

The logo for TASS (The Association for Sport and Society) features the word "tass" in a bold, red, lowercase sans-serif font. A red five-pointed star is positioned to the right of the letters "ss".

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Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of Player Migration to the USA within English Basketball

Project Report

Produced by TASS in collaboration with Basketball England



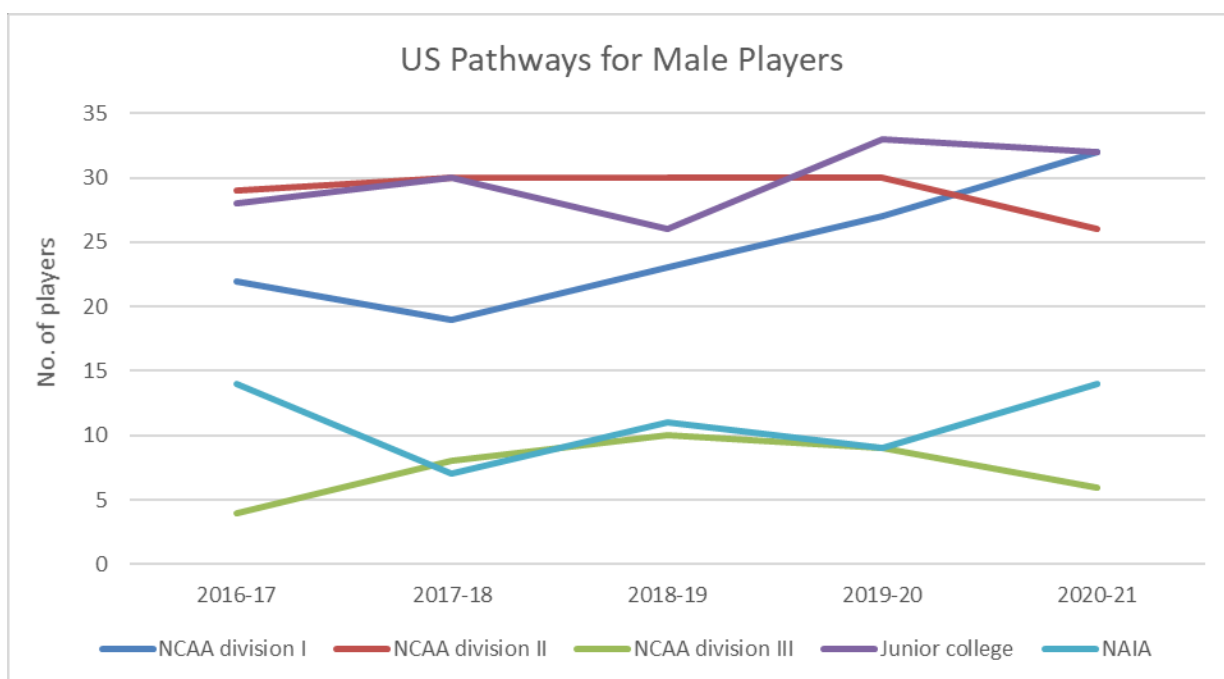
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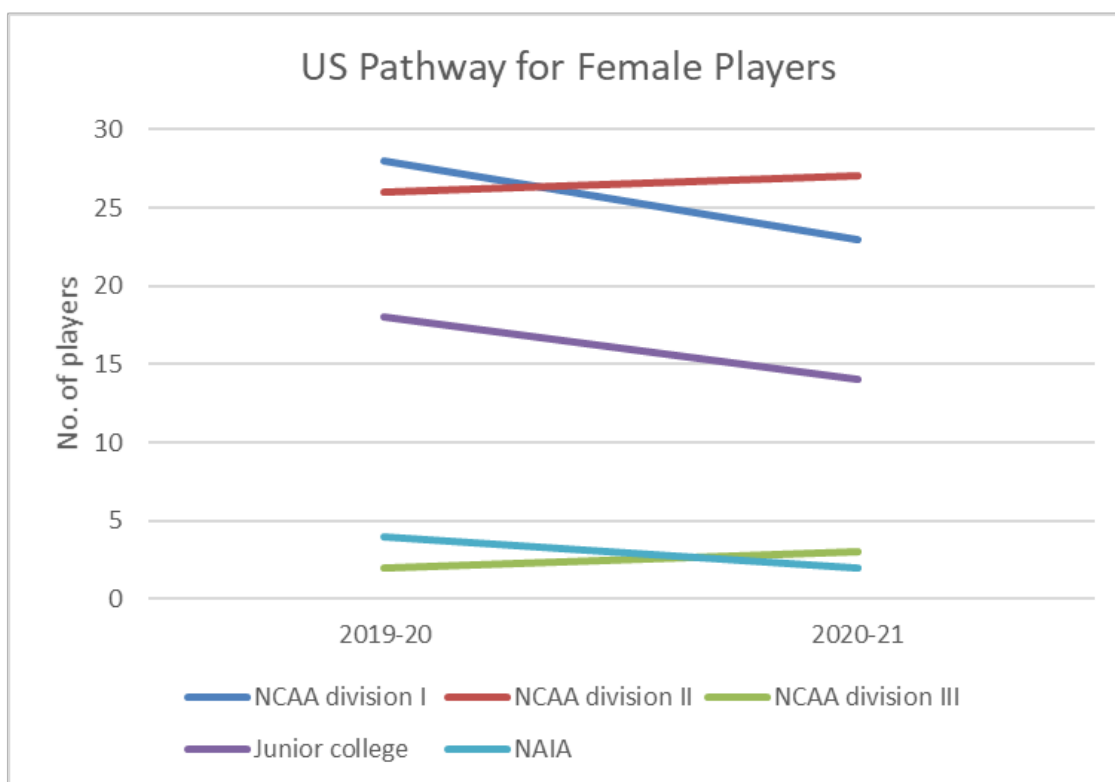
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Introduction

