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## Recruiting guide educates would-be college athletes

By TODD SLISS

Steven Binder has seen the college sports recruiting process change before his very eyes from the late 1970s to today. While the goals and concepts are the same, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's rules and the way in which college coaches can access information have made playing sports in college easier for some, more difficult for others.

When Binder played basketball for Scarsdale High School in the '70s, there was no Amateur Athletic Union ball, no Internet, no social media. Old-fashioned coaches hit the road and recruited players from high schools, also relying on trips to elite basketball camps.

The recruiting process today couldn't be more different, said Binder, a 1980 graduate of SHS. "Back in the '80s, for at least a few years after and certainly before, college coaches could be out 365 days a year. They could be on high school campuses whenever they wanted. They could attend practices, scrimmages, games, write you letters, call. The rules were far less technical and formal than they are today."

For today's athletes, the recruiting game is about increasing your chances by expanding the pool of choices, taking



Steven Binder

charge of the process and helping coaches recruit you. It's a sales game, and sometimes kids have to sell themselves — often by picking up a phone and calling a coach — something that can be difficult for a teenager.

While everyone agrees that the top tier players will reach the level they are meant to, some of those players might not be getting looks from the colleges they're aiming for. And that's where Binder's recently published book, "Your Recruiting Playbook: Maximize Your Opportunities to Play College Sports!" ([www.collegesportsrecruiting.net](http://www.collegesportsrecruiting.net)) comes in handy

for all athletes (and their parents), no matter the sport, who hope to play at the next level.

While Binder doesn't suggest that kids start the recruiting process before they need to, he thinks it's a good idea for parents to get to know the industry when the kids are in eighth or ninth grade. Getting educated early will help them down the road so there won't be as much of a shock or rush to get things done.

"It is tougher," Binder said. "Today you have more sports than ever, male and female, more college teams than ever,

parents who are devoting more resources to their kids than ever, and restrictions on when college coaches can get out. You're up against many good players. It's how you interact with coaches. That hasn't changed today. They're taking a risk/gamble as far as picking the right kid ability-wise, the right kid in terms of the person, the student. All those variables apply today. The essence of recruiting really hasn't changed. Time and resources and rules have turned it upside down."

According to some of Binder's numbers, 1 in every 135 high school athletes will go on to play in college. "Are you the best of those 135? That's how hard it is," Binder said. Also, there are just over 1,000 colleges and the average recruiting class for a sport is three kids (and that varies by sport, of course). If there are 250,000 kids playing high school basketball in the class of 2014, that means 3,000 kids will play college ball at some level.

"How do you as an athlete — to go back to the 'Welcome Back, Kotter' days — go, 'Ooh, ooh, pick me, pick me?'" Binder said. "There are so many good players out there. Part of it is, are you good enough? The bigger question is, are you good enough and recognized by somebody else and how do you cut through to be able to do that?"

Binder, still a Scarsdale resident, played ball with two of the best to come out of Scarsdale High School, future professional players Butch Graves and John Revelli. Binder cer-

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tainly got a lot more looks than he would have otherwise, as coach Jack Kaminer's team was high profile back then.

"I was a good high school player on a very, very good high school team," Binder said. "That allowed for a lot of exposure. There were the camps, how good the high school team was, Jack Kaminer's savvy knowing how to reach out and I also was not shy to pick up the phone and call. There was no computer. You got a questionnaire in the mail and you'd send them a tape. Then you follow up."

Ending up as an Academic All-American nominee at Curry College and going on to a successful career in the publishing industry, most recently with *Golf Digest* and *ESPN The Magazine*, was no accident for Binder. And neither was his idea to give back with a one-day-a-year basketball showcase geared toward local players in Section I and Division II and III college coaches from all over.

The Top 100 Binderhoops Premier Basketball Showcase for boys started in 1988 and this fall celebrated its 25th anniversary. He has also counseled many would-be college athletes for various sports. Through the two and a half decades of helping players get noticed by colleges, Binder has learned a thing or 200, which led him to put all of the knowledge he's picked up into his concise 101-page guide.

