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THE STANDARD

TOP 10 TRAITS COLLEGE COACHES ACTUALLY LOOK FOR
— AND AN HONEST SELF-AUDIT FOR PLAYERS & FAMILIES —

SFBA SPORTS PERFORMANCE · BUILT FOR THE WORK

READ THIS FIRST

TALENT GETS NOTICED. CHARACTER GETS RECRUITED.

Every family thinks the path to college basketball is about points per game. It isn't. Coaches at every level — high-major, mid-major, D2, NAIA — say some version of the same thing when they talk about what actually separates the players they sign from the players they pass on: **talent gets a kid on the radar. Everything else is what gets him a scholarship.**

This guide breaks down ten traits that come up again and again when college coaches — from Duke's Mike Krzyzewski to UConn's Dan Hurley and Geno Auriemma to Michigan State's Tom Izzo — talk publicly about what they're really evaluating on the recruiting trail. It's not a highlight reel checklist. It's the stuff that shows up in practice, in the car ride home, and in how a kid responds when nobody's filming.

Use it as a mirror, not a scoreboard. Go through each trait honestly — as a player, and as a parent — and be willing to find gaps. That's the whole point.

01

READ TOGETHER

Go through each trait as a family. The self-reflection questions work best out loud, not silently.

02

BE HONEST

This isn't for anyone else to see. The value is in the truthful answer, not the comfortable one.

03

REVISIT OFTEN

Come back every season. The standard doesn't move — but where you stand against it should.

01	COACHABILITY	...
02	CHARACTER	...
03	TOUGHNESS	...
04	RESILIENCE	...
05	WORK ETHIC	...
06	BASKETBALL IQ	...
07	ACADEMICS & ELIGIBILITY	...
08	TEAM-FIRST MENTALITY	...
09	FAMILY & INNER CIRCLE	...
10	PHYSICAL TOOLS	...

01

TRAIT ONE

COACHABILITY

”

If your body language is bad, you will never get in the game.

GENO AURIEMMA — HEAD COACH, UCONN WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Auriemma has said his staff puts a real premium on body language when they scout — how a kid reacts to a mistake, to a teammate's mistake, to sitting the bench. Tennessee coach Lamont Paris puts it even more simply: being coachable isn't a skill you're born with, it's a decision a player makes every single day. Coaches aren't just watching the highlight — they're watching what happens on the very next possession after a correction.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ How a player reacts on the bench immediately after being subbed out
- ◆ Whether a correction gets applied the next rep, or has to be repeated all game
- ◆ Body language after a turnover or missed shot — reset, or spiral
- ◆ Does the player ask questions and take notes, or assume he already knows it

PLAYER

"When my coach corrects me in front of the team, what does my face and body actually do?"

PARENT

"When my child gets pulled from a game, is my first instinct to comfort them — or to help them understand why?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE Coaches often decide "coachable or not" inside the first ten minutes of a workout.

02

TRAIT TWO

CHARACTER

”

We recruited talent with character. We didn't recruit talented characters.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI — FORMER HEAD COACH, DUKE BASKETBALL

Coach K said for decades that he weighs three things when evaluating a player, all equally important: is he genuinely talented, does he fit the environment, and what's his character. He called that third piece "the nutcracker" — the thing that decides it when two players look the same on paper. Duke's recruiting reputation was never built only on talent; it was built on avoiding players who bring off-court friction into a locker room.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Does his reputation in the gym match his reputation in the classroom and community
- ◆ How he treats referees, the end of the bench, and opponents after a loss
- ◆ Off-court conduct — social media, hallway behavior, how he talks about others
- ◆ Whether winning matters more to him than being liked by everyone

PLAYER

"If a coach called my teacher, my club coach, and a teammate's parent this week, would they all describe the same person?"

PARENT

"Do I brag more about my child's stat line, or their character?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE

Character shows up fastest in the moments a player thinks nobody's grading him.

03

TRAIT THREE

TOUGHNESS

”

I look for a player who's tougher.

TOM IZZO — HEAD COACH, MICHIGAN STATE BASKETBALL

Izzo has said the two intangibles he prioritizes above almost everything else are toughness and passion — because talent is easy to see on film, but toughness is what determines whether a player can be developed once he's on campus. Izzo has also called discipline the highest form of love a coach can show a player, arguing that the players who crave being pushed are the ones who end up starring.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Does the player seek out contact on drives and on the boards, or avoid it
- ◆ Mental toughness after a cold shooting night — does he keep shooting or disappear
- ◆ How he responds to being physically challenged in practice, not just games
- ◆ Does he play the same with the game on the line as he does in warmups

PLAYER

"Do I go looking for contact on defense and on the boards, or do I try to avoid it?"

