

Playing college recruiting game

Athletes' parents hear straight talk on kids' chances

By Mel Meléndez
The Arizona Republic

The underlying message at a college recruiting lecture at Dobson High school was loud and clear: Lower your expectations if you want your child to play college sports.

"Less than 1 percent of all high school athletes go to Division 1 schools, so be realistic and stop playing the name game," speaker Jack Renkens said, referring to the top schools for athletics.

"The goal should be that your kid get a quality education, have the chance to play and that they be fully funded. This is doable if you play your cards right."

About 200 parents, students and coaches sat in the Dobson High auditorium Tuesday while Renkens shared his tough-love strategies on college athletics recruiting.

Renkens lectures at more

than 120 schools annually, sharing his experiences on both sides of the recruitment coin.

He has been a teacher, a high school coach and a college athletic director. He also is the father of Brooke, who played college basketball for Manhattan College in New York City.

"I was told she'd never get an athletic scholarship to a quality school because Brooke couldn't guard a chair," he said. "But she's a heck of a shooter, and I found one looking for a good shooter where she got a full ride."

Renkens wrote *Recruiting Realities*, a handbook for parents that aims to shatter the myths surrounding collegiate athletic recruiting.

He also formed a speakers group, under the same moniker, charging schools about \$1,000 for his services.

He pulls no punches when addressing the good, the bad and the ugly of recruiting. He shares his thoughts on:

■ College athletic camps: "Save your money. Kids don't get recruited that way."

■ Relying on coaches to secure scholarships: "It's your responsibility to sell yourself."

■ Turning to recruiting services: "There are five or six decent ones, but most are rip-offs, so beware."

Renkens mostly spoke of the countless scholarship opportu-

nities at smaller, private schools.

He said students don't have to be outstanding athletes to secure full rides, they need to be savvy, realistic and determined.

What's more, if you're not offered paid campus visits and the college's head coach doesn't pay a home visit, then kiss that scholarship goodbye.

Good grades help, but so does a willingness to attend college out of state.

"The further you go, the sweeter the deal," he said. "And remember, kids that can't read and go to college on athletic scholarships typically don't graduate."

Renkens, a familiar face at Mesa campuses, rounded out his tour last week with stops at Red Mountain and Westwood high schools.

"This was sort of a slap in the face, but in a good way, because it took away some of the illusions parents have," said Steve Zeigler, whose son plays football for Dobson. "It reminds you that there are many different options that will allow kids to play at the college level."

"But Zach will go to a Division 1 school," Zeigler added, pointing to his son.

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PARENTS CORNER

Tips on establishing rapport with your athletic child.

- Make sure your child knows that, win or lose, you appreciate the effort given and are not disappointed in him or her.
- Try your best to be completely honest about your child's abilities, competitive attitude and skill level.
- Be helpful but don't coach. Coaching is the coach's job.
- Don't say, "Winning doesn't count," because it does. But encourage your child to compete, try hard and have fun.
- Try not to re-live your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure.
- Don't compare your child to other team members.
- Get to know your child's coach.
- Always remember that children tend to exaggerate when praised and when criticized.
- Explain to your child that courage does not mean the absence of fear.

Source: Jack Renkens of
Recruiting Realities



Jack
Renkens