

College Picks and the Perfect Mix

from Carol

What is the magic formula to get into the college of your dreams? And how will you know if you can pay, play, and make the grade? There is no single magic formula, but there are some basic ingredients that can get you into the kitchen... IF you are willing to dedicate yourself to the process.

The complete potion requires time and discernment - which can be aided by parents, coaches and mentors - but let's begin with the basics. A few key ingredients are: grades, tests scores, senior schedule, athletics and most importantly, your character.

1) Grades: Most schools (and NCAA) will look at your GPA using your core classes, not with the added inflation of electives and PE grades. As a general rule: there is no minimum number of courses for college entrance. It is expected that you complete an English, a math, a natural science, and a social science class each year, as well as 2-4 years of a second language, and an array of electives. It is also expected that you have taken the most challenging course load that your school offers AND that you can do well in. College admissions will review and ask, "Are you a good fit for our school, meaning will you be successful? Have you been steady and diligent throughout high school and kept a solid GPA? Have you taken a challenging array of courses?" If you are looking at top tier schools, they expect you to have taken top classes in your high school - AP or honors or dual credit - proving your ability and desire to study and learn. If not, what are the extenuating circumstances?

2) Standardized tests: Because it is difficult to fully assess the variants inherent in comparing hundreds of thousands of high schools, teachers, courses, etc., college admissions compare standardized ACT or SAT scores. Critical Reading and Math comprise the number that colleges use to determine your admissibility. A quick visit to the school's website will give you the middle range of scores for incoming freshmen. Merit-based aid is usually awarded beginning at 1200 (critical reading + math) but requirements may be higher or lower depending on the school's percentage acceptance rate. For students who are motivated to do well and have the aptitude to study, there are many companies, tutors, websites and books available for test prep at a variety of fees. Before employing a service, I recommend that you request a baseline assessment and a guarantee for a percentage of score increase.

3) Senior Course Schedule: Colleges determine your acceptance based on your performance through your junior year. It is expected that you will continue in a disciplined manner throughout your senior year. The courses you select for your senior year are the last opportunity for you to prepare for the next level of academic rigor. College admissions officers want to see that you are challenging yourself and performing at your best in preparation for their coursework for the following year. Choose wisely!

4) Athletics: What does it take to get noticed by tennis coaches? On a recent trip to the boys 16-18's nationals in Kalamazoo, I visited with several college coaches and from those discussions, I compiled the following list of desirable traits:

- a) Rankings and significant wins against players with similar profiles to their current roster
- b) Technique and technical skill
- c) Potential and desire to further develop as an athlete
- d) Intelligent shot selection and ability to craft a point
- e) Attitude and resiliency
- f) Discipline and work ethic

f) Ability to lead teammates by positive example.

5) Character: If you will notice in the list above, it includes more character attributes than physical or ranking results. Winning is very important, but so are your attitude and sportsmanship. How do you translate to others the all-important, intangible character attributes that you possess and practice? Are you active in any community service activities? Do you volunteer? Have you been committed to a cause or project over a period of time? Do you have a job? Have you experienced hardship? What makes you unique? Your ability to prioritize, goal set and make the decisions to meet them will set you apart from the rest.

In summary, winning matches is the best way to get the first look from college coaches. Your discipline and dedication will keep them looking. But it is your attitude, resiliency, and 'coachability' that will make them a true fan.

How can parents help in guiding the college process?

As in all major decisions affecting the life of your child, you want the very best for him or her. Determine whether this is yours or your child's decision, or a combination of both. This will avoid frustration and will serve to clarify goals. Guide your child in how to research colleges using the factors meaningful to your family values and requirements. Make sure that the school is a good match academically, culturally, and athletically. Your child will be spending a great deal of time with the coach and team, who will serve as a second family during the next four years. Here are a few things to consider:

- 1) Philosophy of the school
- 2) Academic match
- 3) Network for chosen studies
- 4) Coaching style
- 5) Culture of the team
- 6) Importance and potential of playing time
- 7) Cost: athletic/academic scholarship vs. financial aid
- 8) Location, distance, and ease of visits.

Although it appears to be an arduous task with many variables, this creative process can be an enjoyable experience. Prioritize your personal formula and stay true to the recipe.

The time you begin this process depends on the preparedness of you and your child. Begin to gather the ingredients and, regardless of where you are in the process, categorize them and play with the possibilities. Eventually, everything ripens and is ready to create a unique and powerful opportunity.

Looking forward!

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