

What Not to Do: Recruits Share Their Biggest Turnoffs in College Recruiting

College recruiting can make or break an athlete's future, and for coaches, every interaction leaves a lasting impression. After speaking with current and former Division I, II, and III athletes from Power 5 programs to the MIAA, Big East, and GLVC, clear patterns emerged about what not to do on the recruiting trail.

The obvious red flags include lying about scholarships, misrepresenting team culture, or ignoring NCAA rules. Beyond those, athletes consistently pointed to other missteps that push recruits away:

- **Favoritism on visits:** Athletes notice how coaches divide their time on official or unofficial visits. If a higher-profile recruit receives all the attention while others are overlooked, the message becomes clear about how the program values individuals. Recruits want to feel welcomed and included, which also signals a strong, team-first culture.
- **High-pressure tactics:** Some recruits thrive when given structure or firm timelines, but many feel unnecessary stress when pressured to commit quickly. Strict deadlines can cause athletes to walk away rather than buy in. A flexible approach that matches the personality of the recruit is more effective and shows respect for their decision-making process.
- **Trash Talking rival schools:** When asked about recruiting missteps, athletes consistently mentioned negative comments about other schools. While the intention may be to highlight advantages, speaking poorly about another program often reflects poorly on your own. Athletes prefer to hear what makes your program unique, not why another should be dismissed.
- **Replace-or-be-replaced language:** Phrases such as “you can replace this player” or “anyone can be replaced” can leave a damaging impression. Athletes want to feel valued for their potential contributions, not positioned as a replacement part. Framing the conversation around how a recruit adds to the team's success builds confidence and buy-in.
- **Culture cover-ups:** Student-athletes emphasized the importance of honesty about team dynamics. When current players are asked to present a certain image of team life that does not match reality, recruits quickly feel misled once they arrive. In the long run, this only increases the chance of transfers.
- **Lack of preparation:** Something as simple as forgetting a recruit's name, hometown, or background details can leave them feeling undervalued. Taking the time to personalize conversations and demonstrate genuine interest goes a long way. Recruits want to know they are more than just another name on a list.

At the heart of it, recruits want honesty, respect, and a genuine connection. A strong program does not need to put on a show for recruits- it needs a culture that speaks for itself.