



**USA WATER POLO
TEXAS DEVELOPMENT
COLLEGE PACKET**

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Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Water Polo Resume**
- 3. Top 10-15 Schools**
- 4. Collegiate Clubs**
- 5. California Community Colleges**
- 6. Varsity Schools**
- 7. Conferences of NCAA Water Polo programs**
- 8. NCAA Championships**
- 9. Benefits Available for NCAA student-athletes**
- 10. Athletic Scholarship & Other Financial Aid Opportunities**
- 11. Being Proactive & Getting Started**
- 12. What do Colleges/Coaches Look For?**
- 13. Preparing to Play in College**
- 14. NCAA Eligibility Center**
- 15. Recruiting & Contact with Coaches**
- 16. Communication & Social Media**
- 17. College Visits**

USAWP Texas Development College Packet

1. Introduction

Participating in college sports is a privilege. Everyone will not have an opportunity to do play water polo at the next level. Sports give student-athletes a taste of the real life after graduation and beyond. In school, you learn, study, and then are tested on the material. After college, most student-athletes will be a part of a team in their work setting similar to what they went through in college, albeit for drastically different goals, etc. In sports, athletes learn how to work together to reach common goals, are held accountable for actions by others (coaches and teammates), and are tested everyday on their knowledge of the team and the job at hand.

Yes, water polo is a great sport and it can help get you into one of the best colleges in the country, but please understand that each student-athlete will only get out of sports what he or she puts into it. Athletes need to start working NOW to make sure they get into the college of their choice in the FUTURE. In this packet is some info on college water polo programs, athletic programs in general, and how to initially contact coaches of universities you may be interested in. Each athlete has a choice to be PROACTIVE or wait until the last minute. Getting started early only increases a student-athletes chance of getting into his/her college of choice.

Deciding on a College: DO NOT pick a college based strictly on water polo or athletic possibilities. Use your athletic ability to possibly earn some scholarship opportunities or get your foot in the door of the school you want to attend. After narrowing your choices down to a manageable few, sit down with Mom and Dad and decide what can be done financially and then decide the best fit for you to accomplish your goals ***academically, athletically, and financially*** while having the priority being ACADEMICS!!!!!!

Mom, Dad, and Coach Can Help: Although most high school students may not want to ask their parents for help, they can be wonderful resources: helping make copies, video your games, calling admissions departments, staying on top you, providing needed advice, etc. Coaches can also provide help when asked. Coaches are more than willing to call, email, or send letters for just about anyone. You must ask for people to support you...it will not just take care of itself.

2. Water Polo Resume

All student-athletes who are entering their junior or seniors years (or earlier) should develop a water polo resume (sample resume included). This can act as a tool for the athlete to “sell themselves” to college coaches. An athlete can send his/her resume to a college coach to initiate contact and update the resume to continue contact. This also shows the college coach that a prospective athlete is organized, motivated, determined, and is willing to work hard for their goals. These are all traits college coaches look for in prospective athletes. This also does the coaches job for them and encourages the coach to start a file on the athlete, research the athlete, and begin recruiting the athlete.

3. Top 10-15 Schools

All athletes should NOT wait for schools to contact them. Instead, all athletes NEED to research schools that meet their needs *academically, athletically, and financially*. This research should allow athletes to develop a list of 10-15 schools that best fit their needs. As the process continues, schools can be added to or subtracted from this list. This will streamline the efforts of the student-athlete in contacting coaches, choosing where to take recruiting visits, and finally deciding on which school to attend. Below are some simple criteria to think about when creating a Top 10 list of schools.

School Size (small/medium/large): Although school size should not be a major factor in deciding a college, it should be taken into consideration. There are all shapes and sizes of water polo schools throughout the country. Some schools are large schools which feel like small schools and others are small schools which feel like big schools.

Public/Private: There is a preconceived notion that private schools are more expensive than public schools. When looking only at face value, this is true. But taking into account scholarship money availability, financial aid options, etc., this is NOT the case. For example, there are no varsity programs in Texas that are public schools. Therefore attending a public school in California would require an athlete to pay an “out of state tuition” with limited options for financial aid, work studies, etc.. Keep an open mind as all schools will have different costs to them.

