

The Women's College Basketball Recruiting Process
A Guide for Perplexed Canadians

Bob McCue

August 2003

Table of Contents

Preface 1

The College Basketball Experience in Canada vs. The United States..... 1

 Overview 1

 The "Business" Orientation of US College Athletics..... 1

 "Beer and Circus" at US Universities 2

 How to Deal with Academic Concerns..... 3

 The Nature of Coaches and the Team Environment..... 3

 Training and Injuries..... 4

 Style of Play 5

 Miscellaneous Unexpected Costs – Health Insurance; Travel; Phone; Taxes 6

 Canadian National Team Prospects 6

How Good are the US High School Players? 8

 How Can Canada Close the Talent Gap?..... 8

 Differences in Style of Play at the High School and Club Level: Canada v. the US 9

 Personal Coaches and Trainers 9

 Conclusion regarding the Talent Gap 10

What Are the US Coaches Looking For? 10

What you are looking for? 11

 Large v. Small 11

 Private v. Public 12

 Culture 12

 Great Education v. Great Basketball 13

 Style of Play 14

 How Bad Do They Want You?..... 15

 Quality of Program 15

Coach v. School	16
How to Attract the Coaches Attention	17
Agents and Recruiting Services	17
Going Down to the US for High School or Club Play	17
NCAA Rules	18
Internet and News Clippings.....	18
Sending Out Tape	18
The Nike All Canada Camp and "Combines"	20
Going to Camps at Universities	20
Persuading the US Coaches to come to Canadian High School Games	21
Enlisting the Help of Friends in the US	21
Unofficial Visits.....	21
The Pros and Cons of Canadian Club Basketball.....	21
How to Evaluate Them.....	22
RPI and SOS.....	22
Academic Qualifications	22
Friends and Relatives.....	23
Other NCAA Coaches	23
Recruiting Class Quality	23
Quality of Facilities and Equipment	23
Unofficial Visits.....	24
Phone Calls.....	26
Official Visits	26
The NCAA Clearinghouse and the ACT and SAT Tests.....	27
Early Offers and Informal Acceptance.....	27
Scholarship Details	28

Celebrating the Decision.....29
How to Say You're Sorry.....29
Conclusion.....30

The Women's College Basketball Recruiting Process

A Guide for Perplexed Canadians

Bob McCue
August 2003

Preface

During the past couple of years I have assisted my daughter, Marin, to make her way through the Canadian and US college basketball recruitment process. This process, while stressful and difficult in a number of ways, has been one of the most positive developmental experiences of Marin's young life, due mostly to the nature of the US college basketball system. For reasons outlined below, this system has much more money to play with than its economics merit. Money attracts exceptionally talented people into the coaching system, and those people spend a lot of time and energy trying to find the right girls to play for them. This resulted in Marin spending many hours on the telephone and in face-to-face meetings with talented, personable coaches. I hasten to add that the Canadian coaches with whom we dealt were also talented, but did not have anything like the resources of their US counterparts to spend with Marin while trying to persuade her to play for them.

In many cases, the coaches with whom we dealt eventually decided that Marin did not meet their needs. While this was difficult for her, the time she spent interacting with a group of exceptionally bright, high calibre human beings has changed her outlook on life in a variety of positive ways. And there were a number of coaches who reached the flattering conclusion that Marin was just what they needed. But most importantly, I watched as Marin progressed from being intimidated by the people with whom we had to deal in this regard and having to rely upon me to carry the conversation and ask questions, to confidently controlling the process on her own.

I would say that whether Marin had decided to go down to the US to play basketball or to stay in Canada (a decision she only made a few weeks ago), the time and resources we spent getting to know the US system were more than worthwhile from a life experience point of view. And from my perspective, that is what basketball is all about – it is a potentially valuable life experience that is both enjoyable now and a great preparation for many other things.

While learning to deal with the US recruitment process, I was impressed by the dearth of useful, published, information available respecting it. Fortunately, we have a couple of friends (Sid and his daughter Ashley Dutchak, and John and his daughter Sarah Craig) who went through the same process a couple of years ago. They provided some helpful advice, the most important aspect of which was that we should start earlier than they did.

Bruce Dunham, who played last year at Idaho State and the year before that at a top-ten US junior college, was also most helpful. Marin was invited to attend the Nike Camp last fall as she was starting grade eleven. During one of the games she played there I sat next to Nancy Wulff, whose daughter Alisa will be a freshman this fall at the University of Virginia and is a member of last year's Canadian Junior National Team. Nancy is, I suspect, the type who does a bang up job of whatever she undertakes. During the course of the hour we sat together, and in a couple of follow up emails, she shared a significant amount of helpful information with me.

Marin's club coach this summer, Cory Russell, was a virtual font of useful information. Cory coached for many years in the high school and university system in the US before coming to Canada, and he was the greatest single source of strategic and other information about how to approach visiting the schools, dealing with coaches, and making the final decision. I wish that we had been involved with Cory much earlier, but we did not meet him until Marin was headed down to the stretch run in terms of her decision.

Finally, the administration at Springbank Community High School, and particularly Principal Alf Gould, has been tremendously supportive of Marin and her teammates athletic endeavours. Marin and I are grateful to the teachers who have provided her with a fine education, as well as incidentally helping her to do well on her SAT and ACT tests, the coaches (including Paul Colborn for several years in community basketball and Kara Vanhooren for two at SCHS), and various others who have contributed to putting her in the position she now occupies.

One of the few rules I try to follow in life is the "golden rule" (the "do to others what you would like them to do to you" version), which has been articulated in different ways in an amazing number of modern and ancient cultures. Hence, since I wish others had taken the time to compile a summary of their experience with the recruitment process so that my job as Marin's helper would have been easier, I will do what I can in that regard for the benefit of those who come along behind us. And now that I think of it, the other version of the golden rule ("he who has the gold makes the rules") is one of US college basketball's defining features. There is a lot of gold involved, and a lot of rules. I will offer a few comments respecting some of the interesting things I observed in this regard that are perhaps not essential to the recruitment process, but may help you to understand the nature of the beast with which you are dealing.

I should note what this summary is, and what it is not. It is a snapshot of one family's experience. I hope that it will make your life easier and help you to help your daughter find more opportunity and make better decisions than otherwise might have been the case. However, I have not attempted to exhaustively research this subject, although I looked as hard as I reasonably could as we scrambled along. I assume that you will look in some places I have not and find things that contradict some of what I have to say. By weighing different perspectives and trying to understand them, you will develop a more balanced view of the things that matter to you in this process.

While I only have first hand experience with the girls' recruiting process, from what I can tell there are many parallels with the boys'. I have not, however, taken the time to undertake a comprehensive "compare and contrast" exercise in that regard. And finally, I note that the US college basketball system is a market. Hence, it is dynamic and what I have to say will go out of date, perhaps quickly. In particular, I expect that the NCAA recruiting rules will continue to change, and that each year more resources relevant to the recruiting process will be put up on the Internet. That is the first place you should look to supplement what I have provided here. For example, I tried to find chat rooms where I could pick up information respecting coaching staffs, but could not find any. I also tried to find chat rooms or rating services respecting the quality of past recruiting classes. Again, I could not find those, but heard that they exist.

I perceive my role in writing this summary as that of breaking the ice, particularly for Canadian players and their parents who are outside the well-lubricated information loop down in the US. Hopefully, others who come along this path after Marin will record their thoughts and add them to ours, and a few years from now a much more comprehensive picture of how this process works will be easily accessible for those whose daughters wish to consider playing college basketball in the US.

Good luck!

Bob McCue
Calgary, Alberta
August, 2003

The College Basketball Experience in Canada vs. The United States

Overview

The primary advantage that the United States has going for it is twofold. First, at the upper levels of play it is without question far more competitive than the Canadian college game. And second, the resources available to the better schools are staggering relative to what we have in Canada. It has become my view that the combination of resources and talent creates the probability (but not the certainty) that any particular player can find a place in the United States that will help her become a better basketball player at the end of four years than would have been the case had she stayed in Canada. As noted below, there are exceptions to this rule, and I will recount several instances we ran into in this regard. However, on the basis of the probabilities involved, Marin decided that she wanted to play in the United States and I supported her in that decision

The "Business" Orientation of US College Athletics

One of the criticisms mounted against US college athletics is that it is too much of a business and hence often becomes an impersonal "meat grinder" that chews the players up and spits them out at the end of four years. In some cases, that is in fact what happens. But in most of the cases we encountered, that characterization would be unfair. Perhaps a little bit of background respecting the economics of US college athletics would be helpful.

There were only two sports that are direct profit making sources for some US schools. While the statistics I am about to recite are not exact, they are close enough to convey an accurate general impression. Of the many football programs in the US college system, only a handful make money. The only other sport that makes any money for US universities is men's basketball. Of the many hundreds of US college men's basketball programs, only about fifty of them make money. Every other athletic program loses money.

A friend who recently coached at major US universities in the Eastern United States indicated to me that the budget at the last school he was at for the women's basketball program was approximately US\$1,500,000. Each year they generated revenues of approximately \$10,000. Overall, the athletic department deficit at the end of each year was in excess of \$9,000,000. The university was required to fund that deficit out of tuition revenues, government grants and alumni donations. Given that dismal picture, it does not seem that US college athletics are much of a business. The question arises as to why these colleges continue to fund their athletic programs? The answer to this question appears to lie in alumni donations. A strong correlation is alleged by some, and disputed by others, between the level of alumni donations and the success and breath of the colleges' athletic programs. Hence, while college athletics are not direct revenue producers, they are alleged by the universities in question to be directly connected to an important revenue source.

Another important factor with respect to women's college athletics is the so-called "Title IX" legislation in the US. This came into effect a number of years ago and requires rough parity between the funding of men and women's athletic programs. As this legislation has gradually taken hold, it has shifted massive amounts of money from the male to the female side of the ledger within the US college athletic system. For example, football is by far the most expensive sport to fund within the system. Football is only played by males. Hence, many schools have started a variety of female athletic programs, fully funded by scholarships, in an attempt to counter-balance the football budget.

As far as women's basketball is concerned, it is more than enough to attempt to counter-balance the male basketball budget. At many of the big schools in the US, for example, the budget for the male basketball team will be well in excess of \$2,000,000. To push a budget for a female team up above \$1,000,000 results in a massive increase in the funding to the women's program. By way of contrast, I understand that the total budget for a typical Canadian men's program would be somewhat less than CDN\$100,000. It does not take rocket science to determine that talent follows money, to a significant extent.

"Beer and Circus" at US Universities

In a recent book entitled "Beer and Circus: How Big Time College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education" Murray Sperber paints a disturbing picture of the US university educational system, and particularly its orientation toward athletics. The book's major criticisms focus on the tendency of US colleges to gain reputation and funding largely on the basis of their research prowess, and hence to neglect the undergraduate educational function. And secondly, those same schools make up for their provision of poor education by creating a "party" atmosphere. The focal point of the party is often athletics. This highlights the importance for these schools of fielding well-funded, excellent athletic teams to keep the students coming in the door and the alumni donations rolling in. In the author's view, this has turned the US educational system upside down. The conferences which have resisted this process (starting with the Ivy League schools in the East) have maintained their educational standards and kept low profile, relatively un-funded athletic programs as well. All Canadian universities would fit into this category. In the US, most of those schools are found in NCAA Div III. The division II schools provide a higher level of funding to athletics. And finally, the division I schools (approximately 300 of them) are those that we hear about from an athletic point of view and have relatively large athletic budgets. And within division I, there is a group at the top of the system that provide funding at several times the level of those toward the bottom. Not surprisingly, those schools are the ones that are consistently near the top of the sports' pack.

