

## **Section 6 – Self-Marketing and Making Decisions**

Too often young hockey players feel as though they have no control in the recruitment process, whether it be too junior or college hockey. They have more control than they think. Essentially what matters is controlling the aspects that they can control and not focusing on those that they can't. Players can control their fitness level, skill development, work ethic, character, effort, attention to their education, communication, seeking help, who they listen to, decisions they make, nutrition, sleep, and most of all aspects of their lives. This includes what they do to market themselves.

Self-marketing does not guarantee success, but it does guarantee that you have done something. It can only help and will not be seen a negative. What is it? Simply it is reaching out and letting coaches and hockey organizations know you exist and would like an opportunity to compete for a spot. It is a process of getting noticed and working to at least get your foot in the door. It is no different than applying for a job or sending an employer your resume. That process won't get you the job, but it inches you further up the ladder. When you persist and send more info or follow up with another contact it sends a critical message about your character and interest.

The secret, never give up! When you don't receive a message back or when you are told they aren't looking for a player right now you don't fold the tent. You don't feel sorry for yourself, you don't make excuses, and you don't give up. They don't know you so how can they make any informed decision? You work even harder at helping them learn some things about you. Something may catch their interest. Your persistence, determination, ability to organize, problem solve, communicate, your work ethic and any number of personal qualities must be put out there. These are attributes coaches and employers are looking for.

You must be strategic as well. Don't just send them the same information. Do your research about their organization or school. Show them your interest by what you know about them. What are their coaches' philosophies, what do they need, and how do you see fitting a niche? Learn what you can about who their players are, who is coming back, and who is leaving or graduating. What is their school known for, what programs do they have, how do they fit with you interests and what you want to follow academically and career wise? Send them transcripts, what are your academic strengths, and make it clear you could get admitted to their school.

I have worked with hundreds of players, and I know one thing for sure, only about 5 - 10% of them will follow this advice. Some won't believe it is worthwhile, some will not have the drive and the perseverance necessary, and some are stuck in the belief that if they want me, they'll find me. However, I know another truth, the ones who do something, the ones who don't just sit and wait, the ones who make a habit of stepping up and making things happen are far more likely to achieve their goals and ambitions.

The next couple of pages outline a suggested progression of self-marketing. It is not the answer, it is merely a guide. Do what works for you but do something.

## Suggested Self-Marketing Progression

This list is in no way prescriptive or complete. These are merely suggestions from practical experience. Add, change, or delete as you go but don't just sit there – do something!

### Step # 1:

- Make a list of schools that you want to contact. You can add and delete as you go.
- Find their coaches names and emails. (websites)
- Check various sources on the internet
- <http://collegehockeyinc.com/coaches>
- Do some research on the schools.
- Use a booklet or computer spreadsheet to track your process.

### Step # 2:

- Draft a short introductory email to send to coaches
- Introduce yourself, where you play, your interest in their team, your high school GPA and SAT sc
- Tell them that you will follow up in the next few weeks by sending them a complete package
- Ask them if the email address you have is correct or if they prefer a different person.
- Send only a few at a time, record it in your book or spreadsheet

### Step #3:

- Monitor and record the replies in your booklet or on your chart
- Don't expect too many replies to this initial email.
- If you do get a reply, make sure you respond even if their email is not encouraging.
- Always be positive
- Don't burn any bridges
- Remember – things change!

### Step #4:

- Prepare and send your package to a few at a time, including ....
- Cover letter
- Hockey resume or profile
- Grade 9-12 high school transcript
- SAT or ACT report if NCAA.
- Ask them if they would like to receive any letters of reference from coaches
- Ask them if they want game video

### Step #5:

- Monitor and record the replies.
- Make sure you reply as soon as they reply.
- Ask coaches (current and past) to prepare a letter of reference for you.
- Prepare to have game tape available (links)

Step #6:

- Send additional information as available, spread them out, not all at once
- Coach's letters
- Links to game film
- Updated SAT or ACT scores
- Updated school marks or college courses
- Accomplishments or achievements
- Media reports
- Offer your congratulations to the coach on something their team has done

Step #7:

- Continue to monitor, record, and reply to any responses from schools.
- Continue to send additional information as available
- Add and delete schools as necessary and repeat process

Step #8:

- As you narrow the list down ask coaches to make phone calls to top prospective schools.
- Make it easy for your coach by providing names and contact numbers
- Get back to your coach within days to ask about their calls
- Follow up with schools called
- Continue to send additional information as available