East/West: Again, there is a preconceived notion that West Coast water polo programs are better than others. Yes, the top schools on the West Coast are bigger and better than everyone else. BUT there are also very bad West Coast programs and everything in between. There is a place for everyone on both the West Coast & the East Coast.

Playing Situation: Something prospective student-athletes need to ask themselves is what type of situation they want out of their NCAA playing experience. This is relative for everyone. Below is a simple guide to allow athletes to separate schools into categories.

- **A Schools:** the athlete is a difference maker on the team and is an integral part of the team’s success their freshman year. They play all the games and the team would be less competitive without them.
- **B School:** the athlete is a part of the team’s success, but not the top 3-4 players. He/she may start or come off the bench during their freshman year and will grow into a primary role in their sophomore year and beyond.
- **C School:** the athlete does not play much their freshman year except for blowouts. They get a little more playing time their sophomore year, but continues to learn and grow in practice. They do contribute and play significantly during their junior year and is an integral part of the team’s success during their senior year.
- **D School:** the athlete MIGHT get a chance to play their senior year.

4. Collegiate Clubs

An option besides varsity level water polo is to play for a collegiate club. The club sports are usually sanctioned by the school's department of Recreation Sports (or similar department) and are student run organizations. The number of club programs varies from year to year but last was counted at above 300 for both men and women combined. The club teams have opportunities to play in regional leagues, open tournaments, and national championships. For more information on collegiate clubs, please go to: <https://collegiatewaterpolo.org>

5. California Community Colleges

This packet is mostly about NCAA sponsored institutions and about NCAA rules and regulations. Another varsity option is playing for a community college in California. For the right student-athlete, this is a tremendous option. Playing for a community college allows athletes to get a taste of a higher level of water polo, a head start on an education, showcase their skills to four year universities for a possible future transfer, and also live the college life away from home. Many athletes from Texas have taken this route prior to playing for a four-year institution. Athletes need to contact the coach FIRST before the coach can contact the athlete.

- **CCCAA Women's Water Polo:** <https://www.cccaasports.org/sports/wwaterpolo/index>
- **List of Women's Teams:** <http://www.waterpoloplanet.com/water-polo-planet/looking-for-a-college-team-in-usa/womens-junior-college-teams/>
- **CCCAA Men's Water Polo:** <https://www.cccaasports.org/sports/mwaterpolo/index>
- **List of Men's Teams:** <http://www.waterpoloplanet.com/water-polo-planet/looking-for-a-college-team-in-usa/mens-junior-college-teams/>

6. Varsity Water Polo: NCAA and NAIA Schools

Academic Institutions who play varsity athletics can choose to be part of various national organizations. The largest (and most well known) of these institutions is the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association). Most varsity water polo programs are at schools that are members of the NCAA. There are also multiple NAIA schools who sponsor varsity water polo for both men and women. The NAIA schools offer athletic scholarships and play mostly NCAA teams. They DO NOT follow NCAA rules, but compete all season, and offer an alternative to NCAA water polo play (NAIA schools can't play in conference/national champs).

Again, most schools around the country play water polo at the NCAA level. NCAA sports are the sports sanctioned by the school's Athletic Department, have a paid coach (possibly fulltime or part time), and are financially supported by the Athletic Department. For water polo, there are 70+ women's NCAA and 50+ men's programs around the country. The NCAA programs participate in conference/league games, play in tournaments around the country, and can qualify for the Men's and Women's NCAA Championships at the end of each of their individual seasons (Men-Fall, Women-Spring). There are also school sponsored National Championships for both men and women for NCAA Division III programs.

Division I, II, and III is the way the NCAA separates athletic departments at various schools. Each participating NCAA school will determine which division they will participate in. Each Division of the NCAA has its own set of rules governing their member institutions. Many are the same, but some are very different. Generally, Division I schools are bigger institutions who fully fund all of their NCAA sports by offering scholarships and have full time coaches on staff for each sport. Division II schools tend to be smaller institutions who do not give as many scholarships (by rule) and do not have as much money appropriated for intercollegiate athletics. Division III schools are smaller schools with limited budgets who do not offer athletic scholarships, but instead focus more on the education of their student-athletes.