The criticisms levelled against the US athletic system in "Beer and Circus" are much more relevant to the men's side of the athletic system than they are to the women's. I read an article sometime ago in Sports Illustrated with regard to the difference between the typical NBA and WNBA player. NBA players, and other male professional athletes, have during the last decade or so become infamous for their ability to father children out of wedlock, get into trouble with the law, and deal with drug and other substance abuse problems. The female players, on the other hand, often have master's degrees in interesting subjects, tend to read things like James Joyce while they travel on road trips, etc. While I am sure that the Sports Illustrated article caricatured NBA players to a point and for purposes of poetic contrast, sang the praises of the WNBA players, much of what Marin and I saw as we dealt with players now in the NCAA athletic system confirmed picture SI painted.

We have a couple of friends who have recently played or are playing NCAA Div. I basketball on the men's side, and some of the things we have heard about the life style that often goes along with that does not make it surprising that the NBA hosts the troubled crew it now does. On the other hand, for example, we met one girl at the University of Denver (a fine, small, private university with some of the nicest facilities we saw) who was given the opportunity to use her extra year of academic eligibility (most of the schools offer five years of academic eligibility in order to complete four playing years) to almost finish a master's degree in international relations.

We did become aware of a few cases of questionable academic practices in order to facilitate female sports team, but these were far from the norm. The picture that came into focus for us was that the NCAA athletic experience involved virtually no free time for the girls as a result of the intense requirements of both their academic and athletic lives. We ran into all kinds of girls who are in pre-med, pre-law and other demanding academic disciplines, who spoke highly of the relationship they had with their teammates, coaches and the overall experience that they were having. I was pleased with the idea that my daughter would be hanging around with people of the calibre we met.

How to Deal with Academic Concerns

There is no question that the NCAA athletic system requires a greater commitment of time from the girls than does the Canadian system. However, significantly greater resources are aligned on the academic side in order to help get the job done there. Most of the schools that we attended provided virtually unlimited tutoring and academic coaches to help structure programs to suit the abilities of the players. However, the quality of the US schools is much more variable than their Canadian counterparts, and within some reputable US schools it is possible to find "basket weaving" or "gut" courses designed to help athletes stay eligible. Such programs do not exist to the same extent in Canada.

There is no question that the US educational system has much higher and much lower ends of the spectrum than its Canadian equivalent. Hence, more care should be taken both in choosing an academic institution and also in determining which program offered by the institution your daughter will follow and monitoring it while she works her way through. Some of the schools Marin was looking at, for example, were tremendous private academic institutions that offer an education at least as good as anything offered in Canada. In addition, it is my view that the network that Marin could establish while attending such a school would be preferable to what she would likely establish in Canada in terms of creating future career related opportunities for her. Some of the other schools Marin was interested in, and in fact the school she chose to attend, were large public institutions with much more spotty academic records. Most of those schools have a number of programs that are well regarded, and a majority that are not. Part of the key in terms of Marin's obtaining a good education at San Diego State, the school she decided to attend, will be determined by her ability to gain entrance to one of the high quality programs that school runs, and her determined avoidance of the basket weaving courses that could make her life easy there, and result in a degree that would be worth little to her at the end of four years.

The Nature of Coaches and the Team Environment

We have heard much about how hardnosed the US coaches are as a result of the pressure on them to produce winning teams that keep alumni donations coming in. I acknowledge that the environment in which these coaches operate is extremely difficult. We also saw evidence in a number of cases of unhappy players who transferred from school to school, and often indicated that the reason for the transfer was the less than humane treatment to which they had been subjected. On the other hand, we heard far more stories from girls about the wonderful "family" environment which had been created around their basketball team and that despite the difficulties of training and keeping up at school, they would not trade the experience they were having for anything. One girl who spent almost all of her first two years at university sitting on the bench after having a stellar career as a Canadian high school player indicated that if she had the decision to make over again, she would go to the same school. Sitting on the bench and learning in the environment at that school had for her been a great experience.

In my view, the pressure the US system puts on the college coaches is regrettable. However, it does not seem to me to be that different from what I see in Canada. I have heard many of the same sorts of stories from Canadian players as we heard from the unhappy US players. In addition, the money provided to the US coaches attracts a level of talent which we do not see in Canada. Having said that, I should make it clear that I have been very impressed by a number of the Canadian coaches with whom we dealt. In particular, Trix Baker at the University of Alberta and Shawnee Harley and Clare Mitten at the University of Calgary are first class individuals. However, I cannot overstate how impressed I was with some of the coaches we dealt with in the US. I provide below a summary of some of our experiences in that regard. The difficult environment in which these people operate may have caused some of them, often the most successful, to develop a depth of character that is remarkable. I would have been thrilled to turn Marin over to any one of many of the coaches who we came to know during the course of the recruiting process.

Something that impressed us with regard to both the Canadian and the US basketball programs with which we became familiar is the extent to which the girls talked about the feeling of "family" that surrounded the team. This appears to relate to the intense nature of the training environment in which the girls spend a great deal of their time together. In some cases, we encountered an "us v. them" attitude respecting the coaching staff. However, in most cases while there was the necessary degree of tension between the coaches and the players, a great deal of respect and admiration existed between those two groups. Coaches told us about numerous instances in which they have been invited to weddings, received phone calls from delivery rooms after babies have been born, etc. A great coach has a tremendous impact on the players with whom she works. And girls told us about coaches providing wonderful support during times of personal emotional difficulty, showing up uninvited to help move apartments, etc. The caricature of the US college basketball system as a heartless business is in many cases not fair.

Training and Injuries

One of the disturbing things we learned while visiting with coaches and players in the US is the percentage of players who suffer injuries that require reconstructive surgery. On many teams we got to know, 50% of the players in the program require reconstructive surgery at some time during their college careers. On most teams, at least one and usually two or three players per year require ACL surgery or reconstructive ankle surgery. Most teams we spoke with were sensitive to this issue and went to great lengths to explain the importance of adequate training in order to prepare the players' bodies for the stresses of competition. The theory seems to be that a proper weight lifting regimen will strengthen the body, and particularly the legs, to the point where injuries will be less likely. However, it appears to me that many of these injuries were perhaps the result of over-training. One of the coaches we spoke to acknowledged this as a real possibility. When players arrive in the fall, and particularly during the first couple years of their college careers, they are often in nowhere near the physical condition of the more experienced players. The effort to take a quantum leap up the conditioning spectrum puts a tremendous amount of stress on their bodies. While I do not have the data to confirm this, I suspect that the majority of injuries occur during this phase.

I also note in this regard a few things relevant to girls from Western Canada in particular. First, because of grade 13 in the East, most of the girls who have gone down to the US from there are one year older than our girls. That year in many cases makes a big difference in terms of physical strength. Second, the US girls seem to have a least a one-year lead on us in terms of the conditioning programs to which they are exposed in high school. And third, we met many

girls in the US who were significantly older than Marin will be as she goes through school. This is usually the result of taking a little time off school, and then maybe coming to NCAA play through junior college. One of the best point guards Marin played with while on an informal visit this summer was 24 years old. On the boys' side of the equation, this situation seems to be even more common. One young man we ran into (from Canada, incidentally) was a year delayed in high school, then attended a post high school "prep" school to play ball for a year, then took a scholarship from an NCAA Div. I school and red-shirted his "freshman" year (remember, you get five years to play four), and so will play his first year of university basketball as a sophomore but will in fact be three years older than the "true" freshmen against whom he competes. That term – "true freshman" – is one we regularly heard. That it is used at all is an indication of how common the phenomenon I just described is. This is another result of the competitive nature of the US system. And I should also add, I know of many players in Canada who have stayed in school, or moved in and out of school, while playing basketball for much longer than is likely in their best interest. However, this tendency does seem more pronounced in the US than in Canada.

The upshot of the three points above is that if your daughter will be a "true freshman" when she starts to play in an NCAA Div. I program, she is likely to face a significant conditioning gap between herself and most of the other players in the program. Accordingly, in my view it is important that Marin begin now to prepare herself for the level of competition she will face when she starts serious training at San Diego State in the fall of 2004. We also asked questions related to the nature of the training system, and it appears that many of the coaches are substituting stationary bike training and other forms of non-impact aerobic conditioning for activities that would tend to put more stress on the body.

One of the things Marin was concerned about respecting the US system was whether she would have the stamina to endure the training programs required there. Bruce Dunham had been kind enough to share with Marin some of the details respecting the training programs he used while playing basketball in the US. Marin did not feel that she could handle what Bruce described. However, during the informal visits we made to Weber State and the University of Colorado, Marin was permitted to watch the teams go through their spring training sessions, which were among the most difficult they face. It quickly became clear that the women train differently than do the men. The men's workouts tend to be more individualistic in nature. I would characterize the women's workouts both at Weber State and the University of Colorado as group social events that involved a lot of intense physical activity. There was plenty of laughing and camaraderie among the girls as they worked out, and within minutes Marin was comfortable that the only remaining serious impediment in her mind with regard to her ability to play basketball in the US had been removed.

Style of Play

The orientation toward "role playing" is greater in the US than it is in Canada. In some cases, this does good things for the players in terms of preparing them for professional or international play. However, this does have a significant downside. Some players who would be permitted a more free reign in Canada to shoot, score and perform a variety of functions, are in the US restricted to more narrow roles, whether they be offensive or defensive. This is not as much fun, and for some girls in particular, helps to turn what was once a joy and source of creativity into something that much more resembles work. This, in fact, is one of the greatest downsides of the US system. The time required and structured orientation of many programs turns student/athletes into *de facto* poorly paid professionals. Another study I read indicated that many student athletes would be financially better off to have worked the same number hours at

McDonald's as they put into their sports careers while in school. The same study suggested that educationally many of the same athletes would have been in better shape because their athletic careers would not have stunted their educational desire and effort.

The "role" orientation in the US, of course, varies from team to team. As a general rule, the better the team the more likely it is that your daughter will be slotted into a role. I provide below several illustrations of how this works.

Miscellaneous Unexpected Costs – Health Insurance; Travel; Phone; Taxes

Until a few years ago, the US schools covered all of the health insurance costs for their international players. That is no longer the case. Most schools offer an insurance program that can be purchased from the school at a cost of between US\$1,000 and US\$1,500 per year. The parents of some Canadian players who have gone down to the US schools have found that the Blue Cross Travel Insurance program in Canada, at a cost of between CDN\$300 and CDN\$500, meets the requirements of the US schools. The NCAA rules do not permit the schools to cover the cost of this insurance.

The cost of travel and communication can be significant for the family of a student athlete in the US. As a rule, the student athlete will travel back and forth at least twice a year, and parents and other family members may wish to travel down to visit. When you add this up, it can amount to a significant sum of money. Long distance telephone calls are another issue. We have spoken to some people who have indicated that money that they would have otherwise have spent on vacation travel to different locations was spent on vacation travel to the place where their daughter attends school. I was relieved on that front when Marin chose San Diego instead of, for example, Pittsburgh.

