

Recruiting – Planning and Organization at Any Level

I would like to thank the AFCA for allowing us this great opportunity to share some of our thoughts and ideas on recruiting in *The Extra Point*. I would also like to thank all of the coaches with whom I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from over the years in this great sport we coach and a special thanks to Mike Emendorfer, head coach at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Tony Johnson, head coach at Bethany College.

I have had the good fortune to be in charge of recruiting at three very different programs ranging from a small D-II program with a limited budget and small staff to a mid-major Division I-A program with a very large budget. This article is going to detail some of the fundamental concepts we used at each program and how we customized it to each particular program. Remember, the key in recruiting is not what you don't have, but what you **do** have.

First, it is imperative that you do an "inventory" check at your program. To be a great salesman, we have got to know what we are selling better than anyone else. What is it about your program that makes it unique and better than the other programs you recruit against? Second, decide on the ways you are going to sell your program to the prospective student-athletes. Third, make it work within your budget. Finally, implement your plan. Plan your work and work your plan!

Inventory Check: The following are questions your staff should ask about your current program. It is imperative you know the answers!

School: Does the school have any traditions that are of value? What does the location of the school offer the student-athlete (is it near a big city, airport, is it rural, etc.)? Are there any famous alumni? Where do the majority of the alumni live? What does the weather offer over other schools?

Academics: What does your school offer academically that is better than other schools you recruit against? Is the school ranked in any magazines? What is the faculty/student ratio? What majors are most of



Keith Allen
Asst. Head Coach/Defensive Coord.
Southwest Baptist University
Bolivar, Missouri

the student-athletes in? What is the girl/guy ratio?

Football: What does your football program offer that is better than the others (starting immediately, bowl games, prestige, big crowds, on the rise, etc.)? Does the program have any great traditions or rivalry? Does the program have any great alumni award winners? What kind of scholarship/financial aid package does your school have?

The questions listed above are by no means all the questions you could ask about your program, but it is a good start. The main point is you must know your school from an academic and athletic standpoint. Most school's admissions office will have much of this information for you. Something we have used in the past is a football specific fact sheet with all of this type of information for each coach. We then made one for each school we recruited against, so we knew what we were recruiting against.

Now that you have figured out what you have that is unique to sell and how you are going to sell it to the student athletes, you must implement a plan that works within your budget. The following plan is the base plan we have used at the last three programs I have worked. This plan begins with

the Ten Phases of the recruiting process and should be adjusted based on your budget and staff size.

Mass Mail Letter Throughout The Year

Try to begin as early as possible. We try to get something in their hand during February of their junior year- same time as signing date. When I was at the smaller school, we send something once a month, at the bigger school we sent something once a week. Whatever you send out, make sure it is easy to read and exemplifies something unique about your school.

Determine the Number of Scholarships (or scholarship money) that You Have

You must determine how many scholarships are going to be available for you to sign in the upcoming recruiting class.

Identify the Needs of Your Program

As a staff you must determine how many scholarships (scholarship money) you are going to allot for each position. Then figure you are going to have to recruit three or four times that number to get your needs. Also ask yourself how many junior college transfers do you need, how many mid-year junior college transfers do you need – at what positions? We always felt like if we are going to be over, let it be with the defensive and offensive line. We can always find good skill athletes late.

High School/Junior College Visits, Evaluations and Contacts

Upon first contacting the high school coach, ask what the school visiting procedures are, and what the school policy is in regard to the recruiting of student-athletes. These should be respected and it would be completely out of order to ask for special consideration. Make arrangements to visit the school in advanced by card, letter or phone. When you do, indicate the information needed and the individuals you are interested in speaking with.

Find His Button – What does he want and need? Ask him appropriate questions, and let him do the talking. What are the most important points that will make his decision? Express and confirm to him what he wants.

Present Knowledge and Assumptions – Has he been to your school before? Find out what has caused an interest in your school and in your competitors. What has he heard about your program? What is the competition telling him about your program? What is the competition telling him about their program? What is his general attitude about your program?

Important People – Find out who is the most influential person in his life. Who is he going to turn to in order to make a decision. What is the educational background of his parents? Does he know anybody already attending your school?

Film Evaluations

Evaluate video on prospect- put grade on evaluation form that stays with tape (one being offer – five being reject). If the evaluation grade is better than a 3.0 (walk-on) – pass tape and evaluation to position coach otherwise file tape back and drop prospect. If position coach grades prospect better than a 3.0 – pass to coordinator, otherwise file tape back and drop prospect. If coordinator grades prospect better than a 3.0 – put name on master board and pass tape to head coach, otherwise file tape back and drop prospect. There must be at least two, preferably three evaluations per athlete.

