic department support.
* Bumps can happen in the admissions process. Being recruited is not a guarantee.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to offer a perspective on the college recruiting process, primarily for those who plan to seek admissions support from college rowing programs. I hope that this guide will help you meet your objectives—admission at a college that fits your academic, social and athletic needs and aspirations—with a minimum of false starts and crabs.

**The Warm-Up**

Before entering the recruiting “race,” you should seriously evaluate how realistic your college rowing ambitions are. In the spring of sophomore year or fall of junior year, discuss with your coach whether you have or are likely to develop the erg scores, physical attributes and other characteristics that could excite college coaches. If this assessment doesn’t seem promising, you can: a) erg and seat race harder for a place on a faster boat, b) improve your grades and SAT scores so you can row JV or 3V at the school of your choice with less reliance on the recruiting process, or c) consider a college where the rowing is somewhat less competitive, including the emerging Division I club programs. You probably will grow some, which may affect your performance.

**The Start**

Once you decide to pursue collegiate rowing, you will need to identify schools that offer the sport. Start with the USRowing Collegiate Rowing Directory at [www.usrowing.org](http://www.usrowing.org/), but also use Rowers’ Almanac and college websites you can link to through[www.row2k.com](http://www.row2k.com/). Examine race results to identify the crews that participate in regattas you’d like to row in one day.

Cast a wide net. Don’t overlook the Division I and II institutions that have less selective admissions criteria or the Division III schools with strong rowing programs and great academics. Women in particular should explore schools that offer scholarships.

* Assess how competitive the schools are both academically and athletically. Consult college guides—do your grades and scores match their standards? Consult your coach and the school’s race results—what level is the competition and how are they doing? Do they go to the Sprints? The NCAA or IRA Championships? Henley? If these are important to you, find out now rather than later. Remember, however, that programs can change significantly in a few short years.

 Attend college-based summer rowing camps after your novice year to see if you are interested in a particular school and to improve your rowing. For ideas, look at USRowing, individual college and U.S. Sports Camps Web sites, or see Rowing News.

 Visit campuses after sophomore year if possible to get a feel for what you like—urban or rural, large or small. While recruits are allowed only five “official” (travel expenses paid by the college) visits after September 1 following your junior year, you can make an unlimited number of these “unofficial” trips at your own expense. It’s important to contact the admissions office to let them know that you are going to be on campus.

 Tentatively select “stretch”, “probable” and “fallback” schools.

**The Body of the Race**

At the beginning of your junior year, you should complete the recruiting forms on the schools’ crew Web sites to signal your interest. You also can e-mail coaches around this time to indicate your interest, and coaches can respond. If you do contact coaches, provide enough information for them to start evaluating your rowing capabilities and whether you are likely to meet their school’s admissions criteria. You may call coaches and speak with them, but they cannot return your calls.

* In the winter and spring, e-mail college coaches with updated erg times and race results. You also may wish to send them a resume that summarizes your academic and rowing achievements. Some potential recruits send videos but this does not yet appear to be a widely-accepted standard.
* Write to the admissions offices to express your interest in their schools, and send them official high school transcripts after both semesters of your junior year and updated scores each time you take the SAT or ACT. Advise the coaches that you have done this.
* Ask your coach to write a note, to e-mail or to call coaches of the few programs in which you’re getting seriously interested. Respect their time; don’t ask too much of them.
* College coaches are permitted to observe a limited number of practices or regattas to evaluate your potential to row at the college level, but may not speak with you at the event. If they choose to visit a practice, they will make arrangements through your coach.
* Attend a regional development camp or the USRowing Junior National Team Selection Camp if invited. It’s a sign that you have the potential to become a top rower.
* As you begin to evaluate schools, remember that Division I schools often allocate a limited number of admissions slots for highly-recruited rowers, subject to minimum test scores and GPAs, but these conditions can change from year to year. Division II and III coaches do have some influence, but may have less influence than in Division I, and club coaches may have little impact on admissions.
* Visit the schools in which you’re interested during the summer after your junior year. Go to the admissions office, tour the entire campus and take a look at the surrounding neighborhoods. Mid- to late-August often works well, as your camp will be over and many coaches are back on campus. Contact them well ahead of time to make an appointment. Some Division I schools also have invitation-only “open houses” for potential recruits. During your stay, try to picture yourself in both classroom and boathouse settings. Evaluate the amount of training time that will be required there and its impact on academics and other activities.
* The freshman or assistant coach is usually the primary point of contact for high school recruits in Division I, though it’s the opposite in other divisions, where assistants are generally part-time. In every case, make sure that you meet the head coach at some point. After all, that’s the person with whom you’ll likely spend three of your four years.
* Should a particular coach be key to your decision, don’t be afraid to ask how committed she or he is to the program. People do change jobs, and rowing coaches are no exception

**The Sprint**

Before your senior year starts, narrow the field to a small number of schools. If crew is going to be your primary extracurricular activity, by all means apply your rowing criteria (e.g., coach, division, competitiveness, facilities and equipment.) But then you should prioritize schools based on their academic programs, types of students and location.