The value of a US scholarship is taxable for both US and Canadian purposes. Technically speaking, this requires that the student athlete file a tax return in the US, and then file a Canadian tax return reporting this income and claiming as a credit the tax paid in the US. Practically speaking, most players in the US pay the US tax and don't bother to report their income in Canada. In most cases, the credits available to a student athlete with little or no other income from other sources will result in a full refund of any tax payable in the US or Canada. However, for a student athlete with significant other sources of income, tax will likely end up being paid at the end of the day.

Canadian National Team Prospects

At the Nike All Canada Camp last fall, Christine Stapleton (responsible for that camp and Canada's female development program) noted that most of the last several girls who have made Canada's National Team were products of Canadian university programs. She attributes this to good coaching and the opportunity to be a "go to" player in Canada, and noted that several great Canadian players who have gone down to the US in recent years seem to be languishing and not developing as a result of a lack of playing time.

Allison McNeil – coach of Canada's National Team and Associate Head Coach at the University of Oregon – has a different take on things. She noted that players who choose to go down to the US to play should try to make an assessment as to which programs will allow them the chance to log considerable minutes on the floor, and have a chance to make a difference for the team. But she went to add that:

We do not care where they go to school – US or Canada. If they are good enough to make the Canadian National Team they WILL make the Canadian National Team. All of us involved in basketball in Canada want to put the best teams possible on the floor! We got to this level because we are extremely competitive and dedicated people. I think that athletes have to set priorities - if they TRULY want to play for Canada then they need to DEVELOP. It is tough to develop sitting on a bench in either country. It is also tough to develop with poor coaching in either country. Which country they play basketball in is much less important than how hard they work on their game; how much they train and how hard they compete!

Athletes need to make good decisions regarding their development. They need to "learn" how to play, thus schools that teach motion principles should be considered. They need to develop their individual offensive skills, thus coaching is vital. Find out if the schools in question have developed other players in your position; and will they play you at the position you need to play for Canada, or are they all about recruiting and NOT DEVELOPMENT?

They need to play primarily man-to-man defense, thus going to a school that uses primarily zones and zone presses will not help develop them for the National Team. To play internationally they need to COMPETE, because International Basketball is the highest level of basketball in the world. Thus, they need to be PUSHED in practice and PUSH themselves outside of practice. The WANT to make the National Team is in almost every young girl who plays basketball in Canada; the necessary WILL and WORK is in very few.

A "player" can come from anywhere if they really want to be a player! I think many athletes say they want to make the National Team, but few are willing to make the HUGE commitment required. We see "potential" National Team athletes go to US and Canadian schools every year and we see them over the next 4 or 5 years and they have not developed. How much of that is the athlete, how much is the coaching and how much is the competition? There are so many factors to consider.

I believe that if an athlete REALLY wants to play for Canada and they have the required physical and mental abilities (ie: a 5'9" post player is not going to make it no matter how hard she works!) they can do it anywhere! But the things I listed above will help them in a big way! Bad coaches; losing teams; bad conferences; not playing; not working on their game; all set plays and lots of zone defense without man to man principles will not get it done. To play for Canada an athlete needs to commit to being a WORLD CLASS athlete.

Coach McNeill has pointed out the critical factors. Finding out what a program can do for a girl as opposed to what it says it will do is of course a tricky issue. We found that speaking with girls who had left programs after graduation (most coaches will supply names and phone numbers) was a surprisingly useful source of information. These girls are not beholden to the coaches in anything like the way in which players still with the program are. We heard about the good, bad and ugly from many of these girls. The nature of the program over time, the players and teams it has produced are of course also telling. But after collecting all of the information reasonably possible, a great deal still must be left to chance.

Coach McNeill also noted that schools that operate on a quarter basis instead of a semester system work best with the National Team program, since quarter schools start later in the fall

than semester schools and most of the National Team program occurs in the early fall. However, Kim Smith at the University of Utah, a semester school, was able to work out a program with them that accommodated her needs in that regard. And we were told at each of the semester schools that Marin spoke to about this, including San Diego State, that if she is fortunate enough to some day make Canada's National Team they will do what is necessary to facilitate her involvement in that regard.

How Good are the US High School Players?

This issue is relevant to the recruiting process because I think we should be realistic about the level of competition our daughters currently face.

During each of the last three summers (including the summer of 2003) Marin has played on club or provincial basketball teams that have travelled to tournaments in the US. On the basis of that experience, there is no question in my mind that the level of play in the US remains far higher than that in Canada. Marin's most recent experience, at the AZ Elite Tournament in Phoenix this spring and the Mid-Summer Night Madness Tournament in Seattle in July, confirmed yet again this reality.

At the Seattle tournament, four Alberta teams were present, including Team Alberta which this year was the best of the bunch. They each played in the elite division of the tournament, which included 140 teams. I believe that the best Alberta team finish was somewhere in the middle of the pack. There were perhaps ten teams in the tournament which were head and shoulders above the rest, and I believe would have beaten any of the Alberta teams by at least 50. I saw several girls who were either able to dunk or were on the verge of dunking. Both the athleticism and the technique of many girls I saw were significantly superior to the best of our players.

In speaking with coaches and parents of some of the US girls at the tournament, it became clear to me that they start earlier and train harder than we do. However, the most significant feature that has created this talent gap between the Canadian and the US basketball systems is the fact that in the US the average competition level is higher than it is in Canada. Hence, their best play against better players on a regular basis, and continue to ratchet their talent level up. In Canada, our best are playing against a much lower level of talent, and the motivation to improve does not exist. This is a simple application of evolutionary theory – we respond to our environment and develop the skills it demands of us.

How Can Canada Close the Talent Gap?

I applaud what Basketball Alberta is currently doing in terms of trying to get our best players together on a regular basis. This is a step in the right direction. However, this will not do much to close the gap. For our best to play against each other still means that they are playing against a level of competition far below the US level.

While visiting the University of California at Santa Barbara, Coach Mark French confirmed for me what I have for several years believed to be the solution to this problem. UC Santa Barbara is one of the best university basketball teams in the US. This year they have two girls on the US national team and expect to be ranked in the top five during the pre-season this fall. However, UCSB plays in the Big West Conference, which is one of the weakest conferences in NCAA Div. 1A. When I asked Coach French how he maintained his players' edge during the course of the season, he indicated that he has a group of fifteen male players respecting whom he goes through the difficult process of qualifying to practice with his players. This process is so difficult

because each of those male players must meet all of the NCAA athletic requirements in terms of carrying a full load, grade point average, etc., and he cannot provide them with scholarships. A significant amount of administrative effort in his program is directed toward finding the right players to do this, and maintaining their NCAA certification. Some of these players are in practice every day with his team. The group is so large because it is not possible to find male players who can be there every day. But in every practice he wants enough male players to run drills with his team, scrimmage against his team, etc. in order to raise the level of play for them. As he put it to me, in his program 96% of the basketball is played in practice. His job as coach is to create an environment in practice which will continually elevate his players' level of play. The only way to do that, in his view, is to bring in male players.

Each school we visited uses male players to one extent or another. Coach French makes by far the greatest use of this resource. This was caused, ironically, by the weakness of his conference. The teams we visited in stronger conferences did not feel the need to do what he has done, and for the past several years his team has beaten many of them.

I suggest that in Canada we should adopt a strategy that will do something similar in terms of turning a weakness into a strength. I do not believe there is any other way in which we can close the competitive gap that currently exists between us and the US. A great training program that does not illustrate to the girls each time they step on the floor the need to be quicker, more careful, execute better, etc. will not change their behaviour in the manner in which it needs to be changed.

Differences in Style of Play at the High School and Club Level: Canada v. the US

As indicated above, at the upper end, the US club players are more skilled than their Canadian counterparts. However, they also are much stronger, more physical and aggressive in their style of play. By the end of the tournaments in Seattle and Phoenix, our girls had acclimatized to the aggressive level of play. However, we could not overcome the talent and execution differential.

Another observation with regard to the US style at the club level is that they rely to a lesser degree upon set plays, or have a much greater variety of set plays than our kids use. In several of the games Marin's team, Calgary OutWest, played in Seattle we were ahead or close at the half and then lost in the second half largely due to turnovers forced by the US girls' continuing aggressive play and also the fact that they had mapped out the few set plays our team used. This is not to be critical of Cory Russell, the team's coach. Cory did a great job bringing our girls as far as he did. However, they were not able to develop a "read and react" system of play, and the half a dozen options in Cory's offence were all well understood by half time in each of the games we played. The offence simply did not work during the second half.

I believe that the Canadian teams need to move toward a greater use of "read and react" systems. This will produce both better basketball players and will prove more resilient when under the kind of pressure the US teams put on our girls.

Personal Coaches and Trainers

The use of personal coaches has become much more common in the US during the past several years. This trend has not taken off yet in Canada, but I expect that it will. We arranged earlier this spring for Marin to start to work with a personal trainer to build her strength. We were referred by Christie Allen, a current University of Alberta Panda who was the assistant

coach of Marin's provincial team last year, to Kelly Forbes at Lindsay Park in Calgary. Kelly played basketball at the University of Calgary, has been an effective personal trainer, and has provided some individual coaching help to Marin along with the basketball orientated training program he designed for her. I would highly recommend this approach once a girl has stopped growing. I would recommend even more highly putting together a small group of girls who are interested in the same kind of training, and hiring one coach for the group. This would allow the group to replicate the kind of socializing and training environment I described above with regard to the University of Colorado and Weber State teams. These girls put so much time into training that if their social needs are not met at the same time, it is unlikely that they will be able to continue with the program.

Marin started training with Kelly in May of this year, and since then has gained about 20 pounds of muscle and has increased her strength in most of her lifts by approximately 50%. And perhaps more important to her long-term well-being, she now enjoys working out. She has discovered how good it feels to become stronger, and now looks forward to going to the gym several times a week and feels sluggish if she misses a workout.

Conclusion Regarding the Talent Gap

Most good Canadian players best chance to find a place at one of the better US schools will come as a result of either having superlative physical attributes (really tall; really athletic; etc.) or by being an excellent role player. The technique of most Canadian players, and their fitness/athleticism, will not get them in the door. So try to get your daughter the best coaching and highest calibre of play possible in Canada, but the evidence at this point suggests strongly that this also will not be enough to get her a good position in the US unless she has developed some special skills in at least one area.

Many Canadian girls have gone down to the US on the basis of their shooting ability. That is not surprising since shooting is one of the skills that can largely be developed outside the competitive fires that burn in the US. Certainly, a player may have to develop the ability to get her shot off more quickly down there than she has to up here, but the coaches can recognize the ability to shoot independently from other skills.

What Are the US Coaches Looking For?

As noted above, in the US college system the orientation toward role players is much greater than it is in Canada. The attention Marin attracted was due to the fact that she is a great outside shooter and passes the ball well. Coaches recognize that her defensive capabilities, strength and agility, are at this point not up to snuff, but they are prepared to work with her on the basis of her ability to play the "shooter" role and make some other contributions while they develop her into a well-rounded player.

