



Navigating Financial Aid for the Student-Athlete

By Tom Kovic

Financial aid is readily available to families who qualify, based on need, and for the most part is not based on merit or athletic ability. The family can begin the process by using several methods listed below.

- Complete a College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile online at **www.collegeboard.com**. This information needs to be filled in only once and you may designate specific schools (each has a code number) to forward financial aid information.
- Submit online applications to specific schools using their websites. The website will walk families step-by-step through the process and will request specific information with a specific timeline.
- Submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online to **www.fafsa.ed.gov**. The website is very specific and easy to navigate, providing very specific instructions and timelines to assist parents and prospects.

Although most institutions that do not offer athletic scholarships or programs that have exhausted their athletics scholarship “bank” for a particular admissions cycle, there might be some “wiggle room” available for the student-athlete. Need-Blind is a term that financial aid institutions use to assure families that the package they qualify for reflects only their financial status, but the persistent consumer will find some room to maneuver, especially if the prospect offers potential strength to the program.

PRE-READS

A financial aid pre-read is typically encouraged by the college coach as a means of providing prospects with a “ballpark” figure as to what the family can expect to pay for a college education. It is important that the family request a pre-read early in the recruiting process, but with sincere interest in the program. **The family should first determine the individual institution’s policy on providing financial aid pre-reads.**

Financial aid pre-reads, which will be handled by the office of financial aid, take approximately 2 weeks to complete and require the following information:

- Prior year income/business taxes with all W-2 forms.
- Completed worksheet with documented information.
- Divorced/separated paperwork if applicable.
- Completed worksheet and budget.

This information will give parents a fair estimate as to what the family financial aid breakdown will be for the coming cycle. Note: financial aid packages can change from year to year based on changes to personal family finances

MATCHING PACKAGES

Some institutions will attempt to “come in line” with financial aid offers from other schools. Matching typically occurs with schools from the same conference, or similarly selective schools. It is good to make a comparison. Be careful to compare those schools that are truly potential choices. Some institutions will not match certain offers. Remember, the college coach is your “point person” in this process.

INSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Certain institutions offer “internal scholarships” for which student-athletes could be looked at favorably. Research your choice of school for all internal scholarships. These awards are very selective and reward the “cream of the crop” and/or those with tremendous financial need. Communicate these needs with the college coach, who generally recommends potential candidates for consideration. There are many cases where prospects can qualify for Leadership Grants, but communicating to the coach your need for financial aid is imperative.

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEED

It is important the family communicate clearly any offers from other institutions, along with current financial aid pre-reads. Honestly discuss your family financial concerns. Determine where your child ranks in the coach's recruiting priority. If your child is considered "blue chip," carefully probe the coach's feeling in requesting the office of financial aid to take a hard look at the family's request to determine all options to possibly "sweeten the pot."

Considering the fact that the majority of student-athletes who play college athletics are not on athletic scholarship should be incentive enough for families to make a concentrated effort in negotiating financial aid. The family that takes a proactive effort in organizing their finances, works closely with the college coach and practices persistence when navigating financial aid will experience better success and a little more pocket change!