Transcript Evaluations

Following institution and NCAA guidelines, evaluate the transcripts of the student-athletes. This process should be done by the area coach prior to passing a tape on to the position coach. If the student-athlete is “at risk,” it should be denoted on the evaluation card. Any prospect that will not be eligible should be classified as a “Drop” or “JC” prospect.

Ranking of Players

(based on needs, ability, transcripts)

After there are enough names on the master board, coaching staff will evaluate prospects together and rank prospects. Area coaches must know the financial and academic situation of prospects.

Home Visits

Visiting the home of the student-athlete

is one of the best means to get to know and evaluate the true, real character and quality of the student-athlete. The visits should be short and conducted only with the approval of both the parents and the student-athlete. Home visits are one of the greatest recruiting tools a coach has if he conducts himself professionally.

Official/On Campus Visits

To be invited for a campus visit is the highlight of a student-athletes recruiting experience. He looks forward to it eagerly. He will be favorably impressed if the time spent on the campus becomes a rich and meaningful experience. Consequently, the student-athlete host should be selected carefully. He should be an individual who can communicate and relate to the recruit in some manner. Above all, the student-athlete must feel that he is being given positive attention by the entire staff and other members of the program.

Offering Scholarship/ Financial Aid Packages

When offering a scholarship, it is imperative the staff has a game plan on how to offer the scholarship. Is it a “let us know by next week” offer or is it “let us know tonight” offer. The staff should know if the head coach is going to “squeeze” a prospect or “slow play” a prospect. What kind of scholarship offer is it? Does it make sense to the student-athlete, his family and his coach?

These 10 phases of recruiting are not all inclusive, but they may give you and your staff some ideas on how to establish a very functional recruiting plan in the future. The following list is a sample list of procedures that we try to incorporate into our recruiting calendar. Again, this list is not all-inclusive and should be adjusted for your individual school.

Recruiting Procedures Junior Year

January: Send out a letter and questionnaire to all high schools in our recruiting area. Begin mailings to top prospects.

February: We will receive the recruiting services database and begin entering the high school questionnaires. We will send out camp and spring ball information to high school coaches. We will send all the recruits in the database camp info and a questionnaire and request tapes from junior year if needed. Continue mailing top

prospects. Set up an academic/athletic day in April for top junior prospects.

March: We will send out camp and spring ball information to high school coaches (two). We will send all the recruits in the database camp info and a questionnaire (two). Invite top juniors to the academic/athletic day in April.

April and May: Must have a good feel for recruiting areas. Have coaches rank recruiting area by position. Position coaches rank all recruits at your position. We will attend as many combines and recruiting fairs in the area. We will visit our local schools and our top area schools when we are out. Push camps and get questionnaires to the recruits. Send schools more camp info (late April). Get transcripts on all recruits. Invite top recruits to camps (handwritten). Call every prospect in your area!

June: Enter questionnaires as they arrive. Invite top recruits to camps (handwritten). Evaluate all transcripts. Re-rank top recruits. Send top recruits hand written notes.

July: Football Camps. Begin to compile final recruiting lists. Invite all coaches and recruits to all home games.

Senior Year

August: Begin true mailing series No. 1 – being recruited; No. 2 – Top 10 reasons to go to school. Invite to games, send media guide.

September: Keep up with your area high school's win/loss record – send win/loss letters to high schools and top recruits. Begin calling prospects. Determine another academics day with admissions – push that date with recruits. Mailing series No. 3 season recap – invite to games and academics day. Evaluate tape as it comes in (area coach). Begin weekly note cards to top 60 recruits.

October: Same as September. Should have academics day (during a bye). Keep calling prospects. Begin evaluations of film as a staff. Mailing No. 4 – making decisions. Mailing No. 5.

November: Keep up with playoffs, letters to all coaches in every week. Begin to set up official visits. (Five visit letters and graduating rates to all official visit prospects) Mailing No. 6, No. 7.

December: School visits and home visits- be aggressive. Official visits. Keep calling recruits.

January: School visits and home visits-
See “Chalk Talk” page 19

"Hall" continued from page 5

award recipient and six-time conference Coach of the Year honoree, Westering coached 26 First Team All-Americans, was named 1999 AFCA National Coach of the Year and was a member of the Hula Bowl coaching staff in 2000.

A dedicated member of his local community, Westering received a Lifetime

Achievement Award from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Athletes for a Better World. A member of the World Sports Humanitarian Hall of Fame, he received the John and Nell Wooden Humanitarian Award in 2004 and serves as keynote speaker for the United Way, March of Dimes and Tacoma Hospital Organization.

