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SPORTS

Coaches, recruiters sound off — how do you really get a college football scholarship?

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Eric Kurle has sat down with many parents in his 12 years coaching at Graham-Kapowsin High School.

What's the best way to get their child a college football scholarship?

"I tell them to have their kid play multiple sports," Kurle said. "And if they have a favorite sport, then get some extra training, but fit that in and let them play other sports. Keep them playing. You don't have to do football year-round."

Yet, coaches see football specialization as a surging trend.

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Of the 40 South Sound coaches in The News Tribune's survey, 75 percent said they've had athletes choose not to participate in a school sport in the winter or spring seasons to train at outside facilities and focus on football.

And 97.5 percent of the coaches said it would be more beneficial for athletes to play other sports in the offseason, and 80 percent said they've had college coaches directly inform them that 7-on-7 football is not useful in recruiting and they would rather see athletes participate in a different sport in the offseason.

That means play basketball, baseball, soccer, wrestling, track and field, swimming or water polo.



And get good grades.

“

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Brian Strandley, Eastern Washington University assistant football coach

“One-hundred percent,” said Skyline coach Mat Taylor, who was not included in the survey. “They (college coaches) ask what other sports they do in the offseason, what’s his demeanor like when the team is trailing at halftime or down by seven on the final drive – what kind of competitor is he?”

The NCAA charted that 6 percent of the 7.8 million high school athletes in the country will compete in NCAA sports — not just football.

Getting a scholarship is not quite like winning the lottery, but almost.

And some parents and players are sold a bill of goods on how to be a shoe-in for one. Should they specialize? Pay thousands of dollars for 7-on-7 football or for special training? Transfer to a bigger school?

Brian Strandley, an assistant coach at Eastern Washington University who recruits in the South Sound, said no.

“Get your grades up, get your grades up,” said Strandley, a graduate of Curtis High School. “Be a good leader, get yourself in the best condition that you can and when it comes to Friday, play until your heart explodes. Play your butt off, go win games and be a leader.

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“I also suggest to kids that they enjoy it. Enjoy your senior year because you aren’t going to have it again.”

Even at EWU, Strandley said they allow many of their players to play basketball.

“And if you sprain an ankle or twist a knee or something like that, that doesn’t mean we aren’t going to recruit you,” Strandley said. “Play other sports — I think that’s a good thing.”

An NCAA survey of college athletes showed that 71 percent of NCAA Division I football players were multisport athletes in high school. Another survey found that 88 percent of all the 2017 NFL Draft picks — and 30 of the 32 first-round picks — played multiple sports in high school.

“It shows you are athletic,” said Utah offensive coordinator Troy Taylor, who played quarterback at Cal and eventually with the New York Jets. “If they are playing basketball, you get to see them moving around, but it also shows they have good spatial and hand-eye coordination. They have a little bit of an advantage.”

“

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Troy Taylor, University of Utah offensive coordinator

Youth sports has grown into a multibillion dollar industry, and that has created a vastly different landscape than what Troy Taylor remembers when he was the California player of the year.

He said he didn’t get his first scholarship offer until November of his senior year. Now athletes are expecting offers as freshmen in high school, and some even in middle school.

“We really focus on and talk about having fun,” he said. “It should be bliss out there. You should be enjoying it.

“I think there’s some people who turn it into a business and a grind. And I hate that word. It’s not a grind. We are playing football. It’s something we’ve done since we were little and called as many of our friends as we could because there’s nothing we wanted to do more.

“Through all this preparation and the personal trainers, something that’s lost is a little bit of the innocence of the sport. I think athletes might be better trained and more skilled, but you talk to parents or people and it’s all about offers and who they are being recruited by — and it’s lost a bit of the innocence.”

Strandley said he sees kids trying to attend eight college camps in an offseason, wearing out their energy and pocket books.

“We tell them, ‘Your senior year matters. When you play for your high school team matters. You don’t have to go to this camp and this camp,’ ” Strandley said. “We love for kids to come to our camp, but if you go out and play well your senior year and your grades are good and you are a good leader and you win a lot of games – that’s the best way to get recruited, in my mind.”

Both Strandley and Troy Taylor said they work almost exclusively with high school coaches in their recruiting.

And getting recruited also takes genetics.

“You can be 5-foot-6, 160 pounds and no amount of extra training is going to turn you into a Division I football player,” Sumner High School coach Keith Ross said. “If a receiver catches 80 balls, it doesn’t mean he’s getting a scholarship if he runs a 4.9 40-yard dash. Some of these big, recruited guys might not even be that good, but they have genetic gifts.

“But every parent thinks their kid is getting a scholarship. I don’t know where that came from.”

6.7 PERCENT OF THE MORE THAN 1 MILLION HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN THE COUNTRY WILL GO ON TO PLAY NCAA FOOTBALL. AND 2.6 PERCENT WILL PLAY DIVISION I.

According to NCAA statistics, 6.7 percent of all high school football players will play in college, and 2.6 percent will play Division I.

Troy Taylor said when he was at Folsom coaching Jake Browning, who went on to break the national record for career passing touchdowns (229), that Browning never competed in 7-on-7 football in the offseason. Nor did he request to.

He also coached Jonah Williams, who went on to start as a true freshman at tackle for Alabama. And Williams never attended any “exposure” camps in the offseason either, he said.

“A lot of it is genetics and a lot of it is their personality,” Taylor said. “They have a certain mentality and belief and all of those things and that’s the way Jonah was, too.

“If you are passionate about playing basketball and baseball, play those. And then in the summer, focus on football. Put the club basketball and baseball aside and really focus on being with your football team and getting ready for the next season. And after football season ends, focus on your basketball team. When basketball ends, focus on your baseball team.

“So play all the sports, enjoy it, do your best, have fun and make your team your primary focus. And if you want to get extra training, wherever it may be, communicate with your football coach and let him know and let him help you through that process. Tell him why you want to do it and utilize his expertise so he can tell you how that’s going to affect you and your development.”

Two local private football trainers were asked if they’d rather an athlete spend \$1,000 on SAT prep and tutors or for football training.

“SAT prep,” said Aaron Troia, the president of AT Sports Inc., which owns the Rise Football Academy. “Bottom line – if you want to guarantee yourself a scholarship, get the grades.”

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