

Interested in playing college volleyball? If so, it's a good idea to start planning now.

In fact, college coaches we consulted for this story made it clear that high school and club players who are serious about stepping up to the next level should begin their preparation as early as their freshman year in high school. If you're systematic and well-organized, this process can be a great learning experience and will help you find a school that's a good fit – both for volleyball and academics.

To help you prepare for the journey toward a possible collegiate volleyball career, Art of Coaching has put together a comprehensive checklist of things you'll need to know and stuff you'll need to do. Below is your freshman year checklist.

FRESHMAN YEAR CHECKLIST

- Watch some local college matches. Seeing the level of play that you're aspiring to will give you an idea of where you're at as a player and where you need to be by your senior year.
- Get on a competitive club team where you will get playing time. It's important to play for knowledgeable coaches on a good team that practices at least twice a week. It's also important to play at national qualifiers and tournaments so college coaches can watch you.
- Make a recruiting video, but don't pay a lot of money for someone to make it for you. Using video from your phone or iPad and editing in iMovie or a similar program works just fine.
- Create a target list of 15-30 schools. They should be schools you are interested in attending and schools where you would like to play volleyball. Look at all divisions and conferences around the country that you think are your level. (Ask your coach if you don't know). Don't count out any schools when you're a freshman. It's early in the process, so you should be open to many possibilities.
- Create your University Athlete (UA) profile at www.universityathlete.com. Every college coach/recruiter will use it to track and find the court you're on at tournaments. Include your name, a picture, graduation year, contact info, your coach's contact info, parents' names and approach jump touch. It's good to post a highlight video, too. This should all be on the free version.
- Email the college coaches on your target list. With the new recruiting rule, there is no back and forth communication between players and college coaches until June 15th after your sophomore year. But it's NEVER too early to introduce yourself and express your strong interest in attending their school and playing volleyball for their program. College coaches will definitely start watching you play, and if they know you're interested in their school and they like your video, they will mark you down and watch you during your freshman season.
- Start to find out which schools on your target list will need your position in your graduation year. Become a detective and study the roster of the schools, use the prepvolleyball.com "College Needs List," ask your club coach or director to find out which positions the schools at the top of your list will need in your grad year. They are allowed to ask college coaches this without asking specifically about you. When you find out, either keep the school on the list or take it off and add more.

- Attend winter, spring and summer college volleyball clinics and camps at schools you're interested in. Clinics and camps are great for visibility and to get experience being coached by college coaches. The summer between your freshman and sophomore year is important to target specific schools on your list. If you're a setter or a middle, make sure they need your position in your year before you go to the trouble of attending the clinic/camp. Colleges usually aren't as certain about their needs at OH or L/DS for freshmen.
- Keep your grades up. No mystery to this one. The better you do in school, the more options you'll have, especially with regard to merit-based or academic aid that many universities offer.
- Make yourself aware of NCAA core course requirements. Be sure your high school counselor is up to speed on what type of classes you need.
- Become involved in fitness and strength development programs. It doesn't need to be extensive.
- Give yourself a social media checkup. When college coaches mark you down on their watch list after receiving emails from you, you have begun the recruiting process with them and they will check your social media accounts. If they see things that shine a negative light – partying, inappropriate behavior, etc. – it can hurt your chances. Remember, coaches view posts with adult, grown-up eyes. They may stop recruiting you if they don't like what they see. Just be careful.
- Participate in volleyball lessons with a good instructor. In practice, you don't always get enough skill acquisition and technical coaching specific to your weaknesses. Lessons are a great way to improve your skill level outside of club practices. Invite a teammate (in a position that complements yours) so you can split the cost. Both of you will have an opportunity to get better!

QUICK TIP

Don't get discouraged if your dream school isn't showing interest. First and foremost, you're playing volleyball to have fun. If you love the game and keep working hard, you'll give yourself a chance to play at the next level.

Remember, when a school says no, it's not just about you and it certainly doesn't mean you're not a good volleyball player. Maybe the school is already well stocked at your position. Or maybe they need someone who jumps a little higher. Whatever the reason, just keep playing and working hard and having fun. Chances are, you'll arrive at a destination that's right for you.

CHECK OUT THE OTHER COLLEGE CHECKLISTS

[Sophomore Year Checklist](http://www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/sophomore-checklist) - www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/sophomore-checklist

[Junior Year Checklist](http://www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/junior-checklist) - www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/junior-checklist

[Senior Year Checklist](http://www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/senior-checklist) - www.theartofcoachingvolleyball.com/senior-checklist