

“HAD I KNOWN THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW”

***Advice from NCAA Student-Athletes Back to High School Students***

- “I would have worried less about making the right decisions (picking the RIGHT major, picking the PERFECT program and team and WHICH sport) and realized that nothing is permanent, and that if I pick wrong, I still have love in my life. I wish I knew what questions to ask, and that a lot of the questions you ask should be *to the athletes and not to the coach!* The coach is trying to recruit you after all. “
- “I would have paid more attention to my diet. I wish I had a mentor that would have told me that you CAN fight for a 6<sup>th</sup> year of NCAA eligibility and running if you get a medical redshirt, and that it is possible to get law school paid for with that scholarship! I wish someone told me to put more effort in to my grades—that it would have opened more doors afterwards. Mostly, I wish someone had told me that there is no better time to be selfish than in college, and that being selfish towards taking care of your body and your mental and physical and emotional health isn’t actual being selfish in a bad way- it’s a good thing.”
- “I would have been more patient. I got injured because I lied about the mileage I was actually running in high school because I wanted to impress my new coach and say what I thought he wanted to hear- that I had done mile repeats before and tempo runs, and all the things I read about that I knew our program should have been doing, but we didn’t because my high school coach was a 400m coach and coached everyone like a 400m athlete versus coaching us to prepare us for...well, cross country! I tried to copy everything my teammate did who was running 110 miles a week even though the coach gave me my own training that was slated for 35 miles per week, and I just really wanted to be good so bad that I ran myself into the ground and had three stress fractures in less than three months, and then spent so much time alone because of injury that I got depressed because running was the reason I turned down Harvard and Princeton, and came to a big BCS school instead—to run—and then I couldn’t even do that. I didn’t know how to define myself outside of running so when it was taken away, I had to rediscover my identity independent of running. I wish someone would have told me before that that my times weren’t my identity, that I was a person before what I was capable of providing to my team. I wish someone would have told me to be honest with coaches, to encourage open communication, and to be patient... that development happens over time and sometimes it’s ok to take one step back before you take two steps forward.”
- “In high school they want you to be well-rounded to get into college—they want to see your ACT score, your participation in extra-curricular activities, they want to see your examples of leadership, your grades, and more. In college, I thought I was supposed to keep being well-rounded and tried to be president of everything offered on campus while running NCAA, and figured sleep is what would give. I didn’t realize it was my body that would give. I wish someone had told me that in this sport, the recovery is just as important as the workouts and training themselves. I wish someone had told me that I was allowed to focus on just the goal I wanted most, and that it’s “ok” to be exposed to a lot of things, but it’s ok if you don’t want to be well-rounded. That it’s OK to get a B versus an A if you just want to run, and don’t care about being a doctor or a lawyer someday... if all you want is that Olympic team. I wish someone told me it was ok to sacrifice being good at a ton of things to chase the dream of being great at one thing: running.”
- “I’d tell myself not to be afraid of the new competition and see everyone as my equal”
- “I wish someone told me that you can take out loans to make things work, and that going out of state really was a viable option...”

- “I was a recruited walk-on at XXXXX program, which was going through a D2-to-D1 transition at the time, so it'd be D2 my first two years and D1 my second two years. I was told I'd be a contributor to a decent D1 program my last two years, and I believed it. I made the roster once, my sophomore year for T&F, and I ran terribly. I kept training on my own and was socially part of the team, but being in uniform one season (just 4 races!) was not what I had in mind when I left High School. I loved, and still love, XXXXXX, but if I knew what I knew now I'd go somewhere else. Running was and is my priority, and I didn't put myself in a situation to pursue that. If running is important to you, if RACING is important to you, make sure you put yourself in a situation so that you can MATTER in top 7 scoring during your 4-5 years, because it makes a difference when you race and you're the 20<sup>th</sup> guy on the roster and you'll never be in the top 7: something changes inside of you. You know you don't “matter” in the same way and it's easier to give up. Ask around, don't just trust one coach from that school. Do your research. I had no guidance, and just 100% trusted that what the coach told me was true, without thinking that he'd tell the same to many guys, knowing only 1-2 had to do well out of the ~10 of us who thought we'd make a difference. 0 athletes, guys or girls, from my entering year ran for 4 full years for him.”
- “I wish someone had told me that I would go from being a superstar to just being a small fish in a big pond. I wish someone would have told me that that full-ride scholarship wasn't worth losing all that individual attention that I thrived off of in high school from my independent coach. Looking back, it might have been worth it to pick a less prestigious school, and pick a coaching relationship that would have mimicked what I already knew worked well for me”
- “I would have been more aware of what my athletic ability was. I was comparing my times to Illinois- NOT nationally. I wish I knew to reach out to more schools myself during the recruiting process and gain a better understanding of where their "top 7" were in regards to times. I also would have looked at the academic side as well as the athletic side more. The other schools I looked at didn't seem like "schools" to me- just small schools to run at. I would have been miserable! Team atmosphere is just as important to the school as anything else: I had 40 NCAA student-athletes at my wedding party and four of my bridesmaids were on my team, some of them roommates! Ultimately, I wanted to have the "big school" experience. I had no chance of running at a huge school like that with my times in high school. I found a team with a B team that worked for me. It took research, and not every team works like that. I knew going into it that I'd be with the B team, that I'd get a lot faster, but would probably never race at a national meet, on a relay again, or score a point at conference. For me, though, I just wanted to compete, and the program I chose let me do that, even if it meant I travelled to meets via vans versus on planes like some of my other teammates.”