



UNLOCKING THE **NEXT LEVEL**

THE TRUTH ABOUT NCAA RECRUITING,
NIL, AND THE NEW RULES

COACH JASON KENT
B.S., M.S.S., M.A.Ed.

Copyright Notice

Unlocking the Next Level: The Truth About NCAA Recruiting, NIL, and The New Rules

© 2025 Coach Jason Kent

All rights are reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher or author, except in the case of brief quotations used in reviews, articles, or scholarly works.

This book is for informational and educational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the author makes no guarantees and assumes no liability for outcomes resulting from the application of the information provided.

For permission requests, media inquiries, or bulk orders, please contact

NextLEVEL 24 Basketball LLC

nextlevel24@nextlevel24.org

Book Preview: *Unlocking the Next Level: The Truth About NCAA Recruiting, NIL, and The New Rules*

Unlocking the Next Level is a no-nonsense playbook for student-athletes, parents, and coaches navigating the modern world of college recruiting. Written by Coach Jason Kent – a nationally respected player development coach, WNBA scout, and veteran of NCAA and NAIA sidelines – this guide breaks down the new rules of the game.

From understanding NIL and the transfer portal to mastering JUCO pathways, academic eligibility, and social media presence, this book delivers the real talk families need in today's competitive recruiting landscape. Coach Kent strips away the myths and hype, replacing them with actionable steps, insider tips, and tough love designed to prepare athletes for both scholarships and success beyond the scoreboard.

Whether you're chasing a D1 dream or exploring the right fit at D2, D3, NAIA, or JUCO, this guide empowers you to take control of your journey – with clarity, confidence, and no excuses.

Bibliography

Coach Jason Kent is a nationally respected player development coach, a college basketball veteran, and a WNBA advance scout with nearly three decades of experience spanning the high school, collegiate, and professional ranks. As the founder of NextLEVEL 24 Basketball LLC, Coach Kent has trained, mentored, and developed hundreds of student-athletes, more than 20 of whom have gone on to play professionally.

From the NAIA to NCAA Division I sidelines, Coach Kent has served at institutions including Chicago State University, Wilberforce University, IUPUI, and Central Michigan University. He has also made a lasting impact as a Dean of Students, a transformational leader in education, and a powerful voice for equity and access in the recruitment process.

Currently an advance scout in the WNBA, Coach Kent combines basketball acumen with character-building mentorship, helping young athletes and their families navigate a complex, ever-changing system with integrity and intention.

His mission is simple: to prepare student-athletes for success both on the court and in life with no shortcuts, no hype, and no excuses.

Introduction

The recruiting process has changed. The days of mailing VHS highlight tapes and waiting for a call are over. Today, we live in a digital world driven by the transfer portal, NIL opportunities, and new eligibility standards.

I've spent nearly three decades coaching, mentoring, and scouting at every level, from high school gyms to the NAIA, NCAA, and the WNBA. I've seen players with all the talent in the world but no plan, and I've witnessed players with average athleticism outwork everybody and earn scholarships because they were coachable, consistent, and informed.

This eBook isn't a theory. It's a playbook. It's built on real-life experiences, challenging truths, and up-to-date NCAA regulations. Whether you're a student-athlete, a parent, or a coach trying to guide your team, this guide will give you a clearer understanding of how to navigate the path to college basketball in 2025 and beyond.

Let's get to it.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction – The Game Has Changed	pg. 4
2. Chapter 1: The Do’s and Don’ts of Recruiting	pg. 6
3. Chapter 2: The NCAA Pay-to-Play Era	pg. 8
4. Chapter 3: The Truth About JUCO and New Eligibility Rules	pg. 9
5. Chapter 4: Travel Teams vs School Teams – Which One Matters More?	pg. 12
6. Chapter 5: Understanding the Transfer Portal	pg. 18
7. Chapter 6: NCAA D1 vs D2 vs D3 – Know the Differences	pg. 23
8. Bonus Chapter: The Parent Playbook	pg. 26
9. Closing Message: Your Journey Starts Now	pg. 29
10. Citations & Resources	pg. 30

The Dos and Don'ts of Recruiting

The Game Within the Game

If talent alone got you a scholarship, this book wouldn't exist. Recruiting is a game, and you have to learn how to play it. Coaches aren't just looking for the best players. They're looking for the best fits: on the court, in the classroom, and in their program's culture. How you handle communication, effort, body language, and accountability matters just as much as your stat line.

THE DO'S

1. Start Early

Start the recruiting process before your junior year. Build your highlight reel, keep your grades up, and begin reaching out to coaches via email or social media (within NCAA rules).

NCAA Rule: D1 and D2 coaches can contact you starting June 15 after your sophomore year (D1 men's basketball) or Sept 1 of your junior year (most other sports).

2. Do Your Homework

Know what schools fit you academically and athletically. A 5'5 guard may not fit at Kentucky but may shine at a strong D2 or NAIA program.

3. Utilize Your Coaches and Networks

Allow your high school coach, AAU coach, or trainer to advocate. Coaches listen to people they trust.

4. Do Stay Active on Hudl, YouTube, and Social Media.

Keep your highlights current. Lead with your best plays (the first 30 seconds are crucial). Tag schools when appropriate but avoid excessive posting.

5. Stay Coachable

Coaches talk. If you have a reputation for being a hard worker, respectful, and a good teammate, positive word spreads quickly.

THE DON'TS

1. Don't Let Parents Do the Talking

This is YOUR future. Coaches want to hear from YOU. Parents can follow up with questions later, but your initiative matters.

2. Don't Lie About Stats or Offers

Coaches check. And when they find out it's not true, they move on fast.

