

Interview with Author Laurie Richter

(1) Why did you decide to write a book about college athletic recruiting?

There were two reasons I wrote the book. When we started looking at schools and sports programs for my son, it was overwhelming and there was nothing in place to help everyday people get through the process. It seemed ridiculous that we had to invent our own process when so many people go through this year after year.

Then I started comparing notes with other friends whose kids were also trying to get recruited, and heard so many stories with unhappy endings. Mistakes are made because recruiting is shrouded in mystery and complexity. I realized that if parents really understood the process and could help navigate their kids through it, there would be a lot more happy endings.

(2) Why do you think this is an important topic?

There are three interesting circumstances combining to make a perfect storm for college athletic recruiting. First is the absolute explosion of youth sports in the past twenty years. Families spend an enormous amount of time and money on developing their kids' athletic skills and feel like they have earned, and deserve, a spot on a college team. Second, baby boomer parents are characterized by their intense involvement in their kids' lives and their willingness to go pretty far in promoting their kids interests. Third, college has become so cost prohibitive for many families that athletic scholarships become the Holy Grail for getting it paid for.

This family history, motivation, and financial need converge at the doorstep of a process that is pretty haphazard and lacks any real structure. And parents can lose sight of the fact that this process is also about choosing where your child is going to pursue an education and a social life. That's a lot of priorities to juggle as you start the college search. Most kids won't become professional athletes but still deserve to have a great college experience.

(3) Why did you write this book geared toward parents?

The college choice is a complex question for most kids and adding athletic recruitment to it just complicates the process, upping the need for parental involvement and guidance.

In many cases, parents and student-athletes focus all their efforts on pursuing a scholarship and the bragging rights it secures. A full athletic scholarship is a blessing, but the majority of athletes don't get one. Toward that end, I focus on how kids can get money from schools that don't offer athletic scholarships. I want to make sure that if a kid finds a perfect fit in a program that can't offer a full scholarship, parents have both the perspective to recognize that it's still the right decision, and the tools to make it affordable.

Finally, let's be real about this. Most kids just wouldn't sit down with a book about recruiting. But an anxious parent is a motivated reader. I know because I was one.

(4) How did your background of twenty-four years as a market researcher help you in the writing of this book?

I spent my career in market research because I am naturally wired to drill down when I confront something I don't understand. Every market researcher knows that questions are easy to come up with—finding legitimate answers is the tough part. My research background helped me conceptualize what the relevant questions were, and where to look for the answers.

(5) What are a few of the most important takeaways for the reader?

Here are three:

You must be willing to roll up your sleeves and do the work yourself. You can't wait for someone else to take the lead.

There are not a lot of roster spots for freshmen athletes, and there are a lot of kids competing for them. You need to find a way to stand out from the crowd and you need to get your information into coaches' hands.

There is a lot of money available, even from schools that don't give athletic scholarships. Don't assume that if you don't get athletic scholarship money, you will have to pay full freight.

(6) You wrote this book as a parent of a student athlete, not as a recognized authority. How does your role as a parent impact the credibility of the book?

As a parent, there was no one who was more committed to my son's best interests than me, and there was no one who knows him like I do—his motivation, his commitment, his temperament, and the role sports plays in his life. A parent is best positioned to

evaluate how the academic, athletic, and social dimensions of each program will fit their child's needs—you can provide a little vision for his or her blind spots.

Learning the how-to of the recruiting process was relatively easy, and dozens of college coaches were willing to help me understand the parts I was less familiar with. But being a parent who has walked the walk, my value is to help you think through how to keep your child's best interests front and center.

(7) What were some of the tough lessons you learned while going through this with your son?

That you should start earlier than you think because researching the schools is a lengthy process if it's done right. Lots of student athletes only consider the schools that express interest in them. You should be choosing them—not waiting for them to choose you.

That you have to choose the teams and clubs you participate in outside of high school very carefully. They can have a big impact on where you ultimately end up.

That there are no promises. Coaches who are very interested can get disinterested quickly and you won't know why. You need to cultivate lots of options.

(8) If you were doing it all over again, what would you do differently?

Have my son start a dialogue with coaches at schools he was interested in earlier in his high school career.

Have him attend more prospect camps and showcases than he did.

Go on the campus visits with a list of questions in hand and not be embarrassed to refer to it. So many times, we thought of questions we hadn't asked after we left.