

High school players need perspective and a slice of reality

The number question is where do you slot in and what is the level you can play at. Can you play were you think you can? The answer most often is NO!

The best way for high school players to gain perspective and reality about the game beyond high school and how they project at a higher level is to simply go to college games while they are still in high school. I always ask players that want to be recruited if they had ever seen college players play... most of them have not and these are kids that said they wanted to be D-1 players or felt they were good enough to play D-1. How could they have known without seeing them play?

In the greater Northern California region, there are 12 Division I programs (Cal, Cal Poly, UC Davis, Fresno State, Nevada, Pacific, Sacramento State, Saint Mary's, San Jose State, Santa Clara, Stanford, USF), seven Division II programs (Academy of Art, CSU East Bay, CSU Monterey Bay, CSU Stanislaus, Chico State, San Francisco State, Sonoma State), and five D-3/NAIA programs (Bethany, Fresno Pacific, Menlo, Patten, Simpson University). Among those teams are some of the nation's top programs at each level.

On top of all those 4-year schools (24 in all), there are over 40 junior college programs from Porterville to the Oregon border, including Western Nevada College in Carson City. I am sure there are some kids that go to college games to see what a higher level than high school looks like, but I don't think it's very common. Not only can kids go to games, they can and should go to college practices. Start with the JC level, and then move continually up before seeing the DI guys.

I know for a fact there are kids that commit to college programs without EVER seeing them practice or play, without ever knowing the on-field personality of the coaching staff. It is one thing to be recruited by a coach that seems "cool" or is "a really nice guy" but most of that is fluff to get the players. When practices and the games start, the personalities of the coaches on the field can and will be a whole lot different, not in negative way, but in a competitive way.

The intensity of competition at the college level is a whole lot different than high school and travel ball, in terms of the pressure on the players from the coaches. Coaches that are paid for a living to coach and win baseball games tend to expect a bit more of their players, especially the scholarship guys (to whom much is given, much is expected). The pressure on the coaches flows downhill to the players and in my opinion, being able to handle that pressure is what determines if a kid makes it a higher levels... assuming they are talented enough to be there in the first place. So if you are a high school player that aspires to play college ball, or a parent of that kid, get out to our local college games and practices. See it firsthand. There is no reason to not do it. What has always amused me is how negatively most kids look at JC, D2, and D3/NAIA ball. Let's be honest, over 90% of the high school players are JC level players at best beyond high school and even then, most of them are not even starters at that level. When the talent funnel tightens, it gets much harder. Go see for yourself.