There are other roles to be played. For example, we heard many teams talk about having a "defensive stopper". A great defensive player, regardless of offensive abilities, has a place on most good US college teams. There is also a place for a great rebounder with limited offensive ability.

Size matters. Marin's height was a clear advantage in this process. However, many of the best players she played against at the shooting guard position during the informal visits we took (described in more detail below) were shorter than her. The best, Kate Fagan at the University of Colorado (a Big XII Conference All Star last year), is no more that 5'10". My guess is that she

is 5'9". However, these smaller players were very athletic and well conditioned. Much more so than Marin is now.

Emotional stability is important. The coaches who are interested in Marin spent a great deal of time trying to assess her interpersonal skills and stability both as an athlete and as a student. A number of them told us how impressed they were with the way in which she dealt with some very bad games she played in Seattle. While in Seattle, Marin was sick and had some of her worst games of the summer. The fact that she dealt with that adversity without blowing up and continued to be supportive of her teammates was something that clearly impressed some of the coaches who were recruiting her. On the other hand, those less than stellar games cost her a number of scholarship opportunities. This is another problem with the Canadian club system. Most of the other players who the US coaches were watching played in at least three tournaments during the course of the summer at which the US coaches were able to see them play. Marin played at one. She had a bad tournament there as a result mostly of not being well. The fact that this was her only tournament down there gave her no chance to recover, and cost her a number of scholarship opportunities.

We heard a number of coaches talk about assessing "potential". When Marin stands beside many of the US athletes, it is clear that she has not been around a weight room much and is still physically undeveloped. This, coupled with her shooting and ball handling ability, indicates that she has a lot of potential to develop. Likewise, girls with great athletic ability who have not been exposed to much good coaching stand out, as do players with great size who have not yet grown into their bodies.

What Are You Looking For?

The permutations and combinations within the US college basketball system between types of universities and basketball programs seem endless. Some of the distinctions that came into focus for Marin and me as we went through the process are as follows:

Large v. Small

Two of the most interesting schools to recruit Marin were the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia and Santa Clara University just outside of San Francisco. Both are private schools. Santa Clara has an enrolment of well under 10,000, and the University of Richmond well under 5,000. Both have upper quartile Div. I basketball programs and offer a "just short of Ivy League" education. Class sizes are small. The orientation of both schools is on teaching as opposed to research. They seemed to me to be a great combination of education and basketball experience. Almost the same could be said of the University of Denver.

While there are some large private universities, most of the large schools Marin visited were state institutions. These are more likely subject to the "Beer and Circus" criticism referred to above. They also tend to offer a broader range of course options, and will tell you that class sizes are not an issue for their student athletes because of the tutoring and other academic assistance available to them. They also tend to offer better athletic facilities (although none we saw were better than those at the University of Denver), and because of their large student base also tend to have larger crowds at games.

Private v. Public

The private schools, both large and small, tend to fall into two categories. The first are tremendous academic institutions. The second are operated by religious institutions. Some of those in the second also fall into the first. For example, Santa Clare University is a Jesuit owned institution, but offers an open-minded and high quality approach to education. The same cannot be said for all religiously affiliated institutions. Brigham Young University, for example, was recently sanctioned by the national body that governs academic institutions for restricting academic freedom on its campus. The same is true of some other religiously affiliated educationally institutions.

Some private schools (and perhaps some public, although we did not encounter any) do not have a "backdoor" admission policy for student athletes. For example, at Stanford and each of the Ivy League schools admission must be gained through the ordinary channels without any regard for athletic ability. If a potential student athlete is admitted, the athletic department may then offer a scholarship at Stanford. For the Ivy League schools, the only scholarships granted are respecting financial need, but those are often awarded to athletes. We were assured at Stanford that the athletic department had no influence whatsoever over the admissions' procedure, and that they regularly lost athletes they dearly wish to have as a result of their inability to gain admission. Stanford's record with regard to women's basketball, and many other sports, is all the more remarkable in light of this fact. Of all the schools we visited, Stanford was from my perspective the most impressive. As an interesting footnote, one university coach advised me that Duke University's dramatic change in basketball fortunes coincided a number of years ago with its change from a policy similar to that of Stanford's to what might be described as the "typical" policy. That is, athletes are admitted to the school as long as they meet the minimum NCAA admissions standards.

Marin's grades are solid, but not spectacular. Stanford was the only university with which we dealt that questioned her ability to gain admittance on the basis of her high schools marks and admittance test (SAT and ACT) scores. We did not go far enough down the road with the Ivy League schools to find out about their admissions standards, but I assume that they would be similar to Stanford's. Lehigh University and Pepperdine, both top forty academic institutions, indicated to Marin that she would have no trouble meeting their admission criteria in order to receive an athletic scholarship.

Culture

Some schools we visited had very little racial diversity on campus. The private schools tended to suffer most from this (in my view) deficiency. However, a number of the public schools did as well. Those tended to be located in the West and Mid-West (excluding California). On either coast, cultural diversity is much more significant in both the private and public schools. However, even there the public schools tend to be much more diverse than the private.

There also seemed to be significant cultural differences based to some extent on the location of the schools. The schools on both coasts seemed to be more liberal in orientation. The schools in the interior of the country seemed to be more conservative. This gross generalization has, of course, many exceptions. However, researchers have correlated cultural attitudes to some extent by region, and in the US it is clear that both coasts tend to vote Democrat while the interior of the country tends to vote Republican. Hence, the above cultural observation should not seem too surprising. In addition, the East Coast of the US, from accent through to business cultural, is quite different from the West Coast. And the Southern US is different again. It was

both interesting and educational to gain a sense of some of these regional differences during the course of the recruiting process.

In the end, Marin decided that she did not want to be too far away from home. While this did not seem like a particularly important decision criterion from my perspective, for her it was important. Hence, all of the Eastern and Southern schools were eliminated from consideration. However, she did decide that she wanted something different from both a weather and a cultural perspective. Hence, the schools in Utah, Nevada and Colorado that were recruiting her faced a significant uphill battle. She developed early on in the process a strong preference for California, and not surprisingly that is where she eventually decided to go to school.

Great Education v. Great Basketball

There are a few schools that are great educational institutions and also offer great basketball programs. Duke and Stanford perhaps head that list. In the majority of cases, however, there is a trade-off to be made between the quality of the academic institution and the basketball program it sponsors. My preference was to push Marin toward a school that had both a good basketball program and a strong academic record. As noted above, in my view Santa Clara and University of Richmond both met that standard. However, I learned some time ago that if I do any more than gently recommend, the course of action I prefer becomes less instead of more likely. Hence, I stood back and let Marin make her own decision, and other criteria were more important from her perspective. I will describe that in greater detail below.

I had an interesting telephone conversation with a young women who will start playing next year for Santa Clara. She had a stellar high school and club career (including making the All-Tournament Team at the End of the Trail Tournament in Oregon City) and chose Santa Clara over a number of other schools which have better basketball programs. She told me that she had decided that she would only play basketball at a school that offered her the chance to obtain a higher quality education than she would be able to access on her own. Santa Clara has a reasonable basketball program, great facilities, she liked the coaches and most importantly, it met her primary decision criterion. Hence, she committed to attend school and play basketball there. That kind of attitude is not uncommon with regard to the players who end up at schools like Santa Clara. They consciously compromise the quality of the basketball program in order to upgrade their educational opportunity. From what I understand, that kind of decision-making is more rare with regard to the male than the female players.

The experience that Marin had while we visited Stanford University perhaps best illustrates this element of the process. Stanford is a great educational institution, and the basketball players it produces are also top drawer. We had the chance to spend about four hours with Stanford's coach, Tara Vanderveer. She is a remarkable women, as well as being a fine coach. She has twice coached the US National Team, and while we were with her it was obvious to both Marin and me that we were in the presence of someone of world-class caliber. She proudly showed us their campus, talked about the various programs offered there, and most importantly described the nature of many of the girls she has had the privilege to coach and some of the experiences she had with them.

Perhaps the highlight of the day was the opportunity we had to watch a video of a speech given by one of Tara's former players at a recent banquet celebrating the 25th anniversary of Stanford women's basketball. This woman was the third of three speakers, one representing each decade of Stanford women's basketball. The first speaker is a well-known educator and writer who delivered a brilliant address with respect to the roots of Stanford women's basketball. The

second is an engineer who delivered a witty, multi-media address respecting her decade. Coach Vanderveer said she feared somewhat for her recent graduate who had to follow those two powerful, thoughtful presentations. This young lady then stood up and left the large crowd assembled wrung out, and with spines tingling. She was alternately funny, emotional, and provocative. She tied the evening together with her summary of arriving at the school as a wet behind the ears youngster who became familiar with the "ghosts" that lived in the Staple Center (Stanford's athletic facility). These ghosts at different times frightened her, intimidated her, inspired her, and guided her. She told anecdotes respecting each of these experiences that brought laughter, or tears, from her audience. We found out later that not only was this articulate young woman a very talented speaker and writer, but that she was the only freshman in the history of Stanford's basketball program to be elected captain of the team. She was captain and a starting player during each of her four years. Her only liability as a player, apparently, was an inability to shoot. She excelled in every other aspect of the game, and spent countless hours engaged in what she called "rebounding practice", during which she was attempting to develop a shot. She played briefly in the WNBA, and then went to law school and has just completed her degree.

There was a noticeable change in Marin's behavior in general and her approach with regard to the basketball recruitment process after our Stanford visit. I will look back on the day we spent there as one of those water shed moments in my daughter's life, and believe that the time, money and effort we spent with regard to this exercise were worthwhile on the basis of that experience alone. Coach Vanderveer and her assistant Amy Tucker are two of the coaches I referred to above who are truly remarkable individuals and to whom I would gladly hand my daughter over and with whom I would feel grateful to have her associate. The other Stanford coaches and personnel with whom we dealt were also impressive.

Style of Play

We dealt with coaches who articulated a variety of different styles of play. The most crucial distinctions were between structured offensive play versus "read and react"; zone versus man-to-man defensive orientation; and whether the team overall was more oriented toward offense or defense.

Most of the schools we visited indicated that they favoured man to man defensive and "read and react" offensive systems, coupled with a high pressure full court defense and a quick transition game. It was clear to me that these representations were tailored to meet what most recruits want to hear. However, by watching some game film and speaking with other people familiar with the teams in which we were most interested, it was impossible to develop a more accurate picture of their style of play.

I am familiar with one player in particular who had a great Canadian high school career, and was one of the best offensive players I have seen in Canada. She ended up at a school that has a tremendous defensive orientation. During her first two years at the school, she saw the floor very little because although she was one of the best offensive players on the team, she did not meet the minimum standard of defensive ability required by the head coach. This girl, while she has no doubt developed a number of skills that she did not have in high school, appeared to me at the end of her second year of university to be a less capable basketball player than she had been upon high school graduation. Most of all, it appeared to me that her confidence as an offensive player had been crushed. My guess is that had she ended up in a program that did not have the same hyper-orientation toward defense that she would have developed in a healthier manner.

How Bad Do They Want You?

