

Pick a School for the Player Not Your Ego

Let's be honest. Who picks the college for the player-the player, their parents or the coach? All three should be included but all should be realistic.

Let me be clearer. There are tons of schools out there with programs: A++, A+, A, B and C. The divisions in college softball really doesn't tell what the program is like. Not all Division I schools are great programs and not all NJCAA programs are at the bottom of the scale. **That fact needs to be made clear to all.** There are many NJCAA, Division II or III schools that can beat teams in Division I, II or III. So, research the teams in each division individually. **It is the program and the college coach that decide the strength of the team not the division.**

The other thing that needs to be clear is the ability, the attitude and perseverance of the player. An honest evaluation must be made. Egos and the desire of the player, parents and youth coaches really can get in the way. Wanting the player to go because it would be awesome to play for a certain team or college coach, just shouldn't be the way the college is chosen. If they can compete at that level and have fun doing it, that's great. If they cannot compete at that level, it would not be fun nor help anyone. Sorry but that is true. Don't let your wants get in the way. Too many players are now using the portal to transfer to a new school because it wasn't what they expected or playing time wasn't there. I don't see how that can help anyone.

Every player should have their dreams of playing on the best team possible and that school could be at any division. While some teams are on TV, travel a lot and everything else about the school and/or program seems very attractive, the school and program **still must be a good fit.** So please, be realistic with your players or daughter.

Really research the schools you would consider going to:

- *Know how far away from home you would want to go.

- *Know the type of coach you would like to play for.

 - There are coaches that really teach every aspect of the game and coaches that hardly teach

- coaches that encourage players and coaches that do not
- coaches that help and understand team dynamics and coaches that do not
- coaches that believe in hard practices and coaches who do not
- coaches that allow time to be wasted during practices and coaches who fill every minute with learning and repetition
- coaches who think fun is a part of the team experience and coaches who don't
- coaches who yell about everything and coaches who can be stern when they need to be but don't scream and berate players

My choice is a coach who:

- teaches every aspect of the game offensively and defensively, on and off the field lessons
- provides great practices full of learning experiences and lots of repetition
- breaks down all skills even the smallest to reduce any flaws in the player's game
- provide the players with a great schedule that challenges them to be better players
- constantly encourages all players not just the best. Your team is only as good as your weakest player. All players need a purpose and a job on the teams
- plays the toughest teams possible during the season. Players learn from mistakes and getting to the Nationals and winning is the goal. I would rather lose games early in the season to excellent teams than win all season against weaker teams than lose in State, Regionals or Nationals early. We learn quickly what we need to do to be a better team when playing harder teams
- knows when to be tough and demanding of the players and when it is time to have fun
- can read the players and knows when they are struggling
- makes it very clear what the rules are and what they expect from the players on and off the field versus a coach that lacks guidance on players actions or waivers
- makes sure the players know they can come in to talk whenever they feel the need
- talks about pride, professionalism, unity, acceptance, empathy, teamwork, dedication, perseverance, education, learning, team being a family
- talks about the uniform and name on the front
- demands the uniform is worn properly and with pride, talks on care of the uniform and equipment especially the proper care and breaking in of the glove

- talks about players actions on and off the field
- takes every opportunity during the games to continue to teach the game
- at tournaments, points out things during watching other games to the players
- does their homework on opposing teams

Things to think about and do if the goal is to play with the best:

- *Become a student of the game!!! Learn everything you can about the fundamentals, techniques and strategies of the game of softball.
- *Prepare yourself physically for the game by doing physical and agility training.
- *Prepare yourself mentally for the game by working to be mentally tough during every situation.
- *Be a leader-help and encourage your teammates, don't get caught up in petty disagreements-stay out of the muck.
- *Hustle all the time, doing the little things to help the team
- *A positive attitude is everything
- *Never show negative emotion, pouting or fear. No matter how scared you are, never show fear. Never give the other team the satisfaction of seeing your head drop after striking out, making an out or an error.
- *Study hard in your classes and keep the GPA up.
- *Decide how far away from home you really want to go.
- * If you have decided your career choice, go to a school that has that program.
- *Visit several schools to see if you like the atmosphere
- *Visit the game and practice facilities
- *Visit the coaching staff and players
- *Find out about the amount of time doing other required softball related activities that are off the field-weight room, study halls, etc
- *Watch a game and see if you like the way they play, coach, act, react to situations, treat each other, talk to their parents if around, etc.
- *Watch a practice (if allowed) to see if it is too easy, too hard or just right. To improve, practices have to challenge the players every day.

All of these things are needed to be sure the school is a good fit for you. The players should be the best that they can on and off the field for the program. 90-95% of players will not play for the teams that are always on television or playing at the College World Series in Oklahoma City. It is awesome if the player

can. But there are many hours that go into getting to a National Tournament in every division. Is it worth the hours? For me as a coach, that answer is yes. Just pick the division that is a fit and be the best player you can.