

## Scholarship hunter - Play sports? Go to College

By John "jaQ" Andrews jandrews@hippopress.com

Three months ago, Joil Bergeron opened Next Level Performance LLC ([www.gonextllc.com](http://www.gonextllc.com)). Along with equipment sales and training, Bergeron focuses on helping high school athletes find college scholarships, matching them with sports and educational programs that fit their goals. As a former coach himself, Bergeron applies what he learned then to go after what coaches want from student athletes.

### Q:Can you describe the process?

We ... create a game plan for parents and the children who are trying to go to college. ... There's so many different things out there, so many different schools, different programs. ... Now when you add in the mix the prospect of competing at the NCAA level, that can only make things a little bit more difficult. We try to ease that transition. We identify what the person's goals are so it can be a very focused approach, not just from an athletic standpoint, but also from an academic standpoint. It's important that they're getting a good education because most collegiate athletes, after four years, their career is over, so you have to have that college degree.



### Do you get a lot of people who are looking for a sports career or are they looking to use their sports ability to get an education?

Primarily the second thing that you said. Earning a scholarship in athletics is a vehicle for your education ... The fact of the matter is, every kid coming out of high school trying to play college sports is the next Michael Jordan. But realistically, that's just not reality.

### Do you have a threshold performance level that your clients have to meet? Obviously they can't all be star quarterbacks.

You have to say, well, this person wants to play at Division I, these are their athletic statistics, realistically that's not going to get him a starting position. That may not even get him a scholarship on a team, they may be lucky to just be a walk-on. There are so many different opportunities out there. There's Division I, there's Division IA, there's Division II, Division III ... a "full ride," it's very rare to get that. Even if you receive a partial scholarship, those things grow over time ... There's just books, just meal plans, meal plans and books, then there's partial scholarships with a combination of those things.

### Do you consider the athlete your customer, or the colleges your customer?

The athlete. ... Essentially I'm a consultant. That's really what I am, with a lot of other fringe benefits that go along with it.

### Were you a college athlete?

Yes, I was. I actually competed up at UNH.

### What did you do?

Track and field.

### Did you get a scholarship for that?

I didn't! That's one of the things that drove me towards this business. I grew up in Keene and when I was a senior, I was the best discus thrower in the state, ranked number one. I had been recruited for football through some of the colleges in the area, but not really for track. I know I could've earned a scholarship had I just been exposed to what exists out there.

### Are there scholarships for discus throwers?

Yes, oh yes. Every college team is given a scholarship budget. Now, it depends on the size of the athletic department and of course the success of the program as well. But there's money that exists out there ... coaches will have this money available, and really collegiate coaches don't have a lot of free time to go out recruiting. That's the toughest aspect of the job. A good college program will spend upward of 70, 80 percent of their time just on the road recruiting.

### Why is it that colleges give money for athletes? They give scholarships for all kinds of things, but what does a school gain by recruiting athletes?

Let's take it from an academic standpoint. Let's say you earn a degree from XYZ University. You go out and write a book. When you write that book, that book's going to say that you graduated from that university. So it's advertising. Especially with athletics, there is a huge amount of money in college athletics. There's been a lot of debate over the last five or six years, especially for the big football programs, big basketball programs, baseball around the country, that NCAA athletes should receive some sort of a cut from all the financial gain that universities [get].

### Are the kids really concentrating on getting an education then?

It depends on what level you're at. I'm not going to sit here and lie — there's certainly schools where you're there for sports. I'd like to think that that's not what I'm trying to promote. As a former coach, as a current recreational athlete, my firm belief is that you need to have a solid academic background. There's nothing more important than a solid education. That's the biggest thing, finding a match for whoever I work with, that they're going to be able to get a good education. You can't have your focus solely on athletics, because you could go out for practice and get hurt and it's over with.