One of Bruce Dunham's key pieces of advice was that Marin should attend a school that "really wanted her". He was also quick to admit that sometimes this is hard to tell since most coaches in both Canada and the US tend to oversell the amount of playing time and other opportunities that will be available for each player. We spoke with a number of players on US teams who had been "promised" significant amounts of playing time during their first year and who were badly disappointed when the reality of their situation became apparent. There were, of course, always reasons for which the promises could not be met. Perhaps the player herself did not develop as quickly as coaches had thought she would, or other players developed more quickly, or her work ethic was not adequate, etc.

The reality, it seems to me, is that during the recruiting process the coaches are in a highly competitive situation with each other and simply over promise. They are then required to find excuses for a number of their players, since there is not enough opportunity to satisfy all the promises they have made. Hence, many girls are going to be told that they are not working hard enough, have not developed quickly enough, etc. and their expectations will be disappointed.

Without being too cynical respecting the process, I think it is important to take all promises made with a grain of salt, and if possible to speak with not just players who are currently in the program and therefore are still under the thumb of the coaches, but players who have either left or are on their way out and therefore are not as likely to say what the coach wants to be said. And we found it helpful to speak with players who did not have key roles on the team. Kim Gervasoni, the current coach at the University of Nevada at Reno and a former assistant at Arizona State, indicated to us that during her last two years at Arizona State the coaching staff set a goal to make sure that none of their players felt the need to transfer, and they achieved that. This means that the girls who saw little of the floor were made to understand their situation in a way that made them feel accepting, if not happy, and were provided with whatever opportunities they required to keep them at least satisfied enough to stay in the program. We had the opportunity to speak with one girl who during the course of two years had seen very little opportunity to play, and she could not say too many positive things about her coaches and the overall experience of having been on that team.

Quality of Program

As noted above, one of Allison McNeil's key pieces of advice was that Marin not go to a program at which she would be "over her head". Allison provided a number of examples of Canadian girls who have done that and have ended up without a key role to play and have suffered developmentally, from her point of view. The counter-point she provided was Kim Smith, last year's rookie of the year and MVP in the Mountain West Conference, who chose to attend the University of Utah and immediately had a large role to play in their program. She felt that Kim had been better served by going to that program instead of to others that were more high profile but would likely not have offered her the same opportunity.

While I happen to agree with Coach McNeil's advice, the cynic in me cannot help but note that what she told us would help her recruit for Oregon when going after girls that were also looking at top tier schools. There is something to be said for the, "I am going to the best place that will take me" attitude, and a couple of coaches indicated to us that this attitude is much more common on the female side of the game than on the male. One coach told us, for example, that the UMass women's team has a bench that is unbelievably strong, and that the equivalent thing

would never happen in the men's game. Male players, this coach said, who had the ability to be the kind of "go to" players on other teams that the UMass subs have would never be content to sit on the bench. They would give it a whirl, and then transfer.

We also had the opportunity to speak with Kim Smith at length while Marin visited the University of Utah. Kim indicated that a key in her decision to select the University of Utah was the team's motion oriented offensive style (read and react) and its emphasis on defence. Both of these suited her strengths, and she has flourished in their system. As a result of Utah's recent experience with Canadian girls (Erin Gibbons from Salmon Arm, British Columbia; Kim Smith from Mission, British Columbia and Shona Thorburn from Ontario) it was interested in Marin and will continue to follow Canadian players closely. On that basis, Utah was the only school to send a coach up to watch one of Marin's high school games. Marin happened to play poorly that game, and did not stand out when she played against the Utah girls during her informal visit there. This, in my view, resulted in her being dropped from Utah's "must have" list. This highlights the idiosyncratic, hit and miss, nature of the process. The University of Colorado, which has a significantly stronger program than the University of Utah, recruited Marin heavily on the basis of one standout performance while she scrimmaged with their players. At the elite level, one or two poor outings can finish a player's recruiting chances, whereas one great game at the right time can seal the deal.

Coach v. School

Alisa Wulff made her decision to attend the University of Virginia primarily on the basis of the program. Her advice to Marin was that it was best to select a program in a great conference that had a tradition of going to the NCAA tournament, and that of course "feels right" when you visit and have the opportunity to meet the players, etc. However, she did not put a great deal of weight on the coaching staff itself. One of her friends, another highly recruited Canadian player, went to a top notch Div. I school almost exclusively on the basis of its coaching staff. After she committed, the head coach resigned to take a position at another school that represented a step up the coaching ladder. Hence, she is now going to attend a school and play in a program which she did not consider too carefully because of the degree to which she bonded with the coaches during the time she spent at the school. The bottom line is that NCAA coaching staffs change on a regular basis. Some, of course, are more stable than others. The coach I just referred to as having resigned and then taken a job at another school had been in his or her position for approximately ten years before the move, and appeared as stable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

Weber State, one of the schools that offered Marin a scholarship and with which she was impressed, had its number one assistant resign shortly before Marin made her decision with regard to where to play. This assistant had led the charge with respect to Marin's recruitment, and was a person with whom we had significantly bonded during our visit to that school. The head coach, Carla Taylor, is also an impressive individual, but we had spent most of our time with the assistant coach in question. She resigned and then immediately accepted a job at the University of Utah, which I suspect represented a step up the coaching ladder for her.

The question of how much emphasis to put on the nature of the coaching staff is a difficult one. I have seen the dramatic effect on Marin's temperament off, and success on, the court that different coaching approaches have produced. Hence, I do not underestimate the importance of having a coach whose style suits her, and I still have dim memories of having experienced the same thing as a player. For this reason, we arranged for Marin to attend as many camps as we could at the schools for which she was interested in playing, and would have done more of that

had this issue come into focus earlier for us. For the same reason, we arranged for her to get on the floor with as many teams as possible during informal visits (coaches cannot even watch these, let alone do any coaching), since the way in which the team plays and the players treat each other is to some extent a reflection of coaching style. However, I take Alisa Wulff's point – coaches are less permanent than programs. The opportunity to go to a great program, and the self-confidence to deal with coaching changes is a good way to go.

In most cases (and certainly in Marin's case), the temptation to make the decision primarily on the basis of the coach is strong. In the end, that is what caused Marin to make the decision she did. She had the opportunity to go spend a lot of time with Coach Jim Tomey, the San Diego State coach, while she was at his camp. This gave her a much better sense with regard to his style than she had of the coaching styles of the other coaches with whom she was dealing, and since she liked what she saw, she committed to his program.

How to Attract the Coaches Attention

Agents and Recruiting Services

Last summer we hired the services of an agent and had a terrible experience. He took our money and provided virtually nothing in return. That is not to say that all agents are of this type, but given what I have seen I cannot recommend the use of that type of service. We have other friends who made use of recruitment services and indicated that their experience was more positive. But I have not run into anyone who felt that the services they had received were of exceptional value.

Going Down to the US for High School or Club Play

As indicated above, the competitive level in the US is significantly higher than in Canada. Accordingly, if a girl plays regularly with the right organization in the US, she will progress more quickly.

Marin was invited to attend a high school in Arizona during her grade 11 year. Had she gone, she would have had the chance to play for the team that won the Arizona State Championship that year and while doing so compiled the first undefeated record in Arizona 5A history. She passed on this chance because she was not ready to leave home. We were also not ready for her to leave, but had she insisted on going down there would have made that possible. We are glad she decided to stay at home, and feel that the trade off with regard to less basketball experience and more time at home was worthwhile. For other girls of a different character, that might not be the best decision.

Another possibility we looked into was having Marin go down for the entire summer between grades ten and eleven, or between grades eleven and twelve, to play on a US based club team. I also think there is significant merit to that approach, until the Canadian clubs are able to get down to the US to play more of their games or adopt the "play with the boys" approach I outlined above. The difficulty we encountered in that regard was that the American high schools let out for the summer at the end of May and their club season starts in earnest then. Marin would have joined a team already halfway through its club season, and while this would be possible, the chemistry on the team would have been difficult to predict. Hence, in the end, we did not go that route. But I think it is worth considering.

NCAA Rules

The NCAA has a regulated monopoly with regard to university athletes. That is, the athletes "pay" is restricted to what is permitted by the NCAA by way of scholarship, and hence a market is functioning without the discipline of free market rules. The NCAA fills that vacuum with a rulebook that makes the Canadian Income Tax Act look simple in some places. The teams can only communicate with the players at certain times, in certain ways and are only allowed to go to certain types of tournaments during certain small windows of time during the course of the year. One of these rules main rationales is to protect potential recruits from massive amounts of attention that would interfere with their lives, and to this extent the rules are worthwhile. However, it appears to me that someone in the NCAA offices has too much time on their hands. These rules multiply like rabbits, it seems, creating a system complex enough that I did not attempt to try to comprehensively understand it. We relied upon the coaches to guide us as to what we should and should not do.

The NCAA rules limit when the coaches can watch the girls, which tournaments and camps they can attend etc. A summary of which tournaments, camps etc. are "NCAA certified", and hence can be attended by NCAA coaches, can be found on the NCAA's massive website at http://www1.ncaa.org/membership/enforcement/bkb_certification/bkb_events_leagues.html .

While I assumed that Canada's national midget and juvenile championships would be certified, they have not been in the past. In some years that was the case because they were held at a time of year during which the NCAA coaches cannot travel to watch tournaments.

Internet and News Clippings

About two and one-half years ago (just after Marin played in a big tournament in Las Vegas between her grade nine and ten years) I compiled a list of NCAA Div I coaches' email addresses. I did this by going to the websites of schools, primarily in the West, which I knew to have reasonable basketball programs, and extracted from those websites the email addresses of either a head or an assistant coach. The list was sixty or seventy addresses in length. Then, Marin put together a "basketball resume" with my help which we emailed to that list of coaches along with a description of her play at the Las Vegas tournament. Every couple of months throughout the course of grade ten I provided an update to that same list of coaches. I summarized things that appeared in the newspaper, described games that I had attended myself, and perhaps most helpfully, cut and pasted articles which appeared on the sportingyouth.com website, including their lists of all-star players etc. This attracted a significant amount of attention from the coaches. Marin began to receive correspondence from many schools, probably a hundred in total.

The connection between the email list and who came to see Marin play at tournaments was significant. The NCAA Div I coaches are deluged with so much information and they have such a short period of time each year to watch tournaments (a couple of weeks in the spring and three weeks during the summer) that they have to budget their time carefully. Hence, my hope in sending out information was to persuade the coaches to use some of their time to watch one of Marin's games. If they liked what they saw, they would be back for others.

Sending Out Tape

We underestimated the importance of taking this step, and delayed it far longer than we should have. We did enough to get the attention of several elite programs and many "mid-major"

programs, but in order for Marin to have attracted the attention of a significantly greater number of elite programs we would have needed to get a good game tape into their hands much sooner than we did.

For a variety of reasons, we were not able to collect any good game tape for Marin during her grade ten and eleven years. There were some games near the end of grade ten that would have worked, but we did not tape them. Had we taped those games and sent them out during the summer between grade ten and grade eleven, the recruitment process during grade eleven and this past summer would likely have gone quite differently. This again relates to the vast volumes of information with which the NCAA coaches, particularly at the elite schools, have to deal. They may like what they see in the press clippings, but until they see game tape most of them are not inclined to spend a significant amount of their limited resources on a player. All they will do is sent letters to stay in touch. But getting a letter or two from a school does not mean much. They send out hundreds each month, while looking for two or three players per year to join their programs.