PARENT

"When my child has a rough game, do I let them sit with it and work through it — or do I rescue them from the discomfort?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *Skill gets a look. Toughness gets a return visit.*

04

TRAIT FOUR

RESILIENCE

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Mental resilience and the ability to handle pressure are intangibles that get evaluated in high-stakes moments.

CONSENSUS — COLLEGE RECRUITING EVALUATORS, MULTIPLE PROGRAMS

Recruiters across every level of college basketball describe resilience the same way: it's less about whether a kid struggles — every player does — and more about how fast he resets. Coaches watch how a player responds to a bad call, a shooting slump, or a benching. A player who spirals for a quarter is a very different projection than one who spirals for thirty seconds.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Response time after a bad call, a bad play, or a bad quarter
- ◆ How a shooting slump is handled — does he stop shooting, or trust his work
- ◆ Willingness to talk about a loss honestly instead of making excuses
- ◆ Whether adversity shrinks his game or sharpens it

PLAYER

"After my worst game this season, how many days did it take me to feel locked in again?"

PARENT

"Do I model calm after a tough loss, or do I stay upset longer than my child does?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *How fast you reset says more than how hard you fell.*

05

TRAIT FIVE

WORK ETHIC

”

Coaches respect effort, on and off the court.

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL PORTAL — COLLEGE RECRUITING GUIDE

At the college level, coaches largely assume the athletic tools are already there — speed, size, skill. What separates the recruits who get offers from the ones who don't is usually whether the work actually matches the talk. Coaches ask around: does this kid train when no one's watching, or only when the camera's on?

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Does he show up early or stay late without being told to
- ◆ Does he train on his own outside of scheduled team hours
- ◆ A track record of extra reps — not just claiming them
- ◆ Does effort show up on defense and in transition, or only when he has the ball

PLAYER

"On a day with no practice scheduled, do I still get shots up?"

PARENT

"Have I ever actually seen my child train with nobody watching?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *The gym doesn't care who's watching. Neither do the coaches evaluating you.*

06

TRAIT SIX

BASKETBALL IQ

”

Every player at this level is fast, strong, and athletic — fundamentals and feel are what separate recruits.

CONSENSUS — COLLEGE RECRUITING EVALUATORS, MULTIPLE PROGRAMS

College evaluators consistently point to “feel” as one of the hardest things to teach and one of the fastest ways to stand out. Can a player read a defensive rotation and make the right pass under pressure? Can he guard more than one position because he understands schemes, not just assignments? A “positionless” player who processes the game quickly is more valuable than a bigger athlete who only knows his own job.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Does he understand why a play is called, not just what to do in it
- ◆ Can he read a defensive rotation and make the right read in real time
- ◆ Can he guard multiple positions, or only one
- ◆ Does he know the scouting report, or only his own individual assignment

PLAYER

“Can I explain, in my own words, why our team runs the sets it runs — or do I just run them?”

PARENT

“Does my child talk about the game in terms of decisions, or only in terms of points?”

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *Athletic tools get you a look. Feel for the game gets you a scholarship.*

07

TRAIT SEVEN

ACADEMICS & ELIGIBILITY

”

If you can't handle high school classes, college life will eat you alive.

NAIA HEAD COACH — COLLEGE RECRUITING INTERVIEW

Academics aren't a box to check after basketball — coaches treat them as a real signal of whether a player can handle the structure of college life. Grades matter less as a snapshot and more as a trend: is this player's GPA climbing or sliding? Does he manage his own time, or does someone have to chase him down about assignments? A player who can't stay eligible can't help a program, no matter how talented he is.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ GPA trend over time, not just the current transcript
- ◆ Time management without needing to be reminded or nagged
- ◆ Awareness of NCAA/NAIA eligibility requirements and test score benchmarks
- ◆ Whether academics are treated as part of the standard, or an afterthought

PLAYER

"Would my grades survive a semester with no one reminding me about due dates?"

PARENT

"Do I know my child's current GPA off the top of my head, right now?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *A 3.8 GPA opens more doors than a 38-inch vertical.*

08

TRAIT EIGHT

TEAM-FIRST MENTALITY

”

You're probably not going to have one.

