

Recruiting and Transitioning to University as a Varsity Athlete

By: Vickie Croley

Vickie Croley is the former Head Coach at Western University for 32 years and current combined events coach for Western University and LWTF. In this role she has communicated with over 6000 high school students who were interested in coming to Western and consulted with around 3000 first year student-athletes.

Advice for high school athletes interested in Canadian university track and field: Recruiting Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Email the head coach directly. Keep it short, clear, and personal. Before writing, look at the team's Instagram page or website so you can reference something specific.
- Ask about the team's standards. Most programs have expectations for performance. Show that you're aware of this.
- Send your personal bests. Use official results not the results you think you will achieve. Grade 11 performances matter the most in recruiting. When I get an email from a high school student, results are the most important thing I'm looking for. I'll scan an email for those. Coaches are busy and appreciate not having to look up results.
- Share what else you're involved in (work, clubs, other sports). Coaches want a full picture of you.
- Proofread your email. Make sure names, schools, and details are correct. Don't send an email that mentions the wrong university or is addressed to the wrong coach.
- Include academics. Share your intended academic program, Grade 11 average, any completed Grade 12U/12M marks, and projected Grade 12U/12M marks. Your average is based on 12U English plus any program prerequisites and then your next highest marks for a total of 6 courses.
- Follow up if you don't hear back. Coaches are busy and get a lot of emails; sometimes they simply miss an email.
- Try to be competitive in more than one event. That way you can contribute more to the team especially if roster sizes are reduced in the future.
- Coaches, please talk to head coaches or assistant coaches to let them know if you think any of your athletes have the ability to make their team. There are so many recruits out there that we can definitely miss some potential team members. And at Western we would love to have as many local athletes on our team as possible.

Don't:

- Don't pay for recruiting services. They are unnecessary. Contacting the head coach yourself is adequate.
- Don't ask for an athletic scholarship as they are rare and if you are at that level the coach will offer you one. There are academic scholarships and bursaries as well that you can ask about or look up on the university's website.
- Parents, don't email for your son or daughter. Coaches want to hear directly from the student-athlete.

In summary here's what to include in your first email:

Brief introduction

Event(s) and current personal bests

Academic information (program of interest, Grade 11 marks, any completed/predicted Grade 12 marks)

A sentence showing genuine interest in the team/program

Something about the team or program. For example, include a congratulations on last season's team result

A question asking for more information about the team, standards, and the recruiting process

How can student-athletes best handle the transition from high school to university while being a varsity student-athlete?

In high school, your schedule is very structured. You have three 70-minute classes, school practice, and then club practice 3–4 times per week. In university, your schedule becomes much more flexible and managing that freedom is part of the transition.

If you are in a program like Engineering, or sciences with multiple labs you may have 25 -31 hours of school. It may be a tough load to manage while being on a team. It is possible but you can consider spreading your education over 5 years so that you can experience both fully.

Also consider King's University College or Huron University College as they are much smaller than the main campus and may be more suitable for some students.

When in university use the Student Development Centre as they offer excellent supports, including:

- Time-management strategies
- How to write multiple-choice exams
- How to learn effectively from lectures
- Writing support for essays and assignments
- Exam preparation techniques

At Western every athlete has access to an academic mentor within the team, usually someone in your program or faculty. Ask them questions as they've already navigated what you're about to face.

Western has an Academic Success Program Coordinator who runs sessions on important topics and can also meet with you individually. Ask your coach to connect you.

These programs are working at Western. Last year, Western had 75 XC/TF Academic All-Canadians which is having an 80% average or higher. In 2024-25 Western ranks #1 in the country for total AAC across all sports.

To continue to compete each year you need to pass the equivalent of 3 full courses the previous year. Unfortunately, there will always be someone who struggles. If you're struggling, reach out to the head coach early. Don't let it slide or wait until it becomes overwhelming.