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[Ethical Recruiting Compromised...](#)

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The vast majority of colleges and universities have limited or, in the case of Division III, no access to athletics scholarships. However, many institutions have implemented a system of special talent slots, often called 'tips', that allow coaches to recruit academically under prepared athletes who normally would not be admitted to their schools. Athletics administrators should heed the possibilities for abuse invited by this practice.

How does 'tips' work? For example, individual schools or schools within a conference may establish a percentage of athletes who may be recruited under this special program. Each coach will be given a specific number of slots they can use each year. At times, the slots are separated into two categories such as "B" slots for athletes who need a little help in the admissions process and "C" slots for athletes who need significant help. Many coaches using 'tips' are very quick to tell top recruits that they can virtually promise admissions, which for some families is as enticing as a scholarship offer. This is especially true when the institution is among the most academically elite.

There is a whole set of ramifications around 'tips' recruiting strategies, many of which have been

extensively discussed in Bowen and Levin's *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values*. I personally believe that many schools over extend the number of slots they make available with some institutions readily admitting that 50% or more of their athlete population is comprised of students who are under qualified compared to their non-athlete counterparts. However, the part of the process that disturbs me the most is a trend that has gained impetus over the last five years. Many coaches are now telling top recruits that they will only use a 'tip' for them if they commit to making an early decision, which from an ethical perspective is a binding commitment by the recruit when admitted. The coaches will also tell them that there is no way they will get admitted on their own, and if by chance they do, there may not be a spot on the team since the "tip" athletes will get priority. Thus, many prospective athletes are being pressured into selecting a school earlier than they want to or earlier than they need to.

In many cases, the athlete will actually be admitted without the coach using a 'tip' and he or she will be welcomed on the team whenever they commit to the institution, early decision or not. Coaches who use such practices are creating fear and uncertainty among recruits and parents unless the family is very educated about the whole process. Ethically, it is up to the athletics director to send a clear message to his or her coaching staff that they must be honest about their assessment of each recruit's academic and athletic credentials. It is not only the fair thing to do but it will cut down on the dissatisfaction of student-athletes who ultimately feel that they were railroaded into making a decision before they were ready.

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