* Tell the coaches on your short-list schools where they stand, because you are going to be making some requests of them — admissions indications and official visits — and you don’t want to mislead them or to waste their time and resources. If you’re still unsure about your preference order, it’s acceptable to say they’re in your top (X) schools, but be prepared to narrow it down quickly.
* Ask coaches to let you know where you are in their recruiting hierarchy, how likely you are to be admitted with and without their support, and how much impact they expect to have on admissions decisions for the coming year. In some cases, a coach may be able to obtain a “likely to admit” letter from admissions, subject to your continued academic performance. Remember that such letters are by no means a guarantee of admission.
* If invited, make an “official” campus visit as early as possible after the first day of senior year classes. You’ll be able to experience school in session, meet current rowers and watch a practice, which may help you to establish your final preference order. Rowers are permitted up to five such “official” visits, but don’t feel compelled to utilize your full allowance. Each one takes valuable time away from your studies and consumes very limited rowing program resources. Also, don’t interpret the absence of an invitation for an official visit from a Division II or III school as a lack of interest. They simply have less funding.
* Based on your preferences and on where you stand with them, select one or two top priority schools early in the fall. Coaches use whatever influence they have at admissions in direct correlation to your attractiveness as a candidate and to the strength of your commitment to attend if admitted.
* Plan to apply early. Coaches have their greatest impact in the early action process. Devise an “early action” or “early decision” strategy in consultation with your parents and counselors. Remember that many “early action” programs now prohibit early applications to other schools. In these cases, though, they usually permit regular decision applications elsewhere and do not require you to accept their offer of admission until May 1. Prepare your teacher and counselor references both for the early application and for the possibility of regular decision applications in January.
* For all but the most recruited rowers with strong academic credentials, you probably will need to pick your top school by October 1. Communicate your decision to the coach at that college and tell the other coaches that you have selected another program as your early choice. You should strongly reiterate your interest in their programs, assuming that’s the case. They understand the limitations of a system that forces your hand so early, and most will do what they can for you in the regular decision process if your early action choice doesn’t pan out.
* Do not revoke commitments that you’ve made elsewhere. Coaches rely on your word in making their commitments.
* Take the October or November SAT I and/or II as needed. Arrange for your scores to be reported to all schools on your short list, in case you need to apply regular decision.
* Send your early action application, updated transcripts and test scores in on time (usually by November 1.) If it’s the practice at that school, make sure that the coach “flags” or “tags” your application to indicate your recruiting status.
* Thank everyone who’s helped you, including your junior crew coach, all of the college coaches, your teachers and your parents. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Finally, be prepared emotionally and logistically for the possibility of a “thin envelope.” It happens, even with great support. Have in hand the application materials for your other schools, prepare your teachers and counselors for additional references, and don’t plan to be away during the winter holidays—you may have to file additional applications

**NCAA Compliance**

* Much of what can and cannot be done during the recruiting process is governed by NCAA rules. The NCAA “Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete” is the best authority for what’s permissible. The rules can be complex, so you should review them carefully with your parents to ensure that you and the coaches are in compliance. In general, limitations described here are primarily applicable to Division I; Division II and III rules may vary slightly. You can obtain the guide from your school counselor or by visiting [https://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](https://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net/).
* The NCAA permits Division I coaches to send you letters, view books and certain other printed materials after September 1 of your junior year. They cannot contact you by phone, however, until after July 1 during the summer before your senior year.
* After the recruiting process begins in earnest on July 1 after junior year, coaches can call you once per week. If a coach is interested, you may receive letters and printed material. If you do not hear from a school that you have contacted, call the coach to find out why.
* Do insist that your daughter or son keep hitting the books. Rowing can be a tiebreaker, but it won’t overcome a mediocre GPA or low test scores at a selective school. Increasingly, colleges are raising the qualifying bar even for outstanding athletes. Since one can’t turn pro in this sport, it’s critical to prepare for a future beyond rowing.
* Do encourage your rower to be the primary contact with the coaches and the admissions team. This is the overwhelmingly preferred means and indicates that your child is really serious. However, if they can’t find the time, or if there are questions that a parent can best address (there are some), it’s acceptable for you to represent your rower as long as you are courteous, low-key and you fairly represent their views toward the school.
* Do become familiar with NCAA recruiting guidelines and make sure that everyone involved complies—your rower, her/his junior coach, college coaches and alumni. Your rower can be penalized, not just the school.
* Don’t rely on second-hand information. Speak directly with the coach about his or her program only. Situations change from year-to-year and practices vary greatly even within a conference. The buzz you hear from others may not be accurate.
* Don’t ever tell a college coach that your rower is interested in, serious about or committed to going to that school if they are not. Doing so will devastate your rower’s prospects, not only there but also elsewhere, and can damage your junior program’s reputation. You must expect that what you say to one coach will be relayed elsewhere.

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