

This article is a continuation of Kirkwood Academy articles whose focus is to educate both players and parents in understanding an emerging landscape in the United States with an emphasis on youth soccer and the College process.

There is a genuine excitement about “the beautiful game” in the United States, particularly in our area, with the continued growth and expansion of the MLS whose Philadelphia franchise will anchor a new \$500 million development project in Chester in 2010, a stadium that will also feature the new women’s professional league (WPS) at the same venue.

The league has also announced that there will be 2 more teams, expanding the league to 18 by 2011, and with average crowds now on par with the NBA and the NHL, as well as continually increasing TV viewership and revenues, the MLS is expected to expand to 24 teams over the next 10 years.

While many young boys and girls dream of fulfilling life as a professional soccer player, the journey to the top is a difficult one. Most parents and players understand this and readily agree that only the most talented athletes are fortunate enough to make the grade and forge a career as a professional athlete.

For these same parents and players there is also a feeling that they have a more realistic chance of playing soccer in College and hopefully the opportunity to obtain a soccer scholarship to ease the financial burden of the seemingly ever- increasing costs of higher education.

This article is dedicated to help Kirkwood parents and players understand a little bit about the college process and to shed light on the probability of playing at the collegiate level.

One may wonder why such an article is planted in the Academy web-pages and not in another portion of the Kirkwood web-site, and the reasons are manifold. Firstly, I think it is important to help unveil the College process early particularly in relation to scholarship money, because I have met so many parents who believe that their sons and daughters are destined for a college scholarship because they happen to be the best 8 and 9 year old soccer player on their recreation or travel team.

Secondly, there is a sense in some quarters of the sport that we have taken much of the game out of the hands of our children by over-coaching and over-analyzing our kids from the start of their young careers, shielding ourselves by reasoning that if our kids don’t constantly win they will never come to the attention of college scouts when the time comes, and that means no scholarship money in the future.

For these reasons and others, there are too often times that both sidelines (coaches and parents) have taken on a frenzied approach to the youth game emphasizing, and being content with, only winning games at the youngest ages and by extension validating that their young child or player is indeed separate from the rest and is on the right path to a future college scholarship. While this is certainly not the case for all parents (in fact some are driven from the game because of it) it is certainly prevalent enough to warrant a reasoned educational approach as to what exactly the college process does entail, with the hope of providing a starting point for meaningful dialogue for coaches, parents and players alike.

Playing in College

The NCAA data suggest that only 5.5 per cent of male graduating HS seniors will go on to be rostered at an NCAA institution, represented by roughly 5,655 freshmen roster spots. However, it is worth bearing in mind that this is for Division 1, 2 and 3 programs. In the sport of soccer the number of Division 2 and 3 programs by far exceed the number Division 1 teams. Of the 750 men’s soccer programs in the nation, only 203 are Division 1, so just over a quarter of those coveted freshmen spots are actually Division 1 slots, amounting to about 1500 invites every year (This makes sense when you consider the average recruiting class is 7 or 8 players).

To some, these Division 1 numbers may seem like a lot, but when you consider that up to 100,000 soccer playing seniors graduate every year from High School, the numbers can be daunting. Put another way, over 98% of High School graduating seniors will not be rostered on an NCAA Division 1 squad and roughly 95% will not play NCAA soccer at any level.

While these numbers may vary slightly from year to year, the scale of probability of playing does not change that much.

Even if you do happen to make it on to a roster, playing time can be tough to come by. The recruiting cycle is really a window of competition for playing time against a 7 year span of players. Players compete for time with the class that they are in, as well as those already

established on the College team(So, Jr, Sr), as well as the 3 year pool of players that are coming through behind them that are still in High School but already known to College coaches.

Figure 1 below is the NCAA numbers of 6 popular sports and the probability of playing in College and at the professional level.

Fig. 1

Student Athletes	Men's Basketball	Women's Basketball	Football	Baseball	Men's Ice Hockey	Men's Soccer
High School Student Athletes	546,335	452,929	1,071,775	470,671	36,263	358,935
High School Senior Student Athletes	156,096	129,408	306,221	134,477	10,361	102,553
NCAA Student Athletes	16,571	15,096	61,252	28,767	3,973	19,793
NCAA Freshman Roster Positions	4,735	4,313	17,501	8,219	1,135	5,655
NCAA Senior Student Athletes	3,682	3,355	13,612	6,393	883	4,398
NCAA Student Athletes Drafted	44	32	250	600	33	76
Percent High School to NCAA(I,II,III)	3.00%	3.30%	5.70%	6.10%	11.00%	5.50%
Percent NCAA to Professional	1.20%	1.00%	1.80%	9.40%	3.70%	1.70%
Percent High School to Professional	0.03%	0.02%	0.08%	0.45%	0.32%	0.07%

Scholarships

If a young man or woman is talented and fortunate enough to make a recruiting class at a Division 1 institution, one of their immediate obstacles is how they going to fund their education. Many players, parents and club coaches often assume that if players are actively being recruited by college coaches that there is an accompanying financial value. While this is certainly true in many cases it is also likely that these same players are being recruited to play for a small portion of the cost of that particular schools education, or for no money at all.

