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Student-athletes rest easy over early decision

Two weeks ahead of letters, some athletes already know they're in

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As several thousand early decision applicants await word from the Office of Admission, a number of high school seniors have no need to worry about rejection.

Dean of Admission Jim Miller '73 said about 35 students have received "likely" letters - not formal statements of admission, but notices that carry the same effect. What sets these lucky seniors apart from the rest of the applicant pool? All had their applications tagged with a special code: recruited athlete.

Miller said about 120 student-athletes will receive acceptance letters in December, constituting close to a quarter of those accepted early decision. Likely letters tend to go out to students fielding attractive athletic scholarship offers from other institutions, which often require students to commit before early decision letters arrive.

But even for those student-athletes who don't receive likely letters, the simple code on their application alone is a good guarantor of admission. However, the process from athlete identification to acceptance is a long one, often stretching over several years and requiring frequent communication between student-athletes, coaches and the admissions office.

"You recruit a year or two ahead of time," said Craig Robinson, the head coach of the men's basketball team. "From season to season, we look at four to five (basketball players) to get in, but it may take looking at 300 to get down to those four or five."

Extensive NCAA rules govern the recruiting process, outlining how much contact coaches can have with athletes, a correspondence that generally begins in the student's junior year and occasionally earlier. Coaches travel to games and showcases around the country to scout for promising athletes, sending out letters and questionnaires to students who interest them. Students or their high school coaches can also initiate the recruiting process - football player Colin Cloherty '09, for example, made a highlight tape and sent it to a number of schools.

Once coaches have identified possible candidates, they obtain basic academic information. Here, Associate Athletic Director Bob Kenneally plays an important role. For close to 15 years, Kenneally has served as the liaison among the coaching staff, the admissions office and the Office of Financial Aid.

"Coaches will present transcripts and standardized test scores to me to evaluate, just to know whether they should continue the recruiting process or not," Kenneally said. "If someone is extremely weak, we don't want coaches to continue recruiting someone if they don't have the slightest chance of being admitted to Brown."

After receiving the go-ahead, coaches step up the recruiting process, communicating with athletes via phone and e-mail, sending letters and brochures and inviting them on official visits to campus. High school seniors may make official visits to five colleges, with the team paying for airfare and accommodations. Both Robinson and women's tennis Head Coach Paul Wardlaw said coaches hope prospective athletes choose Brown as one of their five visits because it signifies interest on the student's part. The visit is an important part of the "sales process," Robinson said.

One athlete who said he was sold on Brown after his official visit was Cloherty, a tight end on the football team. Although the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., was his first choice, he did not get along well with his recruiting coach there.

"I did get along really well with the coaches at Brown, though," Cloherty said. "I fit into the offense at Brown pretty well, and they showed me different plays they could run with me. They show you they want you to be a part of what's going on, and that sparked my interest."

During students' official visits, coaches continue to scope out potential athletes in order to compile lists of their top choices. Ivy League guidelines specify how many enrolled students at a university can be recruited athletes across all four classes, taking into account how many sports each institution offers as well as the travel squad size of each team. This count helps determine how many students each coach includes on his or her team's recruit list. Some coaches include only two to four students, while 25 to 30 may be on the football list. Goldberger said a list of six or seven is average.

Meanwhile, just like other high school seniors, recruited athletes submit applications. Miller stressed that athletes fill out the same application forms as regular applicants and go through the same review process, whether they apply early or regular decision. He added, though, that student-athletes are moving increasingly toward applying early. Last year, Miller said about 55 to 60 percent of recruited athletes were admitted early.

"The recruiting process is beginning earlier across the country," Miller said. "There have already been a lot of conversations and visits and evaluations by the time early decision rolls around, so a fair number of student-athletes are very clear on where they want to go."

Miller added that early decision provides coaches the security of filling spots on their roster, a sentiment echoed by Robinson.

"You try and get the kids you really want to apply early," he said. "It gives me a commitment from them, and it also gives the school a commitment."

For student-athletes, early decision also provides a comfort. Mike Peterson '10, a centerfielder on the baseball team, turned in his application before last year's Nov. 1 deadline and received a likely letter soon after. Likely letters can go out after Oct. 1, but only to those who have submitted full applications, Miller said.

However, even for those students who don't receive likely letters - only about 35 of 120 athletes admitted early do - knowing they have a spot on a coach's list can be a good indication of likely acceptance. Although not all athletes on coaches' lists find fat envelopes in their mailboxes, Miller said most are accepted.

In addition to the usual admission criteria, the Ivy League also calculates an Academic Index for all its athletic recruits. High school grades or class rank and test scores for each recruit are converted into a single number, and there is a minimum Academic Index allowed for admission. Coaches are familiar

with Ivy League academic standards, Miller said.

"Rather than have a bunch of people apply who aren't going to be admitted, coaches keep weeding out until they get people we think are strong academically and they think are strong academically," Miller said. "By the time we get the lists, they're pretty well cleaned-up. They are very good at understanding what students need to be successful here academically."

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