3. Don't Wait for Schools to Find You

There are hundreds of thousands of high school athletes across all sports competing for limited college roster spots. Whether you're playing football, volleyball, track, or baseball, don't sit back and hope to be discovered. Be intentional. Reach out, share film, attend camps, and make your presence known. If you treat recruiting like a lottery, your odds won't be in your favor.

4. Don't Burn Bridges

You never know who you'll connect with, whether it's through AAU, high school, or a college visit. Maintain a composed and respectful demeanor, even in moments of frustration.

5. Don't Be Uncoachable on Film

Throwing your hands up, arguing with referees, or retreating on defense are signs of concern. Coaches watch everything. They scout not only skills but also habits.

Coach Kent's Real Talk:

"Recruiting doesn't reward the loudest; it rewards the most consistent. You don't need 50 offers; you need the right one."

Action Steps:

- Please consider developing an email list of ten to 15 realistic schools.
- Record and update your highlights every two to three months.
- Please ensure your social media profiles are well-maintained, as coaches do review them.
- Ask two or three trusted adults to serve as your points of contact or references.
- Keep a spreadsheet of who you contact, when, and what they say.
- Talk with your coach or counselor about your NCAA eligibility status. (i.e., NCAA Clearinghouse)

The Truth About JUCO and New Eligibility Rules

JUCO is not a step down, but rather a platform for growth and development.

When most players hear the word "JUCO," they think of Plan B - but here's the real game: JUCO is often the smartest path to a D1 scholarship. Whether you're under-recruited, dealing with grade issues, or just need more time to develop, JUCO is a competitive, respected route to the top.

What is JUCO?

JUCO stands for Junior College, governed by the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA).

There are three divisions:

- **Division I**—Can offer full athletic scholarships
- **Division II**—Offers partial athletic scholarships
- **Division III** does not offer athletic scholarships, but it does provide aid.

These programs play 40+ game seasons and serve as feeders to NCAA D1, D2, NAIA, and even pro levels.

FACT CHECK: A wonderful example is JUCO schools competing in the NJCAA, with over 450 men's basketball programs nationwide. Numerous JUCOs consistently secure national rankings and place their players in high-major D1 schools and D2 schools.

New NJCAA Eligibility Rules (As of 2024):

The NJCAA updated academic requirements to give players more flexibility but also more responsibility:

For Freshman Eligibility:

- Must graduate high school (or equivalent)
- Must be enrolled full-time (12+ credit hours)
- There are no test score requirements, such as SAT or ACT, for eligibility.

To be eligible for the second season:

- Must pass 24 credit hours in the first year
- Must have a 2.0 GPA or higher
- **The clock starts** once you enroll full time (your 5-year clock begins for NCAA too).

IMPORTANT: JUCO athletes looking to transfer to NCAA D1/D2 must meet *NCAA transfer requirements*, not just JUCO rules. This includes specific coursework, GPA, and full-time terms.

JUCO is not just for so-called non-qualifiers anymore.

Players choose JUCO for many reasons:

- Didn't get offers they wanted
- They may want to reclassify for an additional year of development.
- Need to improve academics before transferring
- I got injured and need a bounce-back opportunity.
- Transfer portal traffic blocked their D1 path.

JUCO vs. Prep School: What's the Difference?

Feature	Juco	Prep School
Level of Competition	College-level, physical	High school/Post-grad
Eligibility Clock	Starts NCAA 5-year clock	The clock does <i>not</i> start
Financial Aid	Scholarships available	Usually self-paid (private)
Age Range	18–21+	17–19
Transfer Path	JUCO to NCAA/NAIA	Prep to college (fresh eligibility)

Coach's Note: If you're ready for college-level physicality and can handle the schedule, JUCO gives you real game reps and exposure. Prep is primarily designed for high school students who require an additional year before entering college.

JUCO-to-D1: Real Examples

- **Natasha Mack** (Angelina College (TX) → Oklahoma State Univ. → WNBA Draft pick)
- **Jimmy Butler** (Tyler JC (TX) → Marquette → NBA)
- **Cam Newton** (Blinn College (TX) → Auburn Univ. → NFL MVP)
- Countless more: over 200+ players transfer from JUCO to NCAA D1 & D2 every year (source: JUCO Advocate).

Myths About JUCO

- **"Only undesirable students go to JUCO."** → FALSE. Many choose JUCO strategically for exposure and growth.
- **"JUCO doesn't get scouted."** → FALSE. D1 coaches recruit at JUCO games and even send assistants to JUCO nationals.
- **"You'll get stuck there."** → FALSE" If you focus on your academic and athletic performance, JUCO can significantly boost your career.

Coach Kent's Advice:

“JUCO isn’t about settling; it’s about sharpening. It’ll test your character, your work ethic, and your love for the game. If you survive JUCO, D1 won’t scare you.”

Action Steps:

- Research top JUCO programs in your region (start with NJCAA.org).
- Talk with your coach or counselor about your NCAA eligibility status.
- Understand the JUCO to NCAA transfer path and GPA/coursework requirements.
- Stay on top of credits. Most JUCO players lose offers because of missed academic marks.
- Watch JUCO basketball highlights to see the level of play; this isn’t backyard ball.

Unlocking the Next Level - Bulk Pricing Sheet

The Truth About NCAA Recruiting, NIL, and The New Rules

Package	Quantity	Retail Value	Your Cost	Savings
Starter Bundle	5 books	\$75.00	\$59.95	\$15.05
Team Pack	10 books	\$150.00	\$114.95	\$35.05
Program Builder	25 books	\$375.00	\$274.95	\$100.05
Coach's Locker Room	50 books	\$750.00	\$519.95	\$230.05
Leadership Pack	100+ books	\$1,500.00+	\$999.95+	\$500.00+

Includes shipping & delivery confirmation.

Custom orders available upon request.

Contact Coach Jason Kent

jkent@nextlevel24.org

708-548-5607