Global sport migration is on the rise. An increasing number of athletes are choosing to forgo opportunities in their home countries for new challenges across seas. The United States of America (USA) Collegiate system has become a commonplace transition for English athletes across various sports. In fact, according to NCAA data, when ranked in order of countries that send the greatest number of athletes to the US, the United Kingdom (UK) is ranked second (Canada being the first). In 2019, a total of 1941 athletes migrated from the UK to NCAA division I or II colleges. Of these athletes, 97 of them were basketball players (NCAA, 2020). According to data provided by Hoopsfix ([See here for article](#)), 179 players attended US institutions in 2020-21 (including NCAA division I, II and III, Junior colleges and NAIA schools). From this data, while there is limited data for female players, we can see general trends in the conferences that players are attending, including less players attending NAIA and NCAA division III colleges and the higher attendance to junior college for male players compared to female players.





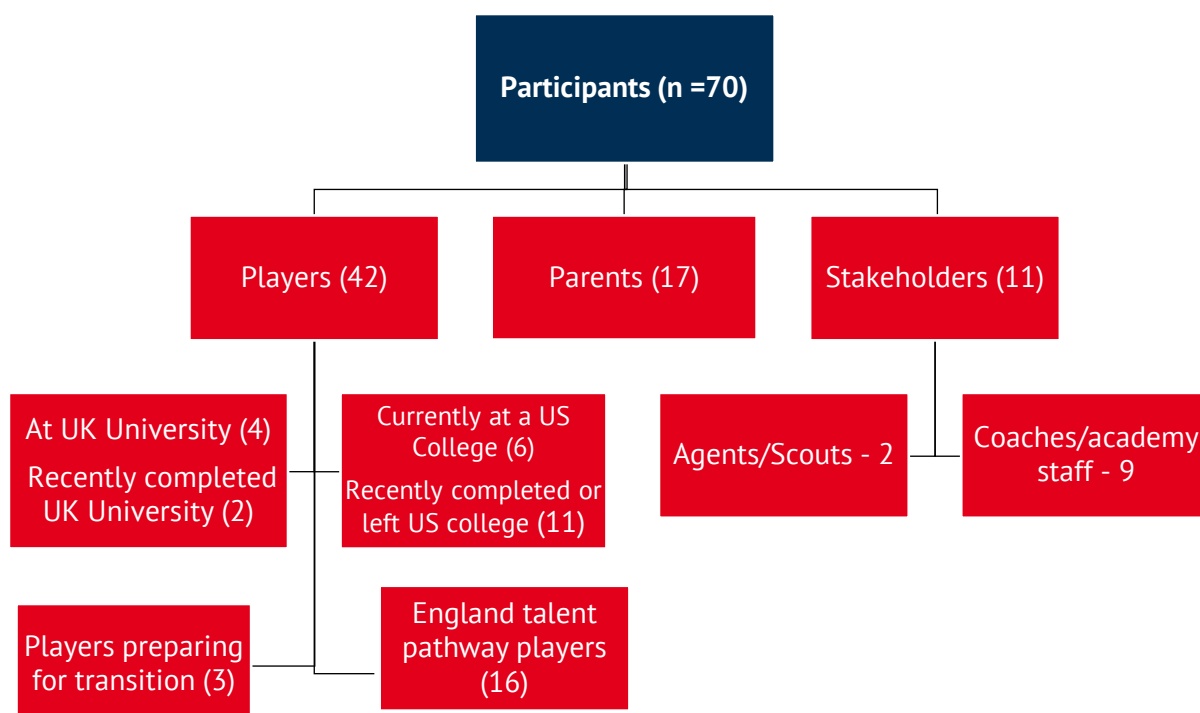
In March 2020, Basketball England approached the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) to undertake a research project focusing on player migration to the USA. Basketball England have seen a significant growth in the number of players transitioning to the USA to compete in high school and college basketball. Only one previous piece of research has explored the UK to USA transition amongst student-athletes in a range of sports, and this is the first piece of work to focus exclusively on basketball.

