

Top 10 Things to Look For in a High School Soccer Program

As you begin the high school search process, there are many things to think about when deciding which institution is right for you: academics, school size, co-ed vs. single gender, community, athletics, teachers, private vs. public, etc. The same can be said if you are interested in playing high school soccer. No matter what schools you are considering, or what level you compete at, you should definitely ponder the following:

Q1. IS THERE AN EMPHASIS ON ACADEMICS?

It is essential to know that the coach and the school value the education you are receiving. Ask for proof.

Q2. AT WHAT LEVEL IS THE COACH AND/OR STAFF?

If you are a recreational player, is there room for you to grow and learn? If you are a high level player, does the coach fit your needs? Is the coach licensed through the NSCAA (i.e. Regional, National, Advanced, Premier, etc.) or US Soccer (F, E, D, C, B, A, etc.)? If not, do they do their due diligence to constantly learn the game? Does the staff have experience in the game that is suitable to your needs? Did they play collegiately or professionally? If so, can they translate that into their coaching? If they are telling you to improve as a player, are they working to do the same as coaches? Sometimes coaches with previous success get complacent later in life. Are they still trying to improve, or are they living off of "reputation?"

Q3. WHAT IS THE COACHING AND PLAYING STYLE?

Ask yourself if the coach is the right fit for you. How does he/she motivate? Will he/she challenge you to improve? Will he/she make you a better player and person? Look at him/her, and decide if your first impression says that this person is a good role model for you. Are you willing to be led by him/her? Can the coach efficiently evaluate you as a player and change you for the better? Does the team reflect that coach? Does the team have a particular style of play? Does that fit your personality (or your desired personality)? Have any players quit? Why?

Q4. WHAT IS THE SUCCESS RATE? HOW IS SUCCESS MEASURED?

Research whether the school has a "soccer team" or a "soccer program," and decide which is best for you. Ask how success is measured. Teams may tout championships, but at what level (league, district, or state titles)? Do they value City rankings or State rankings? Often times, coaches sell prospective high school soccer players on the fact that they had a "winning" season, or beat so-and-so. But, does that short-term success really matter to you? Instead, see what these coaches actually do for their players. Do they help in the college search process? Are they knowledgeable about outside sources to make you better? Do they have success in filling your critical needs and meeting your ultimate goals? Do they put your needs and goals above their personal needs and goals?

Q5. WHAT IS THE OVERALL OPINION OF THE TEAM/PROGRAM FROM ITS PARENTS AND PLAYERS?

Are the parents active in the program? Do they want to play a role? Are they critical of the coach, the current team, or the program as a whole? Are they complimentary? What do parents of alumni say? Do the players have respect for the program? Do they look forward to the soccer season? Are the players proud to play at their particular school? Do the players get along? Do former players stay in contact?

Q6. WHAT IS THE OUTSIDE OPINION OF THE TEAM/PROGRAM FROM THE SOCCER COMMUNITY?

What does the community say? Why are they saying what they say? Are they angry, jealous or sincere? One rule is to note that if there is a strong feeling towards a program, then there is motivation behind those feelings. Be more weary if there is no response, or if a program is irrelevant. Great sources of information generally come from unbiased coaches (i.e. college, club, ODP, etc.) or vendors (i.e. Soccer Village, indoor complexes, etc.)

Q7. WHAT SUPPORT DOES SOCCER HAVE FROM THE SCHOOL'S ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT?

Is soccer a secondary option? How many coaches are on staff? How are the facilities? Is there adequate space to play, train, workout, etc. Are there boosters? Is there a pay-to-play option?

Q8. WHAT IS THE OVERALL GOAL?

Every team should have a goal to benchmark their success. How does the team try to reach these benchmarks? Is there an off season workout program? Is there a plan in place? Does the team's goal reflect your personal goals as an incoming player? Can your personal goals mesh with the team? Do they conflict? Does the coach try to "put square pegs in round holes" with players, or do they have an understanding and ability to "round off the square pegs to make them fit?"

Q9. WHAT IS THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM AND MAKE-UP OF THE TEAM?

There are several things to consider: How many teams are there within the program and how are they structured (i.e. Varsity, JV, freshman, etc.)? Is there a "cut" policy and how are teams decided? How is each player evaluated at the end of the year?

Q10. WILL YOU ENJOY YOUR EXPERIENCE?

The bottom line is that you should play where you will enjoy the experience. The program should fit more than just your athletic needs. Ask yourself if it will be socially satisfying? Will it stretch your confidence or leadership skills? Does it teach you valuable life lessons along with soccer? Remember, it's your experience and you should be able to look back after your four years and be proud of the road you travelled.