



Chapter 8:

The Athletic Advantage



What you will learn in this chapter:

- What NCAA Divisions award athletic scholarships
- The probability of competing in athletics beyond high school
- What Title IX is
- Why prospective athletes must register with the *NCAA Clearinghouse*
- The *National Letter of Intent*
- What is better than an athletic scholarship
- How to market yourself
- Why you may need an athletic résumé
- The huge advantage that low-income student athletes can have in the gaining admission to elite colleges



At 6'2" and 230 pounds, Dylan is a football coach's dream. An offensive lineman, Dylan has fantastic footwork and excellent field awareness. Currently, a sophomore in high school, Dylan dreams of playing Division 1 football on a full ride.

Emma is an exceptionally fast point guard and natural team leader. She holds her high school's record for most points scored during a season. Emma loves basketball and hopes that a sports scholarship will pay for the private college that is financially out of reach of her family.

Put 100 Dylans and Emmas in a room. Guess how many get a full-ride athletic scholarship? One.

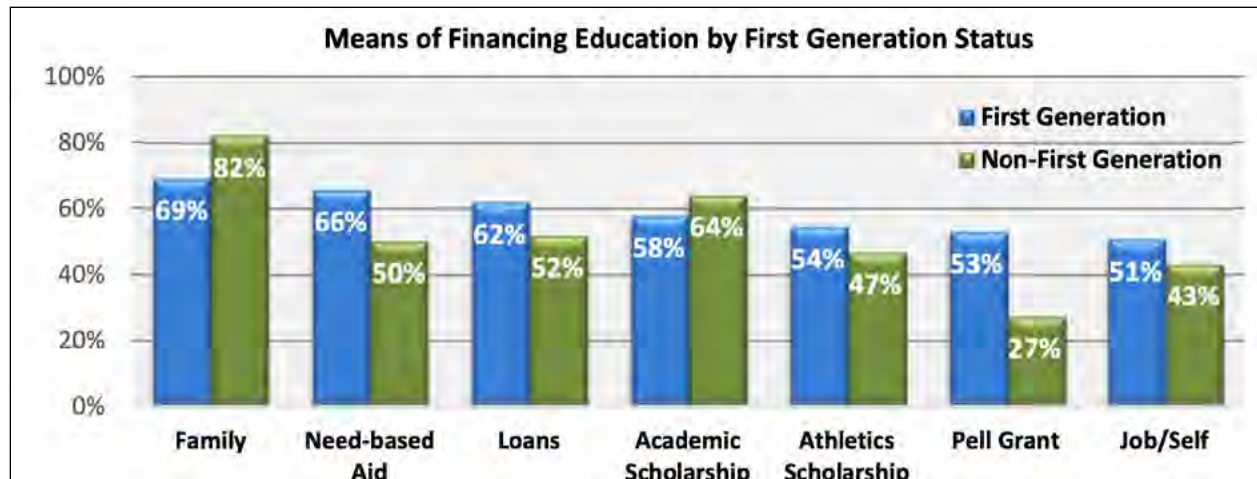
*D1 and D2 schools give out more than \$2.7 billion in athletic scholarships annually. That's a huge dollar amount, but the reality is that **fewer than 2% of high school student-athletes are offered athletic scholarships**. Only six D1 sports provide full-ride scholarships that cover tuition and fees, room, board and course-related books. **These "head-count" sports are football, men's and women's basketball, volleyball, gymnastics and tennis**. Student-athletes in every other sport compete for "equivalency" or partial scholarships that coaches divide among their roster.*

The average athletic scholarship for all sports in Division I is approximately \$14,270 a year for men and \$15,162 for women. In Division II sports, the numbers drop to \$5,548 for men and \$6,814 for women.

Source: [Chasing Athletic Scholarship Dreams Can Be a Costly Mistake](#)

High school athletes have an undeniable advantage in college admissions. While the likelihood of being offered an athletic scholarship is low, with less than 2 percent of all high school athletes being offered even a partial athletic scholarship, being a varsity athlete tips the college admissions scales in favor of thousands of high school seniors each year.

Since over 98 percent of high school athletes will not be offered an athletic scholarship, the first part of this chapter will provide guidance as to how to use your participation in varsity sports to expand your college and scholarship (non-athletic) opportunities.



The above [NCAA](#) data indicates that 66 percent of first generation student-athletes and 52 percent of non-first generation student-athletes take out student loans to attend college. First generation student-athletes only make up 15 percent of student-athletes at D-III schools where they are most likely to be awarded full need-based scholarships if they compete in a “head count” sport. To maximize the athletic advantage, and avoid student loan debt, academics and athletics go hand in hand. Students can only maximize the athletic advantage by taking the level of classes and earning the type of grades that make them competitive applicants at selective colleges and universities. By so doing, D-I schools, like Harvard, Rice, Vanderbilt, Duke, and the University of Southern California; and D-III schools, like Amherst, Swarthmore, Bowdoin, Claremont McKenna, and Williams, all have financial aid policies, outside of athletic scholarships, that will meet the full financial need of admitted students.