The overarching aim of this project was to assist players to make optimal decisions around their future pathway, help players and parents to understand the factors they should consider around the USA decision, who they should speak to, and how they can effectively prepare. The following report provides an honest picture from various stakeholders and players across Basketball England's talent pathway. Sitting within the report are a series of educational resources for players and parents to help support their USA decision making and transition experience.

The current project

Participants

In total, 70 participants took part in this project. These included a mixture of male and female players at varying stages of the English talent pathway and in the USA, and their parents who were perceived as key individuals that help support players decisions and transitions. In addition, the perspectives of Basketball England coaches, club coaches, and academy staff was pivotal to understand the decisions player's face and the support they require along the way. Finally, the inclusion of agents and scouts added an inside perspective on the recruitment process to the USA. A breakdown of the participants is as follows:



Data collection & analysis

In total, 38 individual semi-structured interviews took place with players, parents, and stakeholders, and 4 focus groups with players and parents within the 11-13 and 14-16 age categories. These interviews took place from May to October 2020 and were conducted by 4 different researchers. Data were analysed and sorted into themes and written into the below report.

Summary of key findings

The findings of this project will be of interest to the NGB, English players that are in the process of deciding which route to take, their parents, coaches across the country, agents/scouts and more. Key findings of this project include:

- The US Collegiate pathway is an extremely popular route for young English players to aspire to and is very much considered to be the 'norm' if a player wants to have a career in the sport.
- Parents welcome the idea of their children going to the US but wish they had a clearer vision around what the English pathway and opportunities looked like
- Whilst almost every young player we spoke to aspired to follow the US route, almost no youth player thoroughly understood the process of how to gain a scholarship, areas to look out for, and some of the key challenges they may face. Instead, there was a significant focus on what they could 'gain' from the US system (often with an idealised view), without consideration for the actual experience itself.
- Young players views on the US route are shaped by social media, peers, family, and coaches.
- There are obvious red flags that parents and players should consider when communicating with US colleges and working with agencies. It is easy to see how susceptible players could be to accepting offers. The players own research is extremely valuable in these circumstances.
- Current English players at college in the US believe that if they had considered their options more carefully, their experience would have been optimised. Lack of thorough consideration and preparation can lead to transfer or dropout.
- It was surprising how many players wish they had been more open minded about going to a division II school at the start of their recruitment journey instead of being fixed on the idea of going to a division I school.
- Players in the US would have considered the UK route more carefully if they had been provided more information, UK universities were more active with their recruitment of basketball players, and their coaches had been more supportive of them not following the US route

Based on the findings of this project, 6 overarching recommendations have been presented to Basketball England to action (in a separate document). We hope that the recommendations will play an active role in improving overall player experience in the UK and US pathways. The recommendations include both short and long wins that could be implemented.

Pre-USA

**This section focuses on the decisions and perceptions pre-US
pathway**

What do players at different stages of the talent pathway and their parents understand about the US system?

One of the first questions this research sought to understand was what the general perceptions about the USA Collegiate System are, particularly amongst players & parents in different stages of the English talent pathway. To understand this, TASS hosted four focus groups with players and their parents across the aspire and development age groups. Individual interviews were also conducted with players and parents of players who had decided to go to America for education and basketball.

Under 16 age group

Most players in the study who were in or had been part of the US system explained that they had become interested in the US route within this age bracket (approx. age 14-15). In addition:

- Players as young as 11 described an interest in the American route. In this age-group there was a general perception that the American route offered the highest level of basketball and would give them the best opportunities to play professionally.
- Despite this, players often had not considered the American route in terms of life outside of basketball and in some cases, academics.