There are NOT separate NCAA Championships for Division I, II, and III (unlike Football, Basketball, etc.). Therefore, most all water polo teams across the country play teams from all different divisions (some even in the same conference). Water polo is a small community. ALL the NCAA programs work together to keep the sport alive and thriving in colleges throughout the country.

7. Conferences of NCAA Water Polo programs

For both the men and women, there are multiple conferences available for NCAA water schools to participate in (see list below). Some teams may also be part of no water polo playing conferences based on their athletic department affiliations and/or they may be independents who set their own schedule without league games and conference ties. Most NCAA teams will play in “open tournaments” earlier in the year and then play “conference games”. Each conference uses the “conference games” to seed a Conference Championship whose winner then represents the conference at the NCAA Championships.

- **NCAA Varsity Men’s & Women’s Coach Directory (USA Water Polo):**
<https://usawaterpolo.org/sports/2018/11/28/resources-college-directory-html.aspx>
- **NCAA Women’s Varsity Coach Directory (Water Polo Planet):**
<http://www.waterpoloplanet.com/water-polo-planet/looking-for-a-college-team-in-usa/womens-college-teams/>
- **NCAA Men’s Varsity Coach Directory (Water Polo Planet):**
<http://www.waterpoloplanet.com/water-polo-planet/looking-for-a-college-team-in-usa/mens-college-teams/>

NCAA Women’s Varsity Conferences

- Golden Coast Conference
- Mountain Pacific Sports Federation
- Western Water Polo Association
- SCIAC
- CWPA
- Metro Atlantic Athletic Conf.
- Big West Conference

NCAA Men’s Varsity Conferences

- Golden Coast Conference
- Mountain Pacific Sports Federation
- Western Water Polo Association
- SCIAC
- CWPA – Northeast Conference
- CWPA – Mid Atlantic Conference

8. NCAA Championships

The NCAA Championships for men is the first weekend of December (Fall Sport). The NCAA Championship for Women is the second weekend of May (Spring Sport). The number of teams participating in the Championships is based on NCAA schools sponsoring the sport of water polo. As the number of schools sponsoring water polo increases, the number of teams participating in the NCAA Championships will increase. All the various conference champions AND 2-3 at large teams will play single elimination games to determine the National Champion.

The MPSF is the best conference in the country. This conference is made up of the best teams in the country, including Stanford, UCLA, USC, and Cal. Throughout NCAA water polo history a school in the MPSF has always been the NCAA Champion. Only on a handful of occasions has another school from a separate conference even made the championship game.

9. Benefits Available for NCAA student-athletes

No one should play a sport in college unless they love the sport and want to continue to improve and challenge themselves. There are many extra benefits a student-athlete MAY have as an NCAA student-athlete. Do not compete only for these benefits or they may be taken away. Put your heart and hard work into the sport while in school and the school, athletic department, and your teammates will pay you back ten fold. Some of the benefits include, but not limited to, the following:

Early registration: For normal students, most have to hope the class then want will be there when it is their turn to register. Most schools allow student-athletes to register before the main student body to make sure the athletes to schedule their classes around practices & competitions. This will allow the student-athletes to have their pick of classes, teachers, and times.

Academic Oversight/Tutors: Whether it is the athletic department or coaching staff, most schools provide study halls for student-athletes. These study halls are usually for ALL freshman and upperclassmen that need extra work. Additionally, many athletic departments offer Academic Oversight such as study halls, making sure athletes are going to class, getting athletes the proper academic help as needed, etc. Most normal students who are struggling will have to pay for tutors and have to go and find them. Lastly, most athletic departments provide tutors for their student-athletes as needed.

Professional Coaching: Unlike clubs, most NCAA programs employ professional coaches who are there to teach the kids and improve the program. Some may be full time while others may be part time. In theory, these coaches will train athletes with the best techniques available to help the program achieve as many wins as people. Additionally, they act as parents away from the home and a place for parents to communicate about their child's progress both academically and athletically.

Sports Medicine Staff: ALL NCAA programs will have training programs available for athletes to treat injuries and make sure they get the best medical attentions possible. This will prevent further injuries and quicker recovery time for injuries.

Athletic Dorms/Training Tables: Most athletic departments provide training tables in a specific cafeteria on campus and will provide the best dorms for their athletes to room with other athletes (not necessarily athletes on their own team). This will provide the athlete with the proper nutrition he/she needs to perform, train, study, and excel in the classroom.

