

Give Others a Chance

by Celeste Knierim

As a former college coach of 30 years and now as a summer coach/mentor, I deal with players and their parents a lot. Recruiting has become an extremely stressful event when it should be fun for high school players to check out different schools and visit the college campuses. But now, a lot of the parents are pushing the player to excel in order to get a scholarship and a number of the travel ball/high school coaches are pushing the players to excel to get to a Division I school.

I coached a 16U team last summer and saw first hand how stressful it became for all of the juniors and seniors on the team. Some of the parents were close to being out of control about when to give a verbal commitment and about getting a scholarship especially to a Division I school.

[You know what, it isn't the division as much as it is the quality of the school, the experience/dedication of the coach and the competitiveness' of the program.](#)

Parents and players have to do their homework and take the time to research programs of all types of colleges/universities. The player needs to decide what they want from a school:

- how far they want to go away from home
- how big of a campus
- how big of a class size
- if they have your major
- the competitiveness' of the team
- the travel schedule
- the time missed from classes
- the amount of time spent on softball including wt. training, conditioning, etc
- do they have a tutoring program
- how they can pay for it-scholarship, grant, financial aid
- and there will be more to think about depending on your family needs and thoughts

Here's the deal, [in every division including Division I there are excellent, good, ok and poor teams. Yes, there are poor programs in Division I.](#) Before committing to a school, research the program and find out how they play. Go back at least five years and look at the win-lose record and especially what teams they played. Research the divisions to find the list of nationally ranked teams in those divisions and go back five years to see the consistency of the program. A team can have a good record and still not be a very good team. If they play other weak teams, they may win a lot of those games. However, if they would play the ranked teams or the very good teams, they would lose almost all of the time. Again, if you want to play good softball and learn from good coaches, you need to do your homework and find statistics on the program's strength, their coaches and the teams that they play. Coaches who are recruiting can say anything and spin the truth anyway they want but they cannot change their accomplishments and the rankings against good teams that are on paper and should be online.

In my experience as the head coach of St. Louis CC/Meramec for 30 years, there are numerous myths surrounding two-year colleges. We played all four years schools in the fall-DI, DII, DIII and NAIA. During the Spring, most of our games were against other Nationally ranked NJCAA teams from across the country. So, I feel I can speak to those misconceptions about two year schools. The other divisions probably have their own issues to address also but I want to discuss the NJCAA.

It was so rewarding to watch a freshman come in and watch them mature and blossom as a player. Most NJCAA coaches teach the game and teach the fundamentals constantly to their players. These players are well seasoned after their sophomore years and that is why so many go on to their universities as starters and also on to the Pros or National programs.

[Here are some of the World Class athletes and coaches who got their start at an NJCAA school:](#)

- Crystal Bustos won an Olympic Gold Medal and started her career at an NJCAA school—Palm Beach CC in Florida.
- Chelsea Mesa won a National Championship at Phoenix College, an NJCAA school and went on to play for former Olympic coach Mike Candrea at the University of Arizona.

- Mike Candrea—University of Arizona softball coach and former Olympic Coach was the coach of Central Arizona CC. Not only did he win an Olympic title but numerous NCAA titles at Arizona and NJCAA titles at Central.
- Connie Clark is the head coach of the nationally ranked University of Texas Longhorns but started her playing career at Central Arizona CC where she won National Titles before going to Cal State Fullerton and winning a title there under Hall of Famer, Judi Garman.
- Judi Garman was a junior college coach before Cal State, at Golden West College in CA where she won National titles (one beating my team from Meramec in the 1978 National NJCAA Championship game).
- Clint Meyers won titles at Central Arizona CC after Mike was there and also has won two at Arizona State University.

Check out this list of former NJCAA players:

- David Freese—St. Louis CC/Meramec won the 2011 World Championship with the St. Louis Cardinals and was the MVP of the League Series and World Series
- Albert Pujols—Maplewoods CC World Champion St. Louis Cardinals and said to be the best player in baseball and signed a new contract for around \$254 million
- Texas Rangers players: Derik Holland—Wallace State CC, Ian Kinsler—Central Arizona, Michael Gonzalez—San Jacinto CC
- Cliff Lee of the Phillies—Meridian CC
- Roy Oswalt, Phillies/Astros—Holmes CC
- Hunter Pence, Astros—Texarkana CC
- Placido Polanco and Raul Ibanez, Phillies—Miami-Dade CC
- Vicki Schneider—St. Louis Hummers (Pro softball in the 70s)—St. Louis CC/Meramec
- Yolanda Griffith—WNBA Palm Beach CC
- Walter Jones—NFL Holmes CC (MS) he is one of 100 NJCAA players in the NFL

2008 Olympic Medalists:

Track:

- Veronica Campbell, Barton CC
- Melanie Walker, Kerron Stewart, Novlene Williams—Mills Essex CC
- Aaron Armstrong, Leevan Sands, Barton CC
- Hylear Fountain, Barton CC

Baseball:

- Jake Arrieta, Weatherford CC
- Terry Tiffie, Pratt CC

The list goes on and on. Thirty-two former NJCAA players were on the rosters of playoff teams competing in the 2011 MLB Championship Post Season games. Three on the World Champion Cardinals team. There are even more in professional baseball players that were not in the playoffs.

