

Q: Do you have any suggestions for getting accepted as a walk-on to Division I team? What if you are a strong Level 9?

From Olivia of New York and a similar question from Jen of Tulsa Tom: A walk on member of a college program, Jen, is no less valuable than a scholarship athlete...This is important. That said, the competition for walk on spots, depending on the institution, can be fierce and it is important to get on the radar of the college coaches early, provide them with the information they request and remain persistent and patient. You may not be a great beam or floor worker, but if that Handspring Front Pike Barani Out remains steady, you have a chance in finding a coach who is looking for vaulters!

Q: How early should I send DVDs or YouTube links of a gymnast's work? Is the freshman year too early? From Jackie of Kansas City

Tom: Great question Jackie! It depends on the level of the athlete and her current success rate. If the athlete has raw talent or noticeable potential to rise to higher levels, then the freshman year is not too early. Otherwise, it would be safe to post a video after JO Nationals in the sophomore year.

Q: How can you avoid spending so much money on unofficial visits when a college coach invites you when they visit your gym, but once you are on the visit, they no longer seem interested? How do you avoid this? Is there a way to check on how sincere the coaches are when they initially express interest? From Patty of The Woodlands

Tom: Dear Patty, The best way to get to an answer is to simply ask the question. What's important here is the delivery. Always take the high road and be open and honest with the college coaches... There is a very good chance they will return the favor. Also, the better you know and understand the coaches the better chance you will "pick up" on their level of interest. There will come a time when you need to ask the tough questions and I strongly suggest you take the time to cultivate meaningful relationships with the coaches.

Unofficial visits, especially with the growing impact of verbal offers, are becoming almost necessary for prospects and families. Every Coach is different and while one Coach might be recruiting the current sophomore class, another will hold off in closing on the current senior class until the regular signing period in April.

Many decisions in the recruiting process, including timing of visits, rest in grey areas and "hunches." The better informed the family is and the greater the effort they place in building momentum in the college search, the better their gut reactions will become.

Q: I'm a junior in high school and I've been asked to make an unofficial visit to a far away college. Is an unofficial visit a big deal, or should I pass on the offer? From Linda of Santa Monica

Tom: A lot depends on what year in high school you are currently and where the Coach happens to be in recruiting your class. Linda, If you are a junior and the offer for an unofficial visit is extended and this institution is in her top 3....I suggest you go!

Q: What does it mean when a Division I team extends a verbal "offer" and the gymnast "commits"? Under what circumstances can either party back out? From Jackie of Southport

Tom: Thanks Jackie! I just wrote an article on the subject and you can find it right here on the CGF website, but here is an excerpt:

"The verbal offer is "open ended" and a common question that prospects and parents have is "Can we back out of the agreement?" And the answer is yes. That said it is important to realize the flip side of the coin and although it is less likely, college coaches can back out of a verbal commitment, especially if the prospect shows a lack of progress on the field or in the classroom."

Q: How do you get a verbal commitment and how important is it? From Melanie of Long Beach

Tom: Here is another excerpt from the same article Melanie. I hope this helps!:

"Simply put, a verbal commitment is one where a coach and a prospect agree there is a proper and mutual fit scholastically and athletically with the prospect and the institution. In many cases, there is an offer of athletic aid (scholarship), or in some cases, support by the coach in admissions. The verbal commitment is a "gentleman's agreement." An old fashion handshake where both party's offer their word to remain committed through either the signing of The National Letter of Intent or offer of admissions."

I feel the verbal commitment is very important. The college coaches in the gymnastics community are men and women of integrity and their word is good. Getting a verbal commitment is a team effort where the college coaches and families interact and exchange information all within the boundaries of the NCAA rules.