Strength Training: Professional athletic strength coaches are on staff at most athletic departments to make sure each student-athlete receives the best strength training and conditioning possible. Sport specific training is provided in and out of season. These coaches usually are assigned to teams so each strength coach will get to know each athlete and what each team's needs and wants are. Normally separate weight rooms are used specifically for NCAA teams. This provides an environment where everyone is there for a specific purpose: to EXCEL and ACHIEVE.

Per Diem, Trip Costs, & Team Apparel: Similar to some high school programs, most NCAA programs provide hotel room, pay the transportation costs, and give per diem for each student athlete on trips. This way extra money is not needed, out of pocket, from each athlete. Additionally, teams may provide practice/competition suits, swim caps, goggles, dry land apparel, team apparel/bags, etc.

Camaraderie: This cannot be undervalued. Having a ready made group of people to be friends with, study with, and have a social life with is very important. Many college students do not know very many people when they first arrive at college. Although friends will be made in most situations, having a group available to an incoming student-athlete creates a stable, support structure most normal students pay for at sororities and fraternities.

Entrance into the School: Most coaches have some sort of pull within the admission's department. This will only help prospective student athletes in their quest to get in to some of the top academic institutions. Most water polo coaches have slots within each incoming freshman class. The coaches know the ins/outs of the admissions process at their schools. They will know how to work within the system for the benefit of each prospective athlete.

10. Athletic Scholarships & Other Financial Aid Opportunities

Many NCAA Division I & II water polo programs offer athlete scholarships to its incoming freshman. This varies between schools and is very different for men and women. More scholarship money is available on the women's side due to Title IX parameters and more varsity schools playing the sport. Not all programs offer the full allotment of athletic scholarship money. Most coaches give partial athletic scholarships to many athletes. More "full rides" are available for the women. You must ask each coach what his or her particular situation is.

Many coaches have very good knowledge of their school's academic financial packages. Academic money is available for incoming student-athletes. These funds can offset the lack of athletic money or be put together to offer a student-athlete a "financial package" to attend a school. Everyone has to remember, there are restrictions on all scholarships. You must meet minimum guidelines athletically and academically to keep scholarships for all four years. All academic or athletic scholarships are for only one year (or semester). It is renewable at the discretion of the coach/institution each year (scholarship can increase or decrease!!!).

There is more money available for college than most people can possibly imagine: Pell grants, ROTC scholarships, Service Academy, student loans, outside academic scholarships, etc. YOU must find out what is available to you. Make sure you talk with your counselor at school to find different avenues to receive money for colleges. Go online and investigate your different options. Everyone is a bit different and looking for something different. There is money available; you need to go get it BEFORE you attend college. The money is much tougher to get after you start college (same goes for graduate school...when the time comes).

Five Year Clock/Red Shirts: A student-athlete can only receive five years of athletic scholarship over a six year period (unless extenuating circumstances exist, i.e. medical red shirt, Olympic red shirt, etc.). This is true for “walk ons” or “recruited walk ons”. A student athlete’s five year clock begins when they begin college. During this five years, he/she can play competitively for four years. The extra year can be a year in which the athlete sits out or “Red Shirts”. An athlete who “Red Shirts” practices with the team and is treated as a member (including any athletic money) but does not travel or compete with the team.

11. Being Proactive & Getting Started

How do you get started? Number one figure out what schools you want to attend based on possible majors, proximity to home, costs, etc., regardless of whether they play water polo. If a school does play water polo, you have an advantage over everyone else. Then you need to research these schools to make sure you understand what you will be getting yourself into. Once you have organized your ideas on college and done the requisite research, then this is when you need to contact the coach of the water polo program. You can contact the coach via email, phone, text, or intermediaries (friends, parents, etc.).

Understand that water polo is a small sport in the large scheme of athletics. Programs often have limited recruiting budgets and possibly may only have one coach on staff for on deck coaching, recruiting, and all the other tasks involved in making a successful program. Therefore, never think that the coach will find you. Always be proactive when it comes time to contact coaches. Coaches enjoy talking to potential student-athletes especially when they are organized, know what they want, and have done their research AND call the coach. This is like X-MAS day for most coaches. If you leave a message or do not receive a response to your email/call/text, DO NOT assume the coach does not think you are worthy. Follow up with additional inquiries. NCAA coaches are very busy recruiting, coaching, etc. During the summer they may be away from their desks for weeks recruiting. Do not worry; just keep plugging along. STAY PROACTIVE and always have questions ready to ask the coach.