As a result of the foregoing, we did not get good game tape on Marin until this past June while she was playing with the Outwest Club team, and immediately sent that out to the coaches who had expressed interest in her. This was helpful with regard to the schools that were already recruiting her, but for the schools who had not already put her on their "A" list this information came too late. Several of them got back to us and indicated that they liked what they saw but had already filled their scholarship positions, and recommended that we contact other schools who they knew were still looking. This word came back to us in July of this year, during the summer between Marin's grade 11 and 12 years. By then, before any official visits had been made and over three months before official commitments could be given, many if not most of the elite programs had filled their spots.

When I finally had some tape we wanted to send out, I called a couple of places to find out how much it would cost etc. to get the copying and production job done. The first estimate I received was something like \$18 per tape, plus you supply the blanks, plus it will take over a week. The second place (VisionWorks – (403) 232-8273) did it for about \$6.00 per tape, they supplied the blanks, and when I asked if they could have it done overnight, they said "Sure, as long as you have it here for us by 6 pm". So shop around.

The tape's contents were one game (some coaches said they would rather have seen two), and a preliminary piece of about three minutes in length that showed Marin dribbling and shooting on her own. Marin's outside shooting ability was the skill that attracted the coaches' attention, and we wanted to give them a good look at her form and the percentages she is capable of from long range. A number of coaches told us they found this helpful.

We labelled the tape with Marin's name, an indication of what the tape contained (Shooting Demonstration – 3:06 min; Game 45:00 min.), and indication of which team Marin played for and who their opponent was, the game's date, and Marin's jersey number and color.

In summary, I would say on this point that at the latest, game tape should be sent out during the summer between grades ten and eleven, and then perhaps additional game tape collected during the grade eleven high school season and also sent out. Any tape that is sent out after May of the grade eleven year is likely to be too late to influence the decisions being made by the elite programs.

The Nike All Canada Camp and "Combines"

During the fall of her grade eleven year, Marin had the opportunity to attend the Nike All-Canada Camp in Toronto. This was a tremendous life experience for her, and also provided significant exposure to NCAA coaches. Something in excess of fifty coaches were in attendance at the Nike Camp. Marin began to receive correspondence from a number of schools immediately after that camp ended.

Something we did not take advantage of, but had considered, are the so-called "combines" put on throughout the US each year. These are special basketball camps that are designed to showcase the talents of players for NCAA coaches. They are held during the window of time when the coaches are permitted to attend camps. Some are by invitation only, like the Nike All-Canada Camp, while others are run on a pay for admission basis. Since we did not attend any of these camps, I can't speak from first hand experience respecting them. However, other parents have told us that some of the camps are great both in terms of the competition and the number of scouts in attendance, whereas others are simply an opportunity for the camp organizers to make money and very few if any scouts show up. Had Marin not attracted the attention of a number of schools in which she was interested by the end of grade 11, we would have probably arranged for her to attend some of these camps after researching them.

Going to Camps at Universities

I underestimated the importance of this one. The team style of play and the chemistry between coaches and players is something that I understand but for some reason did not focus on as early as I should have. And also, the opportunity to show an interest in a particular school sets a player apart from the recruiting masses. This can be important. Once the coaches have had the opportunity to be on the floor with the player and assess the player's willingness to accept coaching, basic abilities etc., the probability of both the coach and the player making a good decision with regard to whether she should attend that particular school is far greater than it would otherwise be. Hence, were we planning Marin's program over again, we would have allowed more time during the summer between grades ten and eleven and also between grades eleven and twelve for her to attend camps at universities down in the US in which she was interested.

The desire to attend these camps creates a conflict between club basketball or provincial team basketball and camp attendance. A few of the camps are held in August, but most are held in June and July. The camps in June are problematic from a school point of view, and the camps in July from a club basketball point of view. However, given the importance of the recruiting decision, if we were to go through the process again I would have made a much greater effort to create the opportunity for Marin to go down and attend these camps. As it turned out the attendance at the San Diego State camp was the critical factor for her in reaching the decision to attend school there.

This is one of those issues that in my view should drive the entire process. Knowing that the camps are in June and July, an effort should be made to get down to a short list by then during the summer between grades 11 and 12. This can be done by going on informal visits during the summer between grade 10 and 11, and in the spring of grade 11. Then, several camps (or parts of camps) can be planned during the summer after both grade 10 and 11. That is where the most valuable information respecting the fit between a player and a program can be collected. And even that is nowhere near complete.

Persuading the US Coaches to come to Canadian High School Games

There is a period of time during the high school season when NCAA coaches can attend high school games. They don't like doing this as much as they like attending club tournaments and games during the summer because the talent is more concentrated at that time. However, if a coach is seriously interested in your daughter, she will make the effort to travel to Canada and attend a game. As I indicated above, the University of Utah was the only school prepared to do this for Marin. This no doubt is due to the good experience they have had with Canadian players in their program.

To encourage this kind of attendance, we sent each of the coaches on our list a schedule of Marin's high school games and tournaments in which she would be playing, with an indication as to which games and tournaments would provide the best competition. Had we sent out game tape earlier, I suspect more coaches would have come to see Marin during the course of her grade 11 high school season.

Enlisting the Help of Friends in the US

While we were not able to do this, we know a number of people who have friends that are connected to particular US college basketball programs and who have been prepared to provide a personal recommendation to a coach respecting their daughter. This is effective in more cases than you might imagine. If a coach has a friend who is knowledgeable respecting basketball and is prepared to give a personal recommendation respecting your daughter, that by itself will likely get her a serious look from that team.

Unofficial Visits

These are of critical importance, and are treated in a section of their own below.

The Pros and Cons of Canadian Club Basketball

As indicated above, the best Canadian club teams play at a level far below the upper quartile of the US club system, and we don't get down to the US to play nearly as much as would be ideal. I indicated above my view that the extensive use of male players in the Canadian club system for practise purposes is the only way in which this competitive imbalance can be addressed. I should also note that Marin's experience this summer with the Outwest Club in Calgary has been tremendous. Keith Merrington is one of the most organized General Managers we have dealt with, and Cory Russell did a great job as coach. However, the fact of the matter is that the talent pool in Canada is far below the level of that in the US, and there is only a few ways to address that.

I also note the importance of the coaches on the club teams. Marin has been involved with a variety of clubs over the years, each of which has had great things to offer. However, we have come to regard the club organization itself as secondary and the nature of the coaches as primary. Marin has had poor experiences with great clubs who have happened to end up with an inappropriate or unmotivated coach for a particular summer season, and while Keith Merrington's organizational efforts were stellar with regard to the Outwest Club, it would have taken a lot of organizational dysfunction to overcome the positive experience Marin had with Cory Russell as her head coach this summer, assisted by Chris Harris (recently graduated from the U of C Dinos Program) and Barb Ariss.

How to Evaluate Them

RPI and SOS

From a basketball point of view, the "RPI" rankings are the place to start. Good websites can be found at <http://www.collegerpi.com/women/> and <http://veneziano.tripod.com/rpi/rpis.html> . These provide the overall rankings of both teams and conferences, and will give a sense of where any particular school fits in.

I note that these rankings are somewhat misleading, and the so-called SOS ranking is perhaps an even better measure of the quality of a basketball program in a particular year. For example, US Santa Barbara in the 02, 03 seasons ended up with a poor RPI ranking. However, they played one of the toughest pre-season schedules in the nation and had the third highest RPI ranking at the end of their pre-season. They won every conference game during their league schedule and their RPI ranking fell from near the top of the heap to mid-pack during the course of that win streak. This is a result of the weak calibre of the teams they were beating during their conference schedule. The SOS ranking factors much of that out, and thereby explains UC Santa Barbara's much higher SOS than RPI ranking.

Injuries are another factor that should be taken into account. The University of Denver, one of the schools that most impressed Marin and me, at the end of 03 had a poor RPI rating, and the prior year had gone to the NCAA tournament with more or less the same team. A probable cause of their poor performance in 02/03 was a few key injuries down the stretch. This was also the case with the University of Oregon. Accordingly, the RPI and SOS rankings are just one source of information, and should not be relied upon exclusively.

Academic Qualifications

From an academic point of view, there are various publications that provide information in rankings respecting the universities. The most widely used is the US News and World Report, which can be ordered over the Internet or through bookstores. The Princeton Review is another. As is the case with the McLean's Magazine survey in Canada, the schools that do well in the US surveys crow about that, while those that do poorly question the nature of the system used to create the rankings.

On the whole, I think the picture that comes into view as a result of these surveys is fair. The great schools are at the top of the heap on the basis of a variety of criteria involving admission standards, alumni donations, other sources of funding, the publication of professors, etc. The schools at the bottom of the heap tend to be less well funded, admit students with lower grades, have less alumni support, etc.

Marin turned down the opportunity to go to several top forty academic institutions in order to attend San Diego State, which ranks somewhere between 150 and 200 of the doctoral granting institutions in the US. However, San Diego State does have several well-regarded programs, and the coaches have assured Marin that she will have the opportunity to be admitted into one of those.

As should be clear by now, Marin's decision-making criteria were quite different from mine in terms of where she would attend school, and I had to be careful not to impose my views on her. I think I was successful in doing that largely because I have learned through experience during the past few years that if I express any opinion too strongly, that in and of itself is likely to send

Marin in the opposite direction. Hence, the decision she made to attend San Diego State was 100% her decision, and I am proud of the manner in which she made it.

Friends and Relatives

Some of the most useful information we received with regard to San Diego State after Marin had decided she was seriously interested in attending school there, came from friends who live in California. From them we were able to get a sense of the "man on the street" attitude with regard to these schools. Our friends have attended university or have children who attended university in California, and were able to speak with friends of theirs who have had children either attend or choose not to attend San Diego State for various reasons. The picture that came into focus was consistent with that presented by the surveys. San Diego State is a huge school with a few great programs and many programs that are not well respected; its overall admission standards are much lower than Santa Clara U. and a number of the other schools Marin was considering. However, Marin can get an undergraduate degree at SDSU that will take her as far as any other, provided she does reasonably well in terms of grades and chooses the right program.

Other NCAA Coaches

During the course of this recruiting journey, we became close enough to a number of coaches that after Marin was no longer on their recruiting lists we were able to stay in touch with them and get them to provide us with feedback respecting other schools. Coach McNeil at the University of Oregon was particularly helpful in that regard, as was Mark French of University of California at Santa Barbara and Ceal Barry of the University of Colorado. I felt that I could also have called Elaine Elliott at the University of Utah, any of the Stanford coaches, Pam Tanner at Denver U., and several other coaches with whom we had been dealing. These are high quality individuals, and they recognize that life is long and it makes sense to be helpful where one can do so without extending great effort. Who knows, I might run across the next Kim Smith and be prepared to recommend that she call one of them. It is that kind of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" thinking that in my view helped encourage them to be so helpful.

Recruiting Class Quality

A statistic we asked about at each school was the quality of their recruiting classes. There is a service that ranks these, but I was not able to find it. Hence we collected the information informally. The ability of a school to consistently recruit a top fifty or a top twenty-five class, is a good predictor of future program success.

Quality of Facilities and Equipment

There is no question that the quality of the athletic facilities offered by the school have an influence on its ability to continue to recruit. San Diego State scored very well in this regard. Their facilities are new, and near the top end of everything that we saw. Others that were particularly impressive included the University of Denver and the University of Colorado. The University of Denver, in particular, for a small private school, has spectacular facilities, and their coach Pam Tanner (a former Tennessee volunteer's assistant) and her staff made a very positive impression on both Marin and me.

A question we asked at each school was whether they had access to the latest in video dissection equipment. This allows the coaches to load a game tape on their laptops, and cut

and paste segments for individual players onto disks, and hand them out to the players for study. Thus, the players are able to see, in moments, the things the coaches are trying to communicate to them about their tendencies while on the court. This equipment has a variety of other uses.

While the equipment itself is important, more important from our point of view was whether the program had the funding to be near the cutting edge, which is where this equipment is at the moment. The larger programs had this stuff, as did some of the smaller ones, and then we heard from some schools about how they were going to be speaking to alumni about extra donations so that they could afford it, hopefully at some point during the next couple of years. While money isn't everything, we found a strong correlation between how well funded a program is on the one hand, and high quality coaches and good players on the other. Hence, we asked questions designed to find out how well funded each program was.

Unofficial Visits

I cannot emphasize the importance of having taken this step in Marin's process. Nancy Wulff was the first to recommend that we do this, and I am grateful to her for providing us with the idea and encouragement. That was perhaps the most important result of my decision to attend a couple of days of the Nike Camp with Marin. It allowed me to connect with Nancy and a variety of other parents as we watched our daughters play, and to develop a sense of how youth basketball works across the country, but particularly in Ontario and Montreal where their systems are much more integrated with the neighbouring US states than we are here in Alberta.

In order to make an unofficial visit to a university, you already have to be on their recruiting list or have to somehow get yourself there. We only called schools who had already been in communication with Marin as a result of having seen her at the Nike Camp or having responded to my email messages. Many schools encouraged us to make visits that we were not able to make due primarily to a lack of time.

The amount of time the coaching staff is prepared to spend with a particular girl seems to depend upon where she sits on their list. We allowed one day for each visit, and tried to arrange our visits at a time when Marin would be able to scrimmage with the college teams in question. As it turned out, that was only possible at the University of Utah, University of Denver and the University of Colorado.

Without any question the most important part of Marin's informal visits were those scrimmages. They taught us some things of fundamental importance with regard to the US college game. As it turns out, Marin's performance scales up much better to that level of play than we had thought it would. This is because one of her most important skills, from a university program's point of view at this point, is her ability to catch and shoot. There is so much more movement of both the ball and players at the university level than there is at the high school or club level that there is, paradoxically, more open space. The players are quicker, the defence is tighter, but there is so much movement that Marin had a much easier time getting open for shots and getting the ball than she ever has on a club or high school team. It also became clear that she will have to become much stronger and quicker in order to be a well-rounded player at the NCAA level, but her shooting ability alone was good enough to earn her a good NCAA Div. 1A spot.

Those two pieces of information dramatically changed Marin's motivation with regard to basketball. For the first time in her life, she became interested in weight training and immediately took us up on an offer that had been outstanding for many months to help her find

a personal trainer and get started in that regard. Her confidence, which took a bit of a beating toward the end of last year's high school season, also soared again, and she began to play on the offensive side of the ball with a measure of authority that she had not consistently displayed since grade nine.

It is possible that when we went on these recruiting trips and had Marin play with the college girls that we would have found out less exciting things with respect to where she stood. However, what we were after was information respecting whether playing US college basketball was a realistic goal for Marin. Until we went on our first set of informal visits we did not know whether she had what it takes to play at that level, and what she needed to improve upon. If we lived down there, played in a club system that had sent lots of girls to NCAA programs, we would have had lots of benching marking information that would have made these visits less important for us than they were. However, we Canadians have little access to reliable talent benchmarks.

Had the information we collected indicated that Marin was likely not able to upgrade herself to the level required for NCAA Div. 1A play, it would have been good for us to know that early in the process and modify her expectations and the goals that she had set for herself. Hence, win lose or draw I would highly recommend going on these trips and scrimmaging with the college girls in order to assess where your daughter stands. And we will always be grateful to the coaches at Utah, Denver and Colorado for giving Marin the chance to play with their women.

From another point of view, as I indicated in the preface above, these informal visits have provided a wonderful opportunity for Marin to develop as a human being. I would describe the recruiting process, overall, as a two-way sales program. The school is selling itself to the player and the player is making a similar sales pitch. Depending upon the nature of the school and how highly sought after the player is, the balance in this process shifts back and forth. It was interesting to watch in Marin's case, as her stock either rose or fell depending upon how well she had played the last time a coach saw her, and how her interest in any particular school fluctuated as her knowledge of a variety of schools and what they have to offer improved.

During the course of the summer, we developed a list of questions most of which were asked during each informal visit. At the end of the process when several schools jumped in late (including San Diego State) we sent them these questions by email and then had lengthy telephone conversations with them regarding their responses. That list is attached to this document as Appendix A.

As one of my friends in the US whose daughter recently went through this process put it, "until they are seriously interested in you, the only questions you ask should be those designed to flatter them". However, once a school is seriously interested in your daughter, the list of questions in Appendix A may come in handy.

As a result of first the informal visits just described, and then the telephone calls that started coming on a regular basis on June 21st of this year, Marin has spent many hours during the past several months speaking with NCAA coaches. I have watched her change during the course of that of period of time from someone who was intimidated by the process and therefore unable to conduct interviews without a lot of my help, to a girl who was fully in charge. She now deals with the coaches by herself, both on the phone and in person, and made her decision to attend SDSU with virtually none of my input. She came to me and let me know what she had decided, explained her reasons and asked for my blessing, which I unhesitantly gave. She was able to do this only because for the last several months she has been comparing and contrasting,

listening to questions that I asked and then formulating and asking her own, and as a result is now in a position to distinguish between what she likes and what she does not like and provide relatively coherent reasons for her feelings in this regard. I think that the recruiting process itself has been a tremendous experience for Marin; a significant part of her personal development that I will attribute to basketball in the future. Whether she had decided to attend school in the US or not, I am glad that she was able to have the experience of being recruited by US collegiate basketball programs.

Phone Calls

The NCAA rules prohibit the schools from telephoning the girls until June 21st at the end of their grade eleven year. The time of day at which the first of those calls comes in is of importance, since they indicate the place on the recruiting list occupied by your daughter. It also may indicate something of importance if the head coach phones instead of an assistant coach.

After June 21st, the schools can phone once per week throughout most of the rest of the summer. Official visits can be made as soon as school opens for the fall term. And offers can be officially accepted starting in early November.

Official Visits

Not too many years ago, most decisions were made with regard to where a girl would attend school after an official visit was made. The significant incidence of unofficial visits is a relatively recent phenomenon. Now, for the elite and mid-major schools, most scholarships have been informally agreed to before an official visit is made. Marin was under pressure starting in June to make an informal commitment after a scholarship offer had been made to her. She had intended to make five official visits, which is the maximum allowed. However, the nature of the process eventually became intense enough that she decided to make an unofficial commitment to San Diego State in return for their commitment back to her. I will describe more below with regard to the nature of an unofficial commitment.

When making unofficial visits, the host schools are not permitted to provide any benefit to the school or parents. They can't buy lunch; they can't pay for parking or anything else. However, when an official visit is made, all of the girl's expenses are covered and a chaperone or parent will be hosted at the school's expense, provided that the chaperone or parent covers his or her own air fare. The official visit is usually much more uptown than the unofficial visit. The unofficial visit will involve usually visiting with coaches, academic advisors, touring the school, and perhaps watching some game film and scrimmaging with the players. We also were able to meet with the players in private at each school and ask questions without the coaches being present. That sort of thing would also be permitted at an official visit.

The official visit will also often involve a football game (they usually try to schedule official visits when the football team, if the school has one, has a home game) and will involve a lot more splash in the case of a high priority player from the school's point of view. A friend in the US whose daughter recently committed to a school indicated that the President of the university and the Chairman of the department his daughter hoped to gain admittance to both made a point of seeking them out at the football game, sitting with them and talking to them about how much they hoped their daughter would chose to come and play basketball at their school. Many other people also approached them and indicated the same thing in a less formal way. That experience was the pinnacle of "love bombing" of which we heard. However, the experience many girls have told us about respecting their official visits was quite impressive. Marin had

been looking forward to doing that at a number of schools, but now will settle for one visit to San Diego State on a weekend when the other girls who have been committed to play there will be on campus. This will be more of a weekend long celebration than anything else.

By the time Marin committed to San Diego State, she had already promised to make one official visit to Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. Lehigh is a top forty academic institution with a relatively weak basketball program. However, their coaches did a tremendous job in bonding with Marin and had persuaded her that their school was worth having a look at. The experience that she had at San Diego State, combined with the knowledge that she would not be able to get on the floor with the Lehigh coaches and get to know them, made her decide to cancel that visit. Lehigh had already purchased her tickets, and we felt badly about cancelling. However, we were advised by people who had been through the process before that official visits are cancelled all the time, and that from the university's point of view it is far preferable to have the visit cancelled than to have it go ahead with the great expenditure of time and resources beyond the plane ticket that would be required on the part of the university, with no realistic prospect of the girl committing as a result of the visit. Hence, we called Lehigh, thanked them for their interest and cancelled the trip. However, I had already purchased my ticket to accompany Marin. We are still trying to decide what to do with that.

Lehigh asked us to purchase Marin's ticket from them at its cost. This surprised me. They did not have cancellation insurance, and indicated that their budget is small enough that this would be helpful to them. We acceded to this request, and Marin will be able to use that ticket for travel to San Diego, or elsewhere.

The NCAA Clearinghouse and the ACT and SAT Tests

Before a player can make an official visit, she must be registered with the NCAA clearinghouse. That process ensures that the player is eligible for NCAA play. The registration requires that high school grades be submitted and that, ultimately, the SAT and/or ACT be taken. Some schools require one or the other. Most will accept either. The SAT is the one most commonly required. See <http://www.ncaa.org/eligibility/cbsa/clearinghouse.html> for the clearinghouse registration process, and a variety of other helpful information respecting the NCAA process.

Early Offers and Informal Acceptance

As indicated above, Marin began to receive some pressure to accept so-called early or unofficial scholarship offers in June of this year. It seems that the time for acceptance of these offers get earlier each year, according to the people with whom we have spoken who have been in this game for some time.

A binding contract between a player and a school cannot be entered into until November of a player's grade 12 year. Hence, the most that can be done before then is a non-binding, informal commitment that has moral suasion only. We heard from a number of coaches about players who have reneged on their informal commitment. This creates great hardship for the school because after receipt of an informal commitment, the school generally calls the other players it is recruiting and lets them know that they have already filled their positions. Those players then go elsewhere. If the player later breaks her informal commitment, the school is generally speaking left without the opportunity to take any of the other players in whom it was interested. The coaches, understandably, have excoriating things to say about the character of an individual who would break such a commitment. One coach told us that after a commitment had been broken, the father of the girl in question (who had also given his personal word to the

coach) indicated that if he had understood how upset the coach would be, his daughter perhaps would not have reneged. The coach responded that he was no longer interested in having the girl play for him on any terms because she was the kind of person who would do what already had been done.

We have not heard of any schools that have reneged on their end of the informal commitment as a result of finding a player they liked better. However, we have heard of many instances in which a coaching change has occurred after an informal commitment was made, and as a result all of the informal commitments made by the prior coaching staff were not honoured. We know of one Calgary girl who lost the opportunity to play for a Div I program as a result of this.

As far as Marin and I are concerned, the informal commitment she has made to San Diego State is binding. It would not matter who came along now to make an offer, she is not available.

Scholarship Details

The value of scholarships varies from one school to another. The private school scholarships (including Santa Clara) have a value of approximately US\$40,000 per year. This is due in large measure to the higher tuition required by private schools, and the cost of living in the Bay area. The San Diego scholarship will have a value of approximately US\$30,000 per year. As noted above, that amount has to be reported as a taxable benefit for US and probably Canadian purposes.

The scholarships are renewable on a one-year basis. We have heard of a couple of cases in which new coaches have come into a program and released some of the players signed by former coaches who the new staff did not believe were up to standard. However, in most cases new coaching staff keeps all of the players to whom the program has committed. We have also heard of some players whose scholarships have been cancelled as a result of poor academic performance or misbehaviour, breach of training rules, etc. However, these examples are few. We have been made aware of even more examples respecting which a girl has been injured and unable to continue to play and the school has nonetheless honoured her scholarship. Hence, the one-year renewable nature of the scholarship is not a big issue from our perspective.

The schools generally provide tutoring support and academic coaching. The larger schools tend to have more resources than the small. At some schools, notably the University of Utah and San Diego State, there is a building dedicated to the academic use of student athletes. This building includes counselling facilities, study rooms, banks of computer terminals, etc.

Each school had a "study table" requirement for freshmen and upper classmen who did not meet certain academic standards. This requires that a number of weeks be spent either individually or in groups studying, often under the supervision of an academic coach.

The better-funded programs offer a team training table. The athletes would meet for meals that are tailored to their dietary requirements. Players who have experienced systems that used both team meals at the training table and more individualistic meal plans say that team meals are an important way to build the "family" feeling around a team to which I have referred a few times above. The less well funded schools use a card system that enable the players to eat at a variety of places on campus, but what they eat, how and when is left up to them. A few schools also had arrangements with local restaurants whereby the players would show up one or two nights a week to have a meal provided by the restaurant. The University of Nevada at Reno

has a deal with various casinos that provides the players with the same sort of thing at the buffet style restaurants operated by the casinos.

All of the schools require that freshmen stay on campus in dorms. Upper classmen are provided with the option of moving off campus, and are provided with the stipend designed to cover their cost of living. At most schools, the stipend is sufficient. A few schools' stipends are somewhat below the estimated cost of living for their area. The NCAA regulates the amount of the stipend and requires that it not exceed the estimated cost of living for the university's area.

Most of the coaching staffs we had contact with expressed a significant interest in where their students live, the conditions in which they live, etc. The investment the schools make in these athletes is significant enough that this kind of detail is not left to chance, and most of the coaches genuinely care about their players' well-being. We heard several heart warming stories of coaching staff showing up to help players move in and out of apartments, or otherwise assisting in the stressful circumstances that most college students experience as they acclimatize to life away from home.

Celebrating the Decision

When Marin finally got to the point at which she felt ready to commit to San Diego State, there was a great deal of excitement and joy in our home. There were no more questions about pros and cons, whether the decision was the right one, etc. We simply enjoyed with her an evening of congratulations and memories with regard to the process – both high points and low – and telephone calls with Coach Tomey and his staff at SDSU in which we thanked them for their offer and the kindness that they showed Marin and Juli (Marin's Mom) during the time they spent in San Diego. We again during these calls enjoyed sharing their excitement with regard to the prospects of the program they are building. That evening was one of the most enjoyable that we have spent with Marin during her teenage years.

During almost every campus visit we made, at the end of the visit Marin had been favourably impressed enough to say that she could happily attend school and play basketball at the school in question. At the end of one visit – Pepperdine's – she said, "this is where I want to go to school!" That was the only school to draw that kind of euphoric response. Coach Mark Trakh and his staff did a great job while we were with them, as did their players, and Pepperdine's location is spectacular.

Because of the manner in which I know all human beings can be swayed by the moment, and because of what I had seen Marin go through during the course of the various other visits we had made, I had suggested to her that it was unwise to make a decision as to where to play without allowing a few days to pass so that emotions could fade. Hence, although she felt so strongly about San Diego State that she wished to make a commitment while she was there on campus with the coaches, she put that off until after she had spent a day away from campus and had travelled home. At that point, although the emotions had faded to some extent, she still felt almost as strongly about her decision as she had a couple of days earlier, and I was comfortable having her go ahead and make the commitment.

How to Say You're Sorry

The last step – and I believe that it is a significant step – in Marin's "life experience" related to the recruiting process was the thing she most dreaded. She had to phone a significant number of people with whom she has been corresponding, speaking for hours on the telephone, etc.

and tell them that she had decided not to attend university at their school and play ball for them. The more she had bonded to a particular coach, the more difficult she anticipated making this call would be. We did a little bit of role playing to prepare her for this task, using as a model the way in which some of the schools in whom she had been interested had indicated that they had decided not to offer her a scholarship.

The model is pretty simple. In each case, the coach would say complimentary things about Marin's game, personality, etc. and then indicate that while she was a fine player, wonderful human being etc., that their needs as a program dictated offering a scholarship to someone other than her. Each time this happened to Marin, it of course created a sense of disappointment, but it was done in such a way that it was understandable and more than anything else, as courteous and caring as the delivery of disappointment can be. Marin tried to follow that approach with each of the coaches she had to call. In each case other than one, the coaches responded in a gracious fashion. Some of them asked Marin to keep them in mind if for whatever reason things did not work out for her well at San Diego State.

Conclusion

I hope the foregoing information makes what can be an exciting life experience more comfortable and enjoyable for those who have taken the time to read it.

[\[CAL_LAW957692\3\]](#)

Appendix A

1. How large is your overall team budget? How large is your recruiting budget? How do these rank relative to other teams in your conference, and the better teams in the WCC, the Big Sky Conference, the MWC and the PAC 10?
2. US News and World Report ranks your school as a ___ tier _____ school. Can you help us to understand what that means in terms of the education Marin would receive at your school relative to some of the others she is looking at? Is it possible to compare your school to _____ (add a reference [point with which you are already familiar), for example?
3. How long is your contract with the school?
4. How long was the prior coaching staff at the school?
5. Does the team go on overseas trips?
6. How many teams from your league go to the NCAA tourney in an average year?
7. How often are your team's games televised? On which system? Are all games netcast?
8. How large a home crowd did you average last year? What is the highest average during the past five years? What do you expect during the coming year?
9. What do you recommend respecting staying at school during the summer? What kind of training do the girls who stay around for the summer engage in? If you have a written version of that training program, could you share it with Marin?
10. If Marin requires summer sessions or chooses to stay for the summer, would her scholarship cover that? If she stays at school for the summer, what kind of additional expenses would she incur?
11. Would Marin have five years of scholarship to play four if necessary? How many players during the past several years have needed five to complete four?
12. What is your study table policy? Where is the study table located? Does the team have a designated space for individual and team study? What resources are available to the team in this regard that are not available to other students? In particular, what kind of tutoring support is available to the players?
13. What is your policy regarding red-shirting players?
14. What is the team's graduation rate over the last five years?
15. How have the team's last five recruiting classes been ranked? How do you anticipate that the 03 and 04 classes will be ranked?

16. What type of defense do you use?
17. What type of offence do you use? How important is transition play to your offence? How oriented is the offence toward "read and react" versus structured plays?
18. Will your team likely be known as more of a defensive team, or an offensive team? Put another way, will defense or offence win games for you?
19. How would you describe your coaching style in contrast to the style used at _____ (add a reference point with which you are familiar)?
20. Does the school use a quarter or a semester system?
21. How tough is your pre-season schedule? Who are you slated to play this coming year?
22. Do you use computer systems to break out individual offensive and defensive play for post game analysis? What kind of other feedback systems do you have to help your players understand and work to correct the weaknesses in their games?
23. Is any special attention paid to training your players in communications skills and conflict resolution to assist them to deal with the stresses of being on a team comprised largely of high achievers? If so, could you briefly describe how this is done?
24. On what principles is playing time spread among the players on the team? Could you break down the average number of minutes each player on last year's team received, and how you anticipate that changing (if at all) respecting this year's team? Without asking you for a commitment, what kind of playing time to you envision for Marin during her first year? (RDM note: Any coach who would make a clear commitment in terms of playing time lost credibility in my books. The realistic, honest thing to do is to say that the players earn their minutes in practise, and that they think Marin has the tools to compete. To many coaches make what can be construed as promises that in my view they were unlikely to be able to keep.)
25. What use do you make of male players in your practises?
26. How many players from the team have gone on to professional play? Who are they, when did they play, and where did they play?
27. Does the team provide a training table? Could you describe how/where the girls typically eat? For example, at some schools we have visited the girls use a card system to eat where they want on campus. At others, there is a training table some of the time, and at other times they have a running account picked up by the school at certain restaurants around town. How does your system work?

28. Marin will likely need to continue to try to put on weight and gain strength for some time. What kind of resources do you have that would assist her to do that in a sensible fashion?
29. Are the girls required to live in dorms? If so, for how long?
30. How many coaches does the team have, and how much coaching experience does each have?
31. Is the team's locker room set up as a place where the girls can study, socialize etc., or is its use restricted to formal team meetings, pre and post game use, etc.?
32. When were your athletic facilities constructed, or last updated?
33. The nicest athletic facilities we have seen are those at the U of Colorado at Boulder, and U of Denver. The worst we have seen are at _____, which would be not much better than what a good US high school has to offer. Using UC as a 10 on our scale of 10 and ___ as a 1, where would your facilities fit in?
34. What kind of mementos, special recognitions etc. are the girls given upon graduation from the program? Some of the interesting things we have heard about are the usual seniors night at the final home game, a nicely framed jersey bearing their name and number, letters of commendation from AD or the U Pres., etc.
35. With which other teams does the team share a strength trainer? Does the same strength trainer stay with the girls year round, or do the personnel in that position change throughout the year?
36. What was the team's injury record over the last three years?
37. Are conditioning drills mixed with skill drills during practise? How many hours of practise time does the team have each week during the season? Of that, how much is conditioning and how much skill development? What steps do you take to minimize body stress while attempting to maintain the fitness levels required for optimal performance?
38. How much one on one skill development time can Marin expect to have with her coaches?
39. What happens to Marin's scholarship if she is injured so as not to be able to continue playing?
40. Does the school arrange internships for the players for summer work? How closely related are these to the players area of study?
41. How many former players have remained in town after graduation and found work there?

42. What kind of opportunities are made available to the girls to become connected to members of the community?
43. How has being a member of this team assisted former players to find the kind of jobs they have wanted? Could you give us some examples, and former players Marin could call?
44. Who can we call for references with regard to you?