"Chalk Talk" continued from page 17

be aggressive. Official visits. Keep calling recruits.

February: Signing date. Keep up with recruits that may fall through the cracks. Begin gathering a list of possible walk-ons. Send all signees lifting manual, bios, fitting sheet (signee packet).

March: Send Academic day letter to all possible walk-ons. Keep in touch with signees and walk-ons. Send signee packets.

April: Academic Day. Send all walk-ons a letter stating that we want them. Send signee packets.

"Points" continued from page 8

tested competition. Players also have responsibilities to their teams and their opponents to play within the rules.

Due to the combative nature of the game, players usually are alert and aware of legal contacts by opponents. Therefore, injuries are minimized.

However, certain aspects of play require a higher level of concentration. The resulting vulnerability places players involved in these aspects in an unprotected (defenseless) status.

The following are situations in which defenseless players are susceptible to serious injury:

- The quarterback moving down the line of scrimmage who has handed or pitched the ball to a teammate, and then makes no attempt to participate further in the play;
- The kicker who is in the act of kicking the ball, or who has not had a reasonable length of time to regain his balance following the kick;
- The passer who is in the act of throwing the ball, or who has not had a reasonable length of time to participate in the play again after releasing the ball;
- The pass receiver whose concentration is on the ball;
- The pass receiver who has clearly relaxed when the pass is no longer catchable;
- The kick receiver whose attention is on the downward flight of the ball;
- The kick receiver who has just touched the ball;
- The player who has relaxed once the ball has become dead; and
- The player who is obviously out of the play.

These players are protected by rules that have been in place for many years. It is of the utmost importance that participants, coaches and game officials carefully and diligently observe safety rules.

Intentional helmet-to-helmet contact is

never legal, nor is any other blow directed toward an opponent's head. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified.

Sportsmanship and Penalty Enforcement of Unsportsmanlike Acts: For over 50 years after the introduction of the Football Code, the only rule pertaining to unsportsmanlike conduct was directed at penalizing "abusive or insulting language to opponents or officials." This statement was replaced nearly 20 years ago by "obscene or vulgar language or gestures, or acts that provoke ill will or are demeaning to opponents or game officials."

It has been with great reluctance that subsequent rules committees have had to add specific violations and severe penalties to these rules, but it has been the result of changing attitudes of players and their negative actions on the field. The rules committee remains steadfast to its goal of preserving the integrity of one of our nation's marvelous traditions and greatest team games.

The committee has no intent to discourage spontaneous celebrations with teammates or fans when done in good taste. Enthusiasm is one of football's great assets.

Equipment: Football participants have access to the finest available equipment in terms of safety and style. Before each contest, head coaches certify that all players:

- a. Have been informed what equipment is mandatory by rule and what constitutes illegal equipment.
- b. Have been provided the equipment mandated by rule.
- c. Have been instructed to wear, and how to wear, mandatory equipment during the game.
- d. Have been instructed to notify the coaching staff when equipment becomes illegal though play during the game.

Players have an important responsibility in wearing pads properly and adhering to team dress codes while representing their university or college.

"Teaff" continued from page 4

would ask each set of coaches the same questions and at the end of 10 years, I would write a book entitled **The Master Coaches**, sharing with all coaches the wisdom of great leaders from our game. At the end of 10 years, I could not find the time to write the book. So, at the end of the 11th year, I started the book. My goal is to have it ready for our coaches by convention time.

Here is the list of the coaches whose opinions concerning every facet of our game will be shared in the upcoming book, **The Master Coaches:** Darrell Royal, Eddie Robinson, Frank Broyles, Paul Dietzel, Charles McClendon, Bo Schembechler, Tom Landry, Vince Dooley, Don James, Bill Yeoman, John McKay, Don Coryell, Don Schula, Erk Russell, Gene Stallings, Gordon Wood, Hayden Fry, LaVell Edwards, Ron Schipper, Johnny Majors, Frank Kush and John Cooper. The collective victories of this group is staggering, however, the most important thing is their love for the players, the game and the profession.

Last year, we promised all members of The Foundation a website that would include videos of speakers from the 2005 convention, as well as the last five editions of the *Proceedings* and *Summer Manuals*. For those that were unable to attend the convention, you can simply go to www.afca.com, look on the right side of the homepage and click on the spiraling footballs for The Foundation educational website. Of course, you have to be a member to get onto the website, but once you get there, it is a treasure trove for your growth and development, professionally.