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THE SCHOLARSHIP DIVIDE

Recruits Clamor for More From Coaches With Less



Tim Shaffer for The New York Times

College athletes in sports other than football and basketball, such as the Delaware shot-putter Chase Renoll, often receive only partial scholarships.

By BILL PENNINGTON
Published: March 11, 2008

The country's celebrity college football and basketball coaches lead nationally ranked teams on television, controlling a bevy of full scholarships and a sophisticated marketing machine that swathes college athletics with an air of affluence. They are far from typical.

The Scholarship Divide
These articles are exploring the chase for N.C.A.A. scholarships, the scarcity of

More common is the soccer, lacrosse or softball coach who sits in a closet-sized office beside a \$100 air conditioner and a 12-inch TV, trying to figure out ways to buy the best

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athletic aid, and the challenges facing coaches and scholarship athletes.

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athlete possible for the least amount of scholarship money, which can be as little as \$400. A jack-of-all-trades, this coach has a job that requires the skills of a stock portfolio manager, labor lawyer, headhunter, family counselor and soothsayer.

“There have been days when you feel like a used-car salesman,” said Joe Godri, the baseball coach at [Villanova University](#). “I’ve always been completely honest, but you can’t get away from the fact that the process can be crazy. You pump up a kid so much to come to your place, and when he agrees, you say, ‘O.K., and what I’ve got for you is 25 percent of your cost to attend here.’”

“And no one believes you, but that’s a good Division I baseball scholarship. You have to convince his parents that you’re being really fair.”

The current cost to attend Villanova is nearly \$45,000 a year, and it has cost more than \$35,000 since 2003. The average [N.C.A.A.](#) Division I baseball scholarship, compiled from 2003-4 statistics obtained from the N.C.A.A., is worth \$7,069.

“It’s like we have a salary cap from the professional sports model,” said Godri, whose baseball program can dole out the equivalent of six full scholarships across four years. “Except we’re dealing in thousands, not millions, and we have to stretch it across 25 or 30 kids.”

Working against these college coaches is a perception in the hyper and driven youth sports culture that scholarship money is plentiful. Online recruiting services and private counselors promote the notion that some athletic scholarships go unclaimed.

In interviews with more than 20 college coaches and administrators at two representative N.C.A.A. Division I institutions, Villanova and the [University of Delaware](#), the coaches said they routinely encountered parents with an almost irrational desire to have their children earn some kind of athletic scholarship. Sometimes the amount is

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Tim Shaffer for The New York Times
Villanova's baseball coach, Joe Godri, says money is limited.

irrelevant, as long as the child can attend his or her high school's national letter of intent signing day and be feted in the local newspapers as a scholarship athlete.

"Parents say to me all the time: 'Can't you just throw her something? Just make her feel good,'" said Joanie Milhous, the Villanova field hockey coach. "I have to explain I don't have money to throw around. I think these families have just invested so much in private lessons, tutors and camps, they can't stand the thought of getting nothing at all back financially."

The Delaware men's track coach, Jim Fischer, added: "I'm somewhat amazed that the question of scholarship money always comes up, even when it's an athlete I haven't shown much interest in and who clearly isn't a college-level player. When I meet with them, I sit there thinking, this parent will never even ask about money because their kid would have trouble making some high school teams. But you know what? They ask for money, too."

Other coaches said athletes or their parents tried to be too wily in their scholarship negotiations.

"Families will try to play the coaches off each other," said Kim Ciarrocca, who coaches women's lacrosse at Delaware. "They'll say that they've got a half or full scholarship offer from some school and want us to match it. What they don't know is that we coaches all talk to each other, and we know the truth."

She added: "We will call the other coach and ask, 'Hey, did you offer that kid a full ride?' When the answer is no, that kid might have lost the interest of two coaches."

Godri said parents sometimes are misled by advisers who use the high-profile sports of football or basketball as a model for how to play the recruiting game. That is a mistake, Godri said, because the money in the nonrevenue sports is limited.

"The first thing people have to understand is that they are probably not going to recoup the money they've already spent on their kid's athletic career," Godri said. "But that's what they are told. People get exploited. I wish people would relax and talk frankly to coaches. I'd tell them to lower their expectations, and everything will probably work out fine for all concerned."



Griffin Palmer contributed reporting.

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