You can also have your club and high school coaches contact the coaches for you. Most coaches would bend over backwards to help you get into the school you want to attend. Coaches would likely write emails, make phone calls, and send texts. Let your coach know specifically what you would like them to do (and keep them updated throughout the process). The more players playing in college from Texas the better representation the state will have.

Make sure you have certain materials available to send to the coach: water polo resume/info sheet, game schedule (club or high school), results/statistics, videos, and/or pictures. The more you can send the better. This will allow the coach to get to know you a little bit more and put a face to the name. **STAY PROACTIVE** and always have questions ready to ask the coach (see below)

Keeping the coach up to date on your progression throughout the season is a good idea. You are recruiting the coach just as much as they are recruiting you. Send the coaches updates on your teams successes along with stats, etc. Sending videos of yourself will give the coach an idea of how you play in the case he/she is unable to attend your games. **BE SMART**, send information that will put a positive light on you as a person and water polo player. Leave certain aspects off the water polo resume if you feel it would put a negative (ie, **DO NOT** put your fastest 500 time as 9:43.00). **BUT** never lie to a coach, if he/she asks be honest. If you are honest the coach will be honest with you as well.

Some important questions to ask Coaches:

Athletics

What positions will I play on your team?

- It's not always obvious.
- Most coaches want to be flexible so that you are not disappointed.

Describe the other players competing at the same position.

- If there is a former high-school all-American at that position, you may want to take that into consideration.
- This will give you clues as to what year you might be a starter.

Can I "redshirt" my first year?

- Find out how common it is to redshirt and how that will affect graduation.
- Does the school redshirt you if you are injured?

What are the physical requirements each year?

- Philosophies of strength and conditioning vary by institution.
- You may be required to maintain a certain weight.

How would you best describe your coaching style?

- Every coach has a particular style that involves different motivational techniques and discipline.
- You need to know if a coach's teaching style does not match your learning style.

What is the game plan?

- For team sports, find out what kind of offense and defense is employed.
- For individual sports, find out how you are seeded and how to qualify for conference and national championships.

When does the head coach's contract end?

- Don't make any assumptions about how long a coach will be at a school.
- If the coach is losing and the contract ends in two years, you may have a new coach.

Describe the preferred, invited and uninvited walk-on situation. How many make it, compete and earn a scholarship?

- Different teams treat walk-ons differently.

Academics

How good is the department in my major?

- Smaller colleges can have very highly rated departments.
- A team's reputation is only one variable to consider.

What percentage of players on scholarship graduate in four years?

- This will tell you about the quality of their commitment to academics.
- The team's grade-point average also is a good indicator of the coach's commitment to academics.

College Life

Describe the typical class size.

- At larger schools, classes are likely to be larger and taught by teaching assistants.
- Average class size is important to the amount of attention you receive.

Describe in detail your academic support program. For example: Study-hall requirements, tutor availability, staff, class load, faculty cooperation.

- This is imperative for marginal students.
- Find a college that will take the 3.000 students and help them get a 3.500 GPA.

Describe the typical day for a student-athlete.

- This will give you a good indication of how much time is spent in class, practice, studying and traveling.
- It also will give you a good indication of what coaches expect.

What are the residence halls like?

- Make sure you would feel comfortable in study areas, community bathrooms and laundry facilities.
- Number of students in a room and coed dorms are other variables to consider.

Will I be required to live on campus throughout my athletics participation?

- If the answer is yes, ask whether there are exceptions.
- Apartment living may be better than dorm living.

Financial Aid

How much financial aid is available for summer school?

- There is no guarantee. Get a firm commitment.
- You may need to lighten your normal load and go to summer school in order to graduate in four years. You can take graduate courses and maintain your eligibility.

What are the details of financial aid at your institution?

- What does my scholarship cover?
- What can I receive in addition to the scholarship and how do I get more aid?

How long does my scholarship last?