In our sport of soccer the typical squad size runs from 24-28 players. On the men's side the maximum allowable scholarships is 9.9 per 4 year per period and 14 scholarships on the women's side also per four year period. On average that is 2.5 scholarships for men and 3.5 scholarships for women that open up each year. If the average recruiting class size is 7-8 players

and the money was distributed evenly, each male player would receive approximately a 30% scholarship and each woman roughly 50%.

This rarely happens, however, since programs needs differ from year to year. One year a program may need a forward and are willing to offer more to fill that position, and the next year their needs may be completely different. Furthermore, the more pedigreed the player is, usually the more they will cost each program e.g. a US national youth team player may command a full scholarship.

One other aspect to consider is that many soccer programs are not fully funded i.e. they are not budgeted by the school to have 9.9 scholarships, and may have significantly less.

Anecdotally, I would say an average men's fully funded program has half of its roster with no soccer scholarship money, and the other half is partial scholarships with 1 -3 players on full scholarships. I bring the point up because obtaining a full scholarship is rare (particularly on the men's soccer side).

For those of you who have children that play other sports below (Fig. 2) are some of the allowed NCAA scholarship numbers by sport.

Fig 2.

SPORT	Men		Women	
	Division 1	Division 2	Division 1	Division 2
Archery	0	0	5	9
Baseball	11.7	9	N/A	N/A
Basketball	13	10	15	10
Bowling	0	0	5	5
XC/Track & Field	12.6	12.6	18	12.6
Equestrian	0	0	15	15
Field Hockey	N/A	N/A	12	6.3
Football	85	36	N/A	N/A
Ice Hockey	18	13.5	18	18
Lacrosse	12.6	10.8	12	9.9
Rowing	0	0	20	20
Rugby	0	0	12	12
Softball	N/A	N/A	12	7.2
Soccer	9.9	9	14	9
Swimming	9.9	8.1	14	8.1
Tennis	4.5	4.5	8	8
Volleyball	4.5	4.5	12	8
~ These are the maximum number of scholarships allowed by the NCAA.				
~ Not all NCAA programs are full funded.				
~ Scholarship amounts are over 4 year period.				
~ Division 3 Schools do not offer athletic scholarships				

College Life

Once you have made the decision to be an NCAA athlete, what can you expect?

Figure 3. shows the NCAA numbers from a survey of male athletes about the hours per week that your typical student athlete spends as a student and as an in-season competing athlete.

Fig 3.

NCAA Student-Athlete In-Season Time Commitments						
SPORT	Division 1		Division 2		Division 3	
	Athletic	Academic	Athletic	Academic	Athletic	Academic
Baseball	40	32	37.6	31.8	33.5	35
Basketball	36.8	33.9	35	35	30.6	35.2
Ice Hockey	37.6	31.3	N/A	N/A	35.1	34.2
Lacrosse	34.8	36.1	31.1	32.6	31.6	38.7
Soccer	33.6	39.1	29.9	35.5	28.5	37.3
Track	30.7	38.5	28.6	36.3	27	39.8
Football	44.8	39.5	37.1	35.4	34.4	37.9

Since these are only averages you will see variation from athlete to athlete depending on the course of study they may take, but you can see that most sports spend between 65-80 hours per week between academics and athletics (Youngsters reading this should bear in mind that Mom and Dad's 9-5 job is 40 hours per week. At least that was what they were told when they took the job!!).

What now?

I hope that those who read this article enjoy it in the spirit in which it is written. It is a simple attempt to help understand in part, a process that I feel takes a firm grip of some families too early who have a son or daughter that plays soccer.

As a father I know that it is perfectly natural to want the best for your child, and it is human nature to project ahead for them and help steer them in a direction that you think will help them lead healthy and productive lives. It is also as a father that I urge you to just let the kids play, particularly before the age of 12 and 13 when a large portion of children dropout of the sport.

Let them play without fear of failure; let them not be the champions that we sometimes want them to be. Let them be free to think on the game in their own child-like way for they are not mini adults. Try not to focus on results, especially at the youngest ages. Let them express themselves in their own wonderful way, for they are all artists who need the greatest nurturing and room to experiment (and fail) in painting their beautiful pictures on the field. It is worth keeping in mind that research has shown the main reason children play soccer is for fun, and the main reasons for leaving the sport is loss of interest and because it wasn't fun anymore. Unfortunately, I feel we adults, coaches and parents alike, help run kids out of the game often naively thinking we are helping.

The College scholarship process does not have a place on the sidelines at this tender age. They will win and lose their fair share, regardless of how we coaches and parents wish otherwise (College coaches won't ask how your child did in their U12 league).

Enjoy the game and all its innocence now, because soon enough it will be at an end.

In Sport

Ian Hennessy