As I said, there are a lot of myths being thrown out there about NJCAA programs.

Myth #1: A lot of people think that only kids that have low academics go to a junior/community college and that is just not true. They also thought the teachers were not as good at a two year schools which is not true. I have had numerous players come back to say that the teachers they had at Meramec were better and harder than the ones they had at their four year university. The NJCAA not only has Athletic All-Americans but also Academic All-Americans, many of which go on to make the Dean's List at their four year university.

Many former players have also said they had hundreds of students in some of their classes and were only a number to the professor at their four year school. At a two-year school, class sizes usually range between 35 to 60 with the instructor knowing everyone. That keeps freshman especially in school and starts the player's academic journey correctly.

Myth #2: Your classes will not transfer. Not true. If a student stays on course with taking their requirements along with a balance of electives, their credits will transfer especially after earning an Associates Degree. If a student at a four year school as a freshman or sophomore, does not stick to their list of classes needed, those credits will not

count towards graduation either. In simple terms, you can only take so many hours in a subject that counts towards your degree and you have to take all of the required courses. That eliminates students trying to take all easy classes and not following the set curriculum. Both two year and four year schools has to abide by these rules.

Myth #3: That it is hard to transfer after two years. A student does have to transfer to another school but it is not as hard as people think if you stick to your course catalog. Your coach is responsible for helping their players go on to a four year school successfully. If they don't do that, I probably would pick one where the coach does help you. Remember there are excellent-poor in each division. Academically, everything is spelled out clearly and counselors are there to help make the transition. Leaving old teammates and going to a new team as a junior is a consideration. But a plus of going to an NJCAA school is that the athlete plays those two years without sitting behind a junior or senior. That means a lot more experience. They also have a chance to make the All-Conference, All-Region and All-American teams as well as the Academic All-American team.

The junior colleges really get a bad rap but are full of excellent players and excellent coaches.

MYTH #4: is that the player has to pay for their road trips, uniforms, etc. Not necessarily true, our program was fully funded within a budget but that did not stop us from traveling to Arizona for spring training and playing a very competitive schedule with others trips to Iowa, Illinois, Kansas and Michigan to play the teams we needed to in order to get to Nationals. There are schools out there with even bigger budgets than we had. Are there some with a lower budget, yes, but there are a number of four year schools with low budgets who have to fundraise for spring break trips and more. We did have very few scholarships though for softball so some of our players supplemented with academic scholarships, grants and some on financial aid. There are many NJCAA schools, however, with the full 24 available scholarships for softball/baseball.

No, that is not a typo-24 scholarships per school.

MYTH #5: is that a two year school player is not as good as the player going to a four year school especially a DI player. Look at the list above that I included and realize that there are a ton more not mention

MYTH #6: This isn't a myth just a sad statement. The worse reason to not look at a NJCAA school is because the high school or travel ball coach either hasn't seen the Nationally ranked NJCAA programs and just sees the poor ones. Or worse than that is because they want their players to go DI because it is an ego thing for them. I hope those coaches keep follow up statistics on those players to see if they are playing, if they are at a DI that is good, if the player is happy. It is about the player, not the coaches nor the parents. The player needs to be happy with the decision.

MYTH #7: It is extremely hard for schools to see all of the high schools players in their area let alone in the Nation. Many high schools players are overlooked and that includes some really good players. If a student/athlete does not get an opportunity from the college that they really want to play for, a great option is to go to a good NJCAA school where they will play and be seen by the four year school coaches. However, they need to go to a seasoned NJCAA program with a good track record of winning, of sending players on to universities and having good academic success. There are numerous NJCAA programs like that across the country.

Remember, going to a college is about the student/athlete and getting the correct fit. There is a college and a program that fits every player, the key is researching and putting the time in to find that right fit.

The other thing to remember is that there are teams in every division that are excellent, good, ok and poor. Division I does not have a lock on excellence and on the flip side not all NJCAA, NAIA, Div II or Div III schools are made the same either. There are excellent to poor in these divisions also.

Unfortunately the only teams put on TV are the Division I excellent programs. Your opinion would change if you saw the excellent programs from the other divisions play. Give the others a chance and go watch the ranked programs and you will understand what I am talking about.