- Most people think a "full ride" is good for four years.
- Financial aid is available on a one-year renewable basis.

If I'm injured, what happens to my financial aid?

- A grant-in-aid is not guaranteed past a one-year period even for injuries.
- It is important to know if a school has a commitment to assist student-athletes for more than a year after they have been injured.

What are my opportunities for employment while I'm a student?

12. What do Colleges/Coaches Look For?

Colleges look for...

- Great grades (more As than Bs) and high standardized test scores
- Consistency or an upward trend in grades
- Challenging courses (Honors/AP/IB)
- Involvement in extracurricular activities-focused & sustained
- Maturity, Self-Awareness, and Authenticity
- Enthusiasm about and knowledge of their institution
- Specialists and leaders
- A diverse class

Coaches look for...

- Motivated athletes willing to work hard
- Traditional strengths: size, height, speed...if deficient in one area, compensate in another
- Athletes to fill needed positions, eg: goalies, lefties, 2M, 2MD
- Intangibles such as toughness, heart, competitive drive, grit...
- “Coachable” athletes; good teammates
- Genuine interest in school-be knowledgeable about the school and its water polo program

13. Preparing to Play in College

Playing athletics in college will be very difficult mentally and physically. It will be harder than you can imagine. Preparing by continuing to improve before you attend college is crucial especially if you have high expectation of how you would like your athletic career to continue at the next level.

- Train & play at National Tournaments, USAWP National Junior Olympics
- Train & play at ODP Zone Camps, ODP National Champs
- Seek out the best training available to develop/maintain strong skills and fundamentals.
- Obtain individualized skill instruction if desired.
- Cross train-do strength & conditioning program to complement water polo.
- Participate in off-season training & competition, eg: club program, ODP, clinics, etc.
- SWIM! Swimming is an integral part of water polo.
- Attend camps on college campuses, if desired.
- Adopt good health & nutrition habits/lifestyle.
- Once admitted, stay in shape—report to campus ready to compete

14. NCAA Eligibility Center

- NCAA regulates all athletic recruiting to ensure that prospective student-athletes are amateur athletes & academically prepared for college and graduate with a degree w/in a reasonable time
- Register with Eligibility Center to be eligible to be recruited
- Visit www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org
- Must be registered with Eligibility Center to take official visits
- Must be cleared through Eligibility Center to play NCAA water polo
- Must send final transcripts-end of senior year
- Must complete final amateur certification to be determined eligible to play

15. Recruiting & Contact with Coaches

- Strictly governed by NCAA Rules; pertain mostly to DI & DII schools
- Prospective recruits can contact coaches (calls, emails, letters, texts, etc.) & complete online recruiting questionnaires.
- No limit to unofficial visits - ok to meet w/coach on campus during visit
- Division I coaches can send recruiting materials; all forms of private correspondence permitted starting September 1 of sophomore year
- Division I coaches can send recruiting materials, call, & text starting September 1 of prospective recruit's junior year communications
- Division II coaches can send recruiting materials, call, & have off campus contact starting June 15 immediately preceding junior year
- Division III coaches can call & send written information to prospective recruits starting freshman year of high school w/o limits; unlimited off campus contacts after junior year; official visits permitted opening

16. Communication & Social Media

- Use a mature email address. Update if needed
- Coaches can receive texts, but cannot send texts.
- Beware of copying and pasting... Be personal
- Presentation counts-use complete sentences, proper grammar, spell, capitalize, & punctuate correctly to make a good first impression

Social Media

- People are watching-USE CAUTION!!
- If a coach doesn't respond, don't give up.
- Update your Facebook or other social media accounts
- Coaches cannot "chat" with you online.
- Be aware of what you "Post", "Tweet", "Snapchat", or photograph, etc.-it never really disappears and can come back to haunt you!!!

17. College Visits

Unofficial

- Unlimited, typically taken before the end of junior year
- Financed completely by prospective recruit's family
- Junior Day visits-by invitation only, organized as unofficial visits

Official

- Taken during prospective recruit's senior year – 5 maximum
- Financed in whole or in part by the school
- Before visit, prospective recruit required to submit high school transcript, SAT/ACT scores, NCAA Eligibility ID number & any other documents or forms college requests
- Be on your best behavior-coaches are watching you too