Step #9

- Narrow down the list by looking at criteria including
- Relevant educational programs and quality
- Hockey related variables
- Financial opportunities and realities
- Location and size of the school
- Factors that determine life experiences at each school
- Create a rubric to give a numerical score to each

Step #10

- Try not to decide without visiting the school
- Don't visit schools if you have no interest or intention
- Make good use of your time on a visit
- Talk to players and other students
- Make notes based on questions above
- Be prepared that offers can get made on a visit
- Do a quick follow up with a school when home

## Comparing, Evaluating and Deciding!

Many people struggle with making decisions. Many adults, let alone young people, do not know where to start. By following a process like the one described in the previous pages you have already started the decision-making process. You have defined your goal, established a plan, started your research, gathered information, and looked at many alternatives. Throughout the process you have evaluated options, found some to be unrealistic, others not for you, and some who clearly have no interest in you. You have eliminated some and added others. Gradually you have narrowed your list to ones who you have definite interest in, are realistic opportunities, and have show real interest in you.

At this stage you may pause and take stock of the information you have. Perhaps you need some face-to-face time with the coaches and an advisor from each team or school. A visit to the teams or schools is advisable if possible. Prepare some questions you need answered. Be very deliberate and straightforward. Now is not the time for mixed messages and vagueness. I have found it helpful to categorize your questions.

### **When evaluating junior teams:**

1. **Education** - How is their education program structured? Is there a dedicated team Education Advisor? What do they do to support and facilitate your education? What opportunities are there for taking courses, work experience, and for you to grow outside of hockey. Is help or tutoring available? Is there dedicated study time at home and on the road? When are their practices and how do they deal with conflicts with classes?
2. **Hockey** - Who are the coaches and what is their philosophy? Where do they see you fitting in their line up? What role do they want you to play? Do they anticipate you playing regularly? What is their off-ice training consisting of? Do they have access to fitness facilities? What athletic therapy and medical support is there? How is insurance and medical costs handled? What about equipment, what is provided and what do I have to provide?
3. **Accommodation** - Where will you live? Will you have a private room? Who are the billet families? What type of vetting do they go through to select billets? How do they match billets with players? Are allergies and diet requirements considered? If you don't have a car, how do you get around? How much are billets given for food and can families supplement that?
4. **Costs** – What is covered by the team and what is not? What are the team and league fees? How are expenses for team transportation, meals on the road, extra medical assistance, equipment, sticks, etc covered? How much spending money are players expected to need/have?
5. **Life-Style** – What would my daily schedule look like? How much free time do players have? What are my responsibilities in the billets home? What activities are available in the community? What if a player must work to earn some money? What opportunities are there for work? Do players have team responsibilities in the community?

## When evaluating colleges or universities:

1. **Education** - How many classes is a player expected/required to have each term? Do they offer programs or courses I am interested in? Do these relate to the careers I plan to pursue? What is the quality of their programs and courses? Is there a team academic advisor? What do they do to support and facilitate your education? Is help or tutoring available? Is there dedicated study time at home and on the road? When are their practices and how do they deal with conflicts with classes?
2. **Hockey** - Who are the coaches and what is their philosophy? Where do they see you fitting in their line up? Who is ahead of you in the line up? What role do they want you to play? Do they anticipate you playing regularly in your first year? Do they plan to red shirt you in first year? Is the rink on campus? What is their off-ice training consisting of? Do they have access to fitness facilities? What athletic therapy and medical support is there? What about equipment, what is provided and what do I have to provide?
3. **Accommodation and Meals** – Do they have university residences? Are the residences on campus? Are all first-year players required to live in the dorms? Will you have a private room or do players share? Are meals provided in the dorms? Are allergies and diet requirements considered? How are these costs covered? Do most players move to off campus living at some point? If you don't have a car, how do you get around?
4. **Costs** – What are the total expenses per year? Do they offer athletic scholarships? How much are you offering me? What does this cover? Are expenses for team transportation, meals on the road, extra medical insurance or assistance, equipment, sticks, etc covered? Is there financial aid available? Are there academic and other merit scholarships I can apply for? How much spending money do student-athletes need per year at their school?
5. **Life-Style** – Where is the university located? What is its proximity to where I am from? How would someone travel there? What would my daily schedule look like? How much free time do players have? What activities are available at the university or in the community? What size is the university? Is the community a large urban city or a smaller rural setting? Where do players shop for food or other supplies? Would you enjoy living here?

If you want to get clinical in how you compare teams or schools, you can give each of these factors a score from 1 to 5 for each team or school. Add them up and see what the results are. This may not be how you make your final decision, but it will help you narrow things down. It will become evident which factors are most important to you.