Harvard students, Delano Franklin and Devin Srivastava, in their 2019 article for the Harvard Crimson, [“The Athlete Advantage,”](#) provides insight into how athletes are advantaged in the admissions process at elite colleges and universities:

- Recruited athletes receive “likely letters” long prior to other applicants being notified of their admissions decision.

FALL SPORTS		WINTER SPORTS		SPRING SPORTS		EMERGING SPORTS
Men:	Women:	Men:	Women:	Men:	Women:	Women:
Cross Country	Cross Country	Basketball	Basketball	Baseball	Beach Volleyball	Acrobatics and Tumbling
Football	Field Hockey	Fencing	Bowling	Golf	Golf	Equestrian (Divisions I and II only)
Soccer	Soccer	Gymnastics	Fencing	Lacrosse	Lacrosse	Rugby
Water Polo	Volleyball	Ice Hockey	Gymnastics	Outdoor Track and Field	Outdoor Track and Field	Triathlon
		Indoor Track and Field	Ice Hockey	Tennis	Rowing	Wrestling
		Rifle	Indoor Track and Field	Volleyball	Softball	
		Skiing	Rifle		Tennis	
		Swimming and Diving	Skiing		Water Polo	
		Wrestling	Swimming and Diving			

- Highly **academically qualified athletes are offered admission at a rate of 83 percent**, while equally qualified academic **non-athletes are offered admission at a rate of less 16 percent**.
- Contact between athletes and coaches begin as early as when a student enters high school.
- A coach's athletic recommendation influences admissions decisions in favor of athletes.
- The annual budget for athletic recruitment exceeds \$1 million with coaches traveling throughout the world looking for athletes for Harvard's 42 D-I teams; over 58 club sports; and over 32 Intramural sports.
- Runners, jumpers, and throwers do not even need to make a recruiting visit, but simply send coaches their race times or distances.
- Coaches have considerable power over the admissions prospects of recruited athletes and advise athletes during the admissions process, with one coach advising an athlete not to talk about track in his essays as the admissions office already knew that he was a recruited athlete.

Like Harvard, coaches at most colleges and universities have the power to chaperone recruited athletes through the admissions process by filling out forms, hand-delivering application materials to admissions staff, and advocating for increased financial aid. Another common practice is for coaches to communicate admissions offers directly to athletes instead of the offers being communicated directly from the admissions office as with all other students being offered admission.

While exceptional gifts and talents in music, dance, theatre, or art can provide an advantage when compared to other academically qualified students, at many colleges and universities, athletic talent is valued above all other talent. **Athletes who apply via "Early Decision" are**

most likely to be guaranteed admission and a place on the team's roster. Several former admissions officers describe 3 ways in which athletes receive an advantage in the college admissions process:

1. Streamlined, hassle-free application process in which coaches hand walk the applications of athletes through the admissions process.
2. Overlooking below-average grades and test scores.
3. Guaranteed acceptance and roster placement when applying "Early Decision." (Source: [The Conversation](#))

While athletics is often used to expand college-bound pathways for urban youth, and students from lower-income families, with the exception of football, basketball, and track, college athletics is disproportionately represented by white, wealthy, and suburban youth.

While athletes (recruited or non-recruited) can have a considerable advantage in the admissions process at elite colleges and universities, they are still required to have a strong academic transcript—one that suggests their ability to be successful academically.

Although high school athletics is an extracurricular activity that can result in a student being awarded merit-based institutional financial aid, as presented in the previous chapter, athletic scholarships represent unique scholarship opportunities to fully or partially fund your college education. They also have rules and guidelines, as governed by the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), that differ from other types of merit-based aid.

I'm an athlete, so what so I do?

Begin by recognizing if you are in the 2 percent of recruited athletes or in the 98 percent of non-recruited athletes. If you are a recruited athlete, you should probably begin working with someone who has a comprehensive understanding of the recruitment process. However, if you are in the 98 percent group, then the first thing to do is to expand your thinking from being awarded an athletic scholarship to the primary focus of this book—avoiding student loan debt. By so doing, you will learn that the full need-based scholarships awarded by such D-III schools as Amherst College, Swarthmore, and Williams College are not only guaranteed renewable each year, but they are not dependent on your continuing to compete as a student-athlete.

Follow a plan similar to non-athletes: good grades; rigorous course taking; leadership; and community service. While colleges will understand if the rigor of course taking is not as rigorous as that of students who do nothing but study, they will want to see you challenge yourself academically. While colleges will not hold you to the same straight A standard as the strongest academic students, your transcript should be a strong A/B transcript. Engaging in meaningful