

'Tour' dispels recruiting myths

Few high school athletes will ever have Hall of Fame college coaches making home visits or extending them an offer to attend Big Time U.

But being an all-conference athlete instead of an All-American does not mean that college sports are out of reach.

Dispelling the myths about recruiting and mining for hidden opportunities are among the topics explored in the "Recruiting Realities Tour," which makes a stop at Milwaukee Pius on Wednesday.

The presentation, which begins at 7 p.m., is free and open to the public.

The keynote speaker will be Mike Harrison, a former Division I quarterback and punter for Ball State University and an educator for Chicago-based Recruiting Realities.

"I was a kid who really would have benefited from learning some of this information, not only learning the recruiting process but not limiting myself to the schools I saw playing football on Saturday afternoons on national television," Harrison said.

Pius athletic director Scott Herrick brought Recruiting Realities to the school as a way to shed light on an increasingly competitive and complicated process.

"Anything you can do to help the kids move on to the next level, especially if they're talented enough but no one has really discovered them yet, is good," Herrick said.

"It's not just for Pius kids, it's for everyone."

Keys to success

Harrison emphasizes the importance of academics in the athletic scholarship process.

A combination of exceptional grades and athletic ability may result in some form of financial aid.

"People may focus too much on the athletic scholarships only and don't look at scholarship options that are non-repayable that are sometimes put together for kids at the lower-division schools, whether it be Division II, Division III or NAIA," he said.

In the business of college recruiting, it is often up to the students and parents — definitely not the media — to get the word out and attract prospective coaches.

"Yeah, (media coverage) is nice and it strokes your ego,

but big-time programs or even other programs don't recruit from the newspapers," Harrison added.

When student-athletes consider the idea of playing college sports, there's no such thing as starting the search too soon as a freshman or waiting too late as a senior.

"All kinds of kids are late bloomers, me being one of them," Harrison said.

There are also other hints — like researching out-of-state schools looking to diversify their student body — that can be found in the Recruiting Realities presentation.

"We encourage kids to get in a position of negotiating strength instead of just waiting for the schools to come to them," Harrison said.

Dose of reality

Who steps up to recruit an athlete — and when it's done — speaks volumes about the marketability of an athlete.

Therefore, Harrison reviews important dates on the NCAA calendar and the methods of coaching contact.

"There are a lot of things we walk through in that process on how to interpret are you being recruited or if you are just on a mailing list getting mail," Harrison said. "If you haven't been contacted by certain

dates, according to the NCAA guidelines, you're probably not a Division I prospect at that particular school at that particular time."

And the glamour of an athletic scholarship to college can fade quickly if student-athletes take the wrong approach.

"You'd better love what you do, whatever sport it is, if you're going to make it to the next level," Harrison said. "There are a lot of kids who come in and don't make it out of their first year.

"It certainly becomes more of a business of winning."

By hosting the Recruiting Realities Tour, Herrick believes student-athletes, parents, coaches and athletic directors from all over southeastern Wisconsin can benefit from the message.

"There are a million kids that can run a 5-second flat 40-yard dash in the United States," Herrick said, "but what can help separate you from someone else in that you get a partial scholarship?"

"If this thing can help — and it's free of charge for the (audience) — how can you go wrong?"

He's right.

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