GENO AURIEMMA — ON RECRUITS WHO ASK WHAT THEIR ROLE WILL BE

Auriemma has explained that he can often tell whether a recruit will fit his program by the questions the player asks. Most talk about championships. The ones who ask what position they'll play or what their role will be get a blunt answer — because a role isn't guaranteed, and a player fixated on it before he's even earned a spot is telling on himself. Coaches want players thinking about winning first, minutes second.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ Is the first question about role or playing time, or about winning
- ◆ Does he celebrate a teammate's big game as much as his own
- ◆ Willingness to accept a role that isn't the spotlight, for the team's sake
- ◆ Is his social media presence built around "me," or around "we"

PLAYER

"When a teammate outscores me, what's my honest, first, unfiltered reaction?"

PARENT

"Is my post-game conversation with my child about the score and the team — or just about their points?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *The best recruits ask "how do we win," not "how many minutes."*

09

TRAIT NINE

FAMILY & INNER CIRCLE

”

They tell on themselves, they drop hints.

DAN HURLEY — HEAD COACH, UCONN MEN'S BASKETBALL

Hurley has said he pays close attention to red flags in the recruiting process — has a player bounced between five travel teams, or four different high schools? When he talks to parents, is the conversation about how their son needs to work harder, or a running list of complaints about coaches after a bad game? Geno Auriemma has said something similar about the players who struggle to be good teammates: “you can trace it back, generally, to the parents.” The people around a player shape him just as much as his own habits do.

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ How parents talk about coaches in the car ride home after a game
- ◆ Whether a player has jumped programs chasing minutes rather than growth
- ◆ Do parents advocate through respectful communication, or through complaints
- ◆ Is the inner circle — trainers, family, mentors — building the player up honestly, or just inflating him

PARENT

“In the last month, how many times have I vented about a coach's decision versus my child's habits?”

PLAYER

“How many teams have I played for in the last two years — and why did I really leave each one?”☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE

A player's circle shows up in his game long before it shows up in the box score.

10

TRAIT TEN

PHYSICAL TOOLS

”

Can this athlete make our team better? Can they compete at our level?

CONSENSUS — COLLEGE RECRUITING EVALUATORS, MULTIPLE PROGRAMS

Athleticism is still the entry point — strength, speed, agility, and frame projection matter, and coaches are ultimately asking whether a player's body can survive a college practice schedule five days a week. But the players who stand out are the ones who actually know their own numbers: vertical, sprint time, lateral quickness — and can show measurable improvement in them over time, not just a claim that they've "gotten faster."

WHAT COACHES ARE WATCHING FOR

- ◆ An actual strength & conditioning program outside of team practice
- ◆ Tested, tracked numbers — vertical, sprint, agility — not guesses
- ◆ Whether the player's body is ready for a college practice load
- ◆ Improvement in those numbers over multiple testing cycles, not just one good day

PLAYER

"Do I know my own vertical jump, sprint time, and strength numbers — or am I guessing?"

PARENT

"Is my child doing any structured strength and conditioning outside of basketball practice?"

☐ MEETING THE STANDARD ☐ NEEDS WORK

SCOUT NOTE *Untested numbers are just guesses. Track it, don't assume it.*

THE BOTTOM LINE

THE STANDARD DOESN'T **MOVE.** YOU DO.

Every one of these ten traits is something a player controls. Not height. Not who's watching a given weekend. Not whether a specific coach happens to need a specific position this year. **Coachability, character, toughness, resilience, work ethic, IQ, academics, team-first mentality, the people around you, and the work you put into your body** — a player owns every single one of these.

01 COACHABILITY

02 CHARACTER

03 TOUGHNESS

04 RESILIENCE

05 WORK ETHIC

06 BASKETBALL IQ

07 ACADEMICS & ELIGIBILITY

08 TEAM-FIRST MENTALITY

09 FAMILY & INNER CIRCLE

10 PHYSICAL TOOLS

Go back through your "Needs Work" boxes. Pick one. Start there this week — not next month, not next season. The players who get recruited aren't the ones who scored the most as 12-year-olds. They're the ones who kept closing these gaps, quietly, over years, long after anyone was watching.

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Sources & Attribution — Quotes and paraphrased statements drawn from public interviews, press conferences, and reporting on Dan Hurley (UConn), Mike Krzyzewski (Duke), Tom Izzo (Michigan State), and Geno Auriemma (UConn), as covered by outlets including CBS Mornings, the Harvard Business Review, Sportskeeda, and college recruiting resources including NCSA and IMG Academy. This guide is an independent educational resource produced by SFBA Sports Performance and is not affiliated with or endorsed by any coach, program, or university referenced.