“America is obviously the best level of basketball out there.” (Player, 11-13 age group)

While the players were interested in this route, at this age they rarely knew what the process of recruitment entailed, the different options available to them or what the experience would be like once they got there. Some players did explain that they might need to prepare for the transition from the UK to the US, but this preparation was solely basketball-based:

“I think I’ll try to adapt to the speed and physicality because especially over there there’s a lot of really tall and a lot more athletic people in America than the UK, for example. So just trying to learn to play under that can be quite a challenge” (Player, 14-16 age group)

Parents’ view:

In general, parents were in agreement with their children that the level of basketball was higher in the US. Parents of this age group did however naturally consider the academic side of the US route, including using the American system to access a “free education”.

“I would like a scholarship for him. I would like uni paid for through his sport. That would be the good thing for me, that his education’s paid for, more than anything” (Parent, 11-13 age group)

Parents had limited information regarding the process of recruitment and the system within America, including which schools offer “free education” and the process for accessing and securing scholarships. Generally speaking, the parents had not looked into the details of the American route because they felt there was still a significant amount of time until their children would need to consider their options. However, support staff who advise players in this area would suggest that players need to start the process around age 14 (when selecting GCSE options in year 9).

The parents tended to be more cautious and shared more concerns than the players, including the distance their child would be, the consequences of them getting injured, if they would enjoy the experience, and the challenge of securing a scholarship.

16-19 age group

Like the under 16 age group, the 16-19 age group mostly considered the American route to be the 'best', including having better facilities, better coaching, and better opportunities to play professionally than in the UK. Many of these players considered the American route to be the only option for them, but again, had rarely considered the impact on their lives outside of basketball or their academics. The general observation within this age-group, particularly from players in the academy system, was that the American pathway is the 'normal' route.

"Especially being now in an academy, it is such a normalized thing." (Player, 16-19 age group)

This age group showed much more variety in the amount of knowledge the players had of the American system:

- some players, typically younger players, wanted to go but did not know how to go about identifying their options,
- some players relied heavily on academy or national coaches to guide them through the process, and
- some players had done an extensive amount of research for themselves.

Parents' view:

Similarly to the players, parents of players believed that the American route offered the best facilities, coaching, and opportunities in terms of basketball.

*"Everybody wants to go to America. It's like, would you want to play for your local club, or would you play for Liverpool? That's the scenario that you're looking at. If you want to be the best, you have to go to the best."
(Parent of a player in the 16-19 age group)*

Many parents in this age group also described their concerns, particularly drawing from conversations and media articles that describe older athletes' experiences, including those who had dropped out or returned from the US.

"We got quite a few players that have gone over there. I think the experience looks like its quite mixed. You see the article in Basketball England... It raises some alarms as a parent as to whether it is the experience it's actually all its mapped out to be" (Parent of player in the 14-16 age group)

What do players and other key individuals think about the UK pathway?

After exploring the general perceptions of the US Collegiate route with talent pathway parents and players, a second focal point was the knowledge and perceptions that players had around staying in the UK to pursue basketball and education. All players and stakeholders were questioned on their thoughts around progressing into a UK university whilst also continuing to compete at a high level in basketball. The results are of interest, as they highlight that for the majority, staying in the UK is not perceived to be a legitimate 'choice', and therefore is not factored into the decision-making process. Several different factors emerged, including:

- Players perceive there are limited opportunities to be a professional player in the UK
- Players and parents note the limitations there are for female players in the UK but recognise this is a developing area
- Recruitment activity to UK universities is low
- Players and parents lack awareness of UK sport scholarship opportunities
- Players lack awareness of UK university basketball player experiences
- Players view staying in the UK as 'failure'
- Players felt that coaches did not support them when they wanted to pursue UK university opportunities

Professional basketball in the UK – “it’s not a career”

One of the main reasons cited as to why young players choose to migrate to the US instead of staying in the UK was the perception that there are limited opportunities from a basketball perspective to play professionally.

