



## **SPECIAL REPORT: College Recruiting Goes Viral**

*How the college recruiting process is evolving for coaches and the athletes they hope to land*

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### **College Recruiting 2.0**

There may be no clear definition of College Recruiting 2.0 (“CR 2.0”). One thing is for certain though: CR 2.0 marks a fundamental change in how college coaches recruit, and how prospective athletes connect with them.

CR 2.0 is not about athletes “getting seen” by college coaches, but how the two interact throughout the entire courting process. It’s a move toward a social, collaborative, interactive and responsive “experience.” It’s a complete overhaul in the philosophies of college coaches and the athletes they’re hoping will represent their universities someday.

College coaches haven’t always relied upon the internet to recruit athletes. In fact, until even recently, there were plenty of old-school coaches who refused to abandon their traditional recruiting practices. *If it ain’t broken, why fix it?* They religiously scouted players in person and called on high school coaches for those ever-important “intangibles.”

Many of those practices have survived, of course. But what’s happening in our society today is too obvious even for the most traditional, technologically-challenged college coaches. And a decision not to adapt is potentially devastating to their programs – and their jobs.

The fact is, people – student-athletes and coaches alike – have changed the way they use the web, and as a result, they’ve changed the way they interact with each other. People aren't just getting information dumped to them from a computer; they are reaching out to connect with one another to learn what’s being said about something. The college recruiting process is no different.

With the help of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Digg, MySpace, Wikipedia, YouTube and more, coaches connect with recruits and vice versa. The common theme of each of these websites is human interaction. On blogs, we post comments. On social networks, we make friends. On social news, we vote for articles. And, on wikis, we share information.

So what is CR 2.0? It’s a completely new and socially-driven twist on traditional college recruiting. Information is far more transparent and shared between coach and player in the world of CR 2.0. Coaches don’t have to interview nearly as many player references

anymore, because the “background checks” are virtually hand-delivered in the form of Facebook pages. If a coach “likes” an athlete’s Facebook page, he can follow every conversation, peruse every picture, and get introduced to every friend of that recruit, all from the confines of his laptop.

CR 2.0 also means that information is equally available to recruits. Prospects can “like” certain coaches and their staffs. They can walk side by side with that program on a daily basis. They can see which coaches are “following” them on Twitter, and which ones have joined their parents’ LinkedIn networks. Video, schedules, resumes, transcripts and scouting reports are uploaded, downloaded and exchanged in nanoseconds. An athlete can even take a virtual campus tour at most any college in America now.

In reality, CR 2.0 is far more advanced than the simple notion that athletes must “market themselves.” It’s about creating, nurturing and sustaining relationships with college coaches.

It’s not about traveling around the country in hopes of getting discovered at tournaments that are supposed to “showcase” you. Guess what? These days, if a coach elects to spend part of his valuable (and tight) recruiting budget attending such an event, it’s not because they’re looking for players. Nope. They are in attendance to watch *the* players with whom they’re already well-connected.

CR 2.0 is not about blasting unsolicited game tapes to college coaches either. Want to know which films coaches are taking the time to study? Easy. They’re watching film on athletes they already *know*.

And CR 2.0 is not about who your high school or club coach knows either. While coaches still play an instrumental role in a player’s recruitment, this advanced relationship game takes a lot more time, a lot more than just a phone call, and requires the proactive involvement of the student-athlete from start to finish.

So what is CR 2.0?

It’s athletes and college coaches, connecting.

## How to use social media to help connect with college coaches?



### Twitter:

- Tweet about your recruiting experiences and about your opinions of coaches, programs, facilities, etc.
- Tweet about schools you're researching. Your ability to share information about campuses and programs will impress your followers, and it will tell college coaches that you're serious about your college recruitment.
- Ask great questions via Twitter. College coaches cannot tweet about or with a specific prospect, but they can answer questions via email.
- Follow any coach who follows you or sends you an email.
- Review who coaches are following and follow them too.
- Ask coaches to follow you on Twitter. A great way to do this is by including a link to your Twitter page in your email signature.
- Use your name in your Twitter account for easy identification, and add key vitals in your personal description... i.e. school, position, grad year, gpa, height/weight, goal statement. *@yourfullname*

### Facebook

- Build your own Facebook page. Not a person page that you use to post pictures and write on your friends' walls, but a separate "fan page" that is used only for college recruiting purposes.
- LIKE the programs you visit online and certainly any program that contacts you by mail or email. That way, you can stay connected and informed with what's happening.
- Invite coaches to add you as a friend so they can see your wall posts and current status
- Block any friends who can harm your reputation or hurt your collegiate opportunities by posting bad material.
- In the INFO section of your page, show schools you are communicating with regularly, and schools that interest you.

### LinkedIn

- Ask your parents to invite certain coaches to join their LinkedIn networks once these coaches start contacting you.
- Parents should post updates too! Schools visits, questions for their coach community, etc. (couple posts per month)
- Ask parents to look for groups that these coaches have joined.

## General Tips

- Know the rules! Understand what college coaches can & cannot do as it pertains to social media recruiting rules.
- Sign up for a program like HootSuite that manages the process and integrates social media accounts to make it easier to post new entries.
- Start a recruiting blog and chronicle your college recruiting experience for others to see. Be transparent about who you're communicating with, which schools are doing the best job recruiting you, which coaches aren't good about getting back to you, upcoming campus tours, how things are going in school, for your team, upcoming club tournaments/showcases, etc.

## NCAA Rules on Social Media: What college coaches can & cannot do

Under NCAA rules, direct messages to recruits on Facebook are permissible because it's considered private contact, similar to an e-mail. But posting messages on a recruit's Facebook wall is considered a public forum and not allowed.

Is it permissible for a college coach to...	D-I	D-II	D-III
Comment about possible recruits on their own Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn pages?	No	No	No
Feature photos of prospects on their Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn pages?	No	No	No
Send messages directly to prospects through Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn?	No	No	No
Send "direct messages" to prospects on Twitter?	No	No	No
Send "direct messages" to prospects on Facebook?	Yes	Yes	No
Use Facebook, Twitter and Linked In to advertise their programs?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Follow a prospect on Twitter?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Become "friends" with a prospect on Facebook?	Yes	Yes	Yes
"Like" a prospect's Facebook page?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Join a parent's LinkedIn network?	Yes	Yes	Yes

## **Observations on the NEW Facebook Email System**

*Using @facebook email accounts*

**If you are NOT Facebook friends with a college coach, then you are at a disadvantage.** If you *are* friends with a college coach, and you send a coach an email to his/her **@facebook** email account, then that email will go directly into their priority inbox on Facebook. If you are not friends with the coach and you email them, it will automatically go into their “other” inbox, which is a secondary inbox designed for bulk messages.

**If you are friends with the college coach then your PICTURE shows up next to your email message.** This is huge! It makes the email familiar to the coach and gives a layer of comfort in accepting your message. And for college coaches, it works just the same, especially if it's one of college sports' bigger name programs... it will add an extra layer of excitement to the coach's message if his/her picture appears alongside their Facebook email.

**If you are not friends with a coach, then a generic “email” image shows up next to your message.** This gives off a “bland” impression, and does practically no branding of you. This is important because if one recruit “friends” a coach and another does not, then the recruit who is friends with the coach has the “first movers advantage,” as their emails show up in the priority inbox with their picture next to it.

**Recruits can attach documents.** Recruits can attach documents to their messages in this new Facebook system. So if they send a coach an email, they can also include pictures, transcripts, and even video.