



“Bumper Sticker” Schools

Recruiting Article | Ponte Vedra Beach, FL
By Mike Smith, ForeCollegeGolf



Many young players across the world have dreams and aspirations to play college golf. Most of them are infatuated with “bumper sticker” schools like the Universities of Florida, Alabama, California, Texas, and Tennessee. Now, it’s easy to understand why a junior golfer would want to play for prestigious programs like these. We’ve been immersed from an early age in a culture where college sports are a big deal. Kids dream their entire lives of playing at a school/university they see on TV, billboards, cars, coffee mugs, etc. From early on, we are thrown into the world of college sports.

Therefore, during the initial stages of the recruiting process, most juniors have little to no interest in pursuing schools they don’t recognize or have been exposed to in the past. As you can imagine, most of these schools lie within Division 1. This is a nearsighted misconception in which juniors and parents are hung up on. I’ve even encountered a significant amount of players telling themselves that quality golf programs and academic institutions only lie within the boundaries of Division 1. Not only is this simple belief constraining but it’s also preventing players from missing out on recognizing legitimate opportunities.



FORECOLLEGE GOLF

Understandably, most players are limited when it comes to their knowledge and education of the programs outside of Division 1. So if you're wondering what opportunities lie at each level, check out the breakdown below:

Colleges that belong to the **National Collegiate Athletic Association or NCAA** designate themselves as Division I, II or III, according to NCAA guidelines. Designations are made depending on the number of teams, team size, game calendar and financial support. Within the world of college sports, Division I is the most intense and Division III the least.

Eligibility

Eligibility timelines should also be taken into consideration. D1 and D3 golf allow you 5 years academically to play 4 years, athletically. D2 golf's restrictions are per semester, not year. D2 golfers have 8 semesters of eligibility.

Colleges that belong to the **National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics or the NAIA**

Generally speaking, eligibility requirements, scholarship rules, and transfer guidelines are more lenient for the NAIA than those of the NCAA.

The scholarship breakdown below is broken down (by division) for both men's and women's teams. (Note: the numbers below are NCAA maximums and will only be available if the particular school is "fully funded".)

Scholarship Breakdown (by Division)				
	Men		Women	
	Scholarships	Schools	Scholarships	Schools
Division I	4.5	300	6.0	263
Division II	3.6	231	5.4	181
Division III	*	293	*	184
NAIA	5.0	170	5.0	146
NJCAA	8.0	189	8.0	54
	1183		828	

Scholarship "funding"

Funded vs. Non-Funded

"Fully funded" is technically defined as a particular school's athletic department having the ability to exhaust the full amount of scholarships as allowed by the NCAA (see above chart). From my experience, I have come to believe that only about 50% of men's programs and 65% of women's programs are "fully funded". As many players and families make their decisions based solely off of the Division, I would, therefore, encourage players to expand their horizons for this reason alone and beware, Division 1 doesn't always mean "more scholarship".



FORECOLLEGE GOLF

Comparing D1, D2, D3, and NAIA

When I first meet with players, I ask each one the same question, “what are your goals for college golf?” and I’d be remiss if I didn’t tell you each and every one of them starts or finishes their answer with “I want to play Division 1 golf”.

Now, I will be the last person to belittle a players’ dream or tell them they can’t achieve a goal but I also strongly believe players should be educated and equipped with the facts before they set goals.

I regularly encounter players that set unrealistically high goals or group all “Division 1 schools” together as some sort of perceived hierarchy. Working in the college recruiting business I’ve learned more and more each and every day that there are not only a vast amount of opportunities in Division 2, Division 3 and NAIA levels but there are also advantages to certain players choosing these schools. The notion that D1 schools are superior to all other schools is a nearsighted approach and should be discarded.

The main difference between Division 1 schools and those outside of Division 1 begins with financial resources. The most apparent resources are scholarships, and schools at the D2, D3, and NAIA levels have limited scholarships. (see chart above)

Beyond the scholarships, D2 and D3 schools typically have smaller operating budgets and in many cases, the coaches at these schools have additional university duties to complement their coaching salaries. However, scholarship and budget deficiencies for D2 and D3 programs are where the differences end. Some extremely talented college coaches can be found at the D2, D3, and NAIA level. Many of these respective schools are high-end academic institutions and offer extraordinary environments for their student-athletes. For many players, the opportunity to compete year-round on a Division 1 team isn’t realistic, not to mention, to be on one of the top teams in the country and compete in post-season play. The opportunity to play and improve year-round at the D2, D3, and NAIA levels is extremely vast.

The bottom line – Players should look at schools where they can play and improve as a player. There have been countless players from outside of D1 to play on the PGA Tour, win on the PGA Tour and win majors. Therefore, players have equal opportunity to play professionally regardless of where they play collegiately. I highly encourage players to find somewhere they can play and improve as a player while nonetheless excelling academically and enjoying their college experience.

Mike Smith is the Founder & CEO of ForeCollegeGolf and specializes in assisting junior golfers & their families through the college recruiting process. Email him @ mike.smith@forecollegegolf.com





FORECOLLEGE GOLF

Here are “other factors” you should consider when looking at schools in different divisions. Below you will find relevant questions you can ask when evaluating a prospective college or university.

❖ *Education*

- Does this school have a major I’m interested in?
- How much weight does the degree hold in the work force?
- What are typical class sizes and will I be comfortable with smaller/larger classes?
- What are the requirements to graduate? (# of credits)
- Does this school accept high-school credits?
- What is the acceptance rate?
- What is the graduation rate?
- What do I do if a class conflicts with practice times or tournaments?
- What academic support services are available to students? Are there any services (ex. counseling, tutors, study halls, priority course registration) especially for student-athletes?
- What are the most common majors on the team?
- How many courses or credits do team members take each semester?

❖ *Golf Team*

- Strength of Team
 - Will I have ample playing time/travel opportunities?
 - Where do I fit in on the team?
 - Will I play #1 right away or will I have to sit out in order to gain playing time my freshman year?
 - What is the skill level of players on the team? (scoring avgs.)
- Qualifying format
 - How does Coach organize qualifying?
 - Can players gain exemptions from strong play in team tournaments or does everyone qualify for each event? Are there Coaches Picks?
- Coaching
 - What are the particular strengths of the coach?
 - What are the perceived weaknesses?
 - Are there additional coaches? (Assistants, psychologists, nutritionists, trainers, etc.)
- Recruiting
 - Where does the coaching staff primarily recruit? In-State, out of state, international?



FORECOLLEGE GOLF

- Postseason play
 - Is it realistic to think that we will compete for a Conference Championship?
 - Is it realistic to think that we will make it to NCAA's?
 - Is it realistic to think that we will compete for a National Championship?
- Practices
 - How top-notch are the practice facilities?
 - What amount of access does the team have to these facilities?
 - How are practices structured?
 - Are practices normally on-course or at the range/short game areas?
 - Does the entire team always practice together or do you structure individual time?
- Scholarship money
 - D1 vs. D2 vs. D3
 - Fully funded?
 - How many players is Coach trying to bring in?
- Coach involvement
 - Assistant coaches
 - Trainers, academic advisors, psychologists, nutritionists, etc.
- Team Rules
 - Are there any team rules I should know about? What are the special requirements for this program?
- Workouts
 - Are workouts required?
 - How are the workouts structured and what is the focus?
 - How many days/week and at what time are the workouts?
- ❖ Athletic Department
 - Athletic operating budgets (travel options, facilities, team gear, etc.)
 - Where does the golf team fit into the picture? What role does athletics play in University life?