Binder's first foray into writing was a challenge for him, but his expertise on the subject and his approach to bringing it home for readers will go a long way to making it a success for years to come. The book is a useful tool when he speaks to groups both large and small

throughout the country.

While the NCAA's regulations are not the focus of the book, Binder does include online resources for recruits and their parents to get that information for free. "It's very much of a rules maze, to say the least," Binder said. The book is designed to be read in less than two hours.

Binder has trained youth basketball players and has worked with pros. He's also scouted for college and pro teams. Over the years, he's had a front row seat to get into the minds of college coaches.

"The one thing I can guarantee you is to show you how to communicate, what you should say and as a result you'll get exposure to college coaches," Binder said. "In the end what I can't guarantee is, are you good enough for them to pick you?"

Recently Binder had a bigger stake in the recruiting process when his older daughter Stephanie, now a junior at Johns Hopkins, and his younger daughter, Carolyn, who just started her freshman season at Columbia with a record-setting bang, went through the process for basketball. Both girls graduated from Rye Country Day School and played AAU ball, and Binder was able to guide them in finding the right school for both academics and basketball. And there is no doubt it was different for him being on the parental side this time around after watching kids in his showcase for two decades.

"The academic part was very important first," Binder said. "Being good high school players allowed them to have some very nice choices. But we tried to make the decision as non-emotional as possible. We put very little to no pressure on our

kids. I said to the girls, 'We'll go on these visits and you'll know when you know.' And they knew. They were fortunate to get offers very early, so the process went smoothly for them. If a coach likes you and they think they can put you to rest earlier, you're making their life easier and you can get what you want."

Binder's experience with his own daughters gave him even more insight into the ever-changing process.

"Having the showcases and all the years I've given these lectures helped me stay very grounded," Binder said. "The knowledge helped, but two very important dynamics happened for the levels they're at. They were fortunate they were good enough and they were being recruited by some schools. However, we were not bashful in being able to call some coaches and say, 'Hey, what do you think?' Here's the thing I learned from helping others to doing it as a parent: we were not afraid of someone saying, 'Hey, thanks, but no thanks.'"

Binder said he and his wife, Stacey, were most involved in helping the girls pare down their list of schools to meet their needs on and off the court. When scholarships are not involved there is less lost if the athletics does not work out. (Carolyn, like many athletes in Scarsdale over the years, turned down scholarship offers.)

"If you get there and it's not for you, don't do it," Binder said. "Steph is playing some, but not a lot, but she loves it, so that's great. Carolyn is going to a situation where she can be part of a program and wants to put it on the map. And she loves it. We're just happy that they're happy."

Athletics are a major part of colleges and universities of all sizes fostering "spirit" and bringing in "revenue," according to Binder.

"You have an aspect of college sports over the last couple of decades and especially today where it has become huge business for universities," Binder said. "Yes, in a sense of revenue producing, but it's even bigger than that — it profiles how schools are viewed by other students. It's visibility."

The power of athletics is greater now than ever, and that's for students who are applying to schools (it could push them over the edge for a school that might be a reach academically), in school (there are often perks for athletes, such as academic help, class preference and travel) or have graduated (networking).

"If you're fortunate to be a college athlete, the admissions process is very different in terms of when you can be made offers, when you can be admitted to a school," Binder said. "It can be as early as junior year. Another thing it can do for you is that alumni love their student-athletes. They bleed the school colors, so networking, internship opportunities, getting to know people and future jobs become easier. And not just because you're a jock, but because of the way you handle yourself as you go through your four years at the university, the relationships that you build."

The caution to all of this is making sure you don't overreach in or out of the classroom, another thing that has plagued athletes over time. "You don't want every day to be a struggle," Binder said, adding that either way, "You've got to have the goods."