

College dreams impact youth play  
by [Mike Woitalla](#), February 3rd, 2011 3:04AM

### **Interview by Mike Woitalla**

Ambitions to play college soccer can have a significant impact on a child's path through the youth game -- and the dream of a college soccer scholarship is undoubtedly one reason why parents are willing to spend so much on club ball. We've asked **Avi Stopper**, the founder of college recruiting software company [CaptainU.com](#), to address the issues faced by parents and players, and how clubs have become involved in college counseling.

### **SOCCKER AMERICA: What are clubs doing to help players in their college choice and recruiting process?**

**AVI STOPPER:** One of the benefits top youth clubs -- whose membership fees are often pretty substantial -- say they will bring when they're trying to attract the best youth players is certainly a fair amount of college counseling. That comes in a few forms:

Guidance in how to deal with the process. Setting up "college nights," where they bring in a panel of college coaches and the kids and parents ask questions. And the third is the network that the clubs say they have within the college ranks.

For some clubs they're very tightly networked with lots of college coaches. Others maybe not so much.

**SA: It seems a lot of decisions at the youth club level are driven by the desire to expose players to college coaches. But there are myriad tournaments and an increasing number of leagues to choose from. How should clubs decide which routes to take?**

**AVI STOPPER:** There's not really a formula, for better or worse. It's more of a club-by-club decision.

I want to stress there's not something inherently better in one approach from another. If you say there's a specific strategy and you go down that road, you could be closing off other opportunities and, for example, serving only players of a certain socio-economic class.

It's a question of what the club wants to be and what it believes best serves the needs of the kids.

There are clubs that don't take the long cross-country trips. The vast majority of high school graduates go to college within 400 miles from home. So some clubs stay in their area. They decide, "We're going to go to tournaments people can drive to."

**SA: Very talented players, even at very young ages, leave teams that don't win a lot of trophies for more successful teams -- the notion being that they won't have the college opportunities they're hoping for if playing on a less successful team. ...**

**AVI STOPPER:** That's certainly what the recruiting club will tell that kid. But that's not necessarily the outcome.

It can happen that the superstar kid gets on a new team and isn't getting as much playing time, which can start a vicious cycle. The confidence starts to fall when they play less, they don't play as well, and so confidence falls even more.

I don't think if you're a good player you necessarily have to play for one of the big clubs. If you love being on your current team, your best friends are on it, you can still play in college if that's your goal.

There's also actually an advantage to being a standout on a smaller club, because there's nothing a college coach likes better than finding a diamond in the rough on a "no name" team -- because there's so much less competition from other college coaches than for a player on an elite club. In many ways that's a winning strategy for college coaches. If you're a kind of mid-major college team and try to recruit a kid who's also getting recruited by the very top teams -- that's a daunting proposition

Players can market themselves to college coaches irrespective of what club team they play on.

**SA: What can players do who don't play for clubs that get a lot of exposure to scouting college coaches?**

**AVI STOPPER:** It's true that the most prominent clubs -- on the boys side right now they're the U.S. Soccer Development Academy teams -- get lots and lots of looks from college coaches.

If you're not on one of those teams, for whatever reason -- they're expensive, they're pretty exclusive, they may be geographically inconvenient -- there are still ways to make a college team.

Sending videos is one great way. Playing for a club that goes to other tournaments is still a great way. College coaches still go to those and there are lots of coaches who are looking for diamonds in the rough.

You can go to a college camp during the summer. That gives you a lot of full exposure and the coaches might love you.

**SA: The number of high school-age players courted by Division I coaches with scholarships must be quite small. Can you offer some perspective on college opportunities for the majority of promising youth players?**

**AVI STOPPER:** One biggest miscalculations or misconceptions is you have to be in that group with Division I scholarship prospects -- or bust.

There are lots of great, rewarding college soccer environments for a very large spectrum of players.

Players who don't get the attention the top group gets can fill out the rosters of the better teams. There are a number of levels of college ball and players who don't go to the top college teams can have really awesome, successful college careers.

**SA: Is there something out there for the talented player who doesn't have the grades for college soccer?**

**AVI STOPPER:** There are lots of opportunities. Divisions I and II have minimum GPA and SAT requirements and players must go through the NCAA clearinghouse. But there are many very good Division III and community college programs.

The community college environment in general is designed as a stepping stone -- and it can be so for soccer players, too.

*(Avi Stopper is the founder of [CaptainU.com](http://CaptainU.com), a college recruiting software company, and author of "Make the Team: The Art of Self-Recruiting." He was the captain of the soccer team at Wesleyan University and coached at the University of Chicago.)*

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