“I do know that there’s opportunities in Europe, but in the UK, it really does seem like you have to have another job to support yourself, that it can’t just be a career in its own right.” (Parent, 11-13 age group)

Becoming a professional player was more than often associated with entering the US Collegiate system (although many players have also gone professional by following the UK system) with players expressing that they grew up aspiring to play in the NBA or WNBA, and not UK-based leagues. In addition, it was suggested by participants that more expertise lies in the US, and again this was a further reason why players did not want to stay in the UK system. One parent suggests; *“For this country [England] to take the sport to the next level, unfortunately, these kids have to go. That’s the bottom line.”* In particular, this issue was found to be exacerbated for female players who felt that the limited coverage of female basketball in this country pushed them to go to the USA.

“I think [my daughter] just realised how amazing basketball is for women in America compared to here, because obviously, here it’s not huge for men, but obviously, the men get the main focus in the UK.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

“If I stay in the UK the path to playing professionally feels no longer viable, the league isn’t viewed as legitimate to international teams” (Post-US player).

US-based players also discussed how they felt compelled to leave the UK based on the limited opportunities for female players in the professional game. One female player who has experience of playing in the US and in the UK pointed out however that although there may be less traction in the UK, the standard of play between the two countries is not too dissimilar.

“I say to like younger players now, you have to realize that basketball in England is getting a lot better. It’s a very high level and there’s players from all over the world who are coming to play in this league and it’s not a bad league playing. I think it has a bad rap just from its past.” (Current US player)

Several players did state that they had made the decision to go to the USA before the WBBL had begun to develop and gain more interest and noted that if they had to make the decision again between the US and UK, it may be a little less one-sided. In addition, some parents within the talent pathway focus groups suggested that they would prefer their children to stay in the UK but are not clear on what the pathway looks like after they move out of the junior age groups.

“I would like him to stay in the UK, and if there was a pathway in the UK that would enable him to develop to be the best player he can be, I’d rather that happened in England. I think it would be good for Basketball England to come back and say... look, we want these kids to stay in the UK, we want them to develop in the UK and this is the pathway we’re going to put in place for you. It’s a bit like chasing the golden egg, Oh, let’s all get to America, but in fact, I would imagine a lot of kids from the UK would in fact be very small fish in a very big pond once they go over there.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

Basketball England may need to address this in their talent pathway guides, by outlining more clearly how players can move from England talent pathway programmes to national senior representation.

Player recruitment and competition in English universities

When players and stakeholders were questioned about whether they had considered going to a university in England or elsewhere in the UK, a focal discussion point was that no universities had actively reached out to them asking if they were interested in attending the university in the same way that US colleges did. A parent suggested that this had been a barrier to them pursuing UK options over the US.

“There was no contact from anybody. There was no, if you like, selling of their university or what the basketball was at that university or what the pathway was, and so on. I still haven’t to this day ever received a contact from anybody whether it be university or anybody in a WBBL program affiliated to an educational establishment...Had somebody come along, she might have looked at it, but again, because nobody’s actually approached us, it’s a bit like well, we haven’t pursued it really.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

A player from one of the top academies in the country who is now in the US system stated that no UK universities came to their academy to actively promote their programmes.

“No British university programme came to us, saying this is our Uni, this is what we have to offer. Not one. These universities need to do a better job of reaching out to these players before they start looking into other options. It’s America and staying here, it’s not just America first.” (Current US player)

Academy coaches noted that the best players in their academies would have upwards of 10 US colleges actively trying to recruit them, compared to no UK universities. Although the UK university athlete recruitment system is very different to the USA, whereby scholarship

packages may only be given to the athletes that meet a certain criteria and have fewer resources, this does highlight that UK universities could be more active in promoting and seeking opportunities for players. It must be noted however that those players who were based in the UK did discuss positive recruitment experiences via a UK university.

“I’d also been recruited by the coach at [UK University]. It just seemed like the best fit for me in terms of what I wanted to achieve and what I wanted to do, which is why I decided to go there.... [The coach] reached out to me, attended a few of my games, and made that connection.” (UK university-based player)

Therefore, some level of UK recruitment exists, but certainly not at the same level of activity as the US system. Players also expressed a disinterest at staying in the UK because the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) leagues were not as enticing as college basketball. Players believed that BUCS would need to have more excitement surrounding it if they were to go to a UK university.

“I think playing BUCS, you’re getting watched by a couple of the uni students. Whereas in America you are getting watched by a whole school.... I just think not too many people know about it. I think it just does not seem as fun.” (Player about to transition to the US)

Limited awareness of UK sport scholarship opportunities & experiences

Although players and stakeholders described how they were not personally approached by UK universities, many also discussed that they did not have an awareness of what a UK sport scholarship may consist of, what universities had good links with basketball clubs, and where they would find this information. Almost every player we spoke stated that they had a limited understanding of higher education and basketball opportunities.

“The UK was never really an option, I didn’t consider it at all, just because I didn’t really know about scholarship opportunities in the UK.” (Current US player)

“People think USA is the way to go. I have got no idea what the opportunities are in the UK to stay. I think all of that information should be made available so I can make informed decisions.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

“My transition from the academy to a UK university, I had no idea what universities were good for basketball, what programs were there for me to consider and there was literally no information anywhere....I think that’s one of the things that adds to the pressure of America as well...I saw America as the only option.” (Player who has experience in both the UK and the US system)

Lack of widespread information seems to also be a factor as to why most players feel the USA is their only option. Based on the recognised need from players and parents, TASS have developed a scoping document that highlights Higher Education Sport Scholarship opportunities in England, including the support they can provide, scholarship criteria, website links, and links to basketball clubs. To view the document, please go to page 18. In future, Basketball England and clubs can use the document to notify players about opportunities in the UK so that they can make an informed choice and whether they want to stay or go to the US. In addition, players both in the UK and USA highlighted that they had limited awareness of player’s experiences at different UK institutions, and therefore did not know whether it was the right option for them.

“You don’t really hear much about English university basketball and what it can offer... It definitely has lived up to the expectations.” (UK university-based player)

Feelings of failure - “If I stay in the UK...I’ve failed”

Many players expressed to us that if they chose to attend UK university instead of a US college, this equated to failure because there was so much expectation on them to gain a scholarship in the US.

“I wouldn't say it [UK] was seen as something that was a success, whereas US college would have been... I felt like if I say I'm staying in this country, I'm going to be perceived as almost a failure.” (Current US player)

“Me deciding not to do that was such a big deal and that I was a failure for not going to America or not wanting to...What's wrong with staying in the UK? Why is there not better options to stay in the UK and why isn't there more support for someone who wants to stay in the UK? It's ridiculous.” (Player who has experienced UK and US system)

Players felt they would not be viewed at the same level as other players who had decided to transition to the USA, with many stating:

- They felt like a failure if they stayed in the UK
- They felt irrelevant if they stayed in the UK
- They felt like they would not be ‘noticed’ or ‘mattered’ if they stayed in the UK

“If I stay in this country, I have failed in basketball... When we were younger the perception wasn't very good of being in this country.” (UK university-based player)

This suggests to us that English players currently feel stigma against staying in the UK, when it may be the best option for that specific player.

Lack of coach support when pursuing UK university options

Interestingly, many players also stated that they had no support from their academy coaches when they informed them that they wanted to go to a UK university. Players felt that coaches either:

- Lacked knowledge about UK university options
- Showed a disinterest in them going to a UK university
- Pushed them to go the US

“I found that as soon as I told my coach that I didn't want to go to America and that I wanted to stay in England, I didn't get help from them with finding a good university with a good basketball programme. I still wanted to take basketball seriously at a good level, but as soon as I was like, no, I don't want to go to America, that was when they [academy coach] stopped trying to help me if that makes sense.” (US-based player)

Players noted that their academy coaches didn't actively share what opportunities they might have to study in the UK and play basketball and instead were only interested in the player signing a scholarship in the US.

“I shouldn't feel bad for not wanting to go to America and I shouldn't be penalised for that. I should've had help especially from my coach. It's so stupid.” (US-based player)

This links to discussion further on in this report where players outline that they chose to go to the US because they believe their coaches wanted them to do this over other options. Although it is not clear whether this is because coaches do not understand UK opportunities, they

perceive that the USA is the best option for that player, or there is another gain to their player going to the US. We must stress, however, that this is not the case for all academy coaching staff.

What factors influence players' decisions to attend UK institutions?

Despite some of the negative perceptions that players and parents had about the UK professional basketball and university system, players and stakeholders outlined some of the positive factors that led them and their players to stay in the UK. Considering that we spoke to far less players in the UK than we did who were in or had been through the US system, this section is considerably smaller.

Factors that led players to attend UK universities varied, and included:

- The influence of coaches who were passionate about developing domestic leagues
- Club or Academy links with BBL & WBBL teams
- The opportunities to 'extend' a UK university career compared to the US
- You can play across multiple leagues meaning you are exposed to different types of competition (e.g., BUCS and national league)
- Option to work alongside study and training
- Less Eligibility stipulations, both pre and ongoing
- Postgraduate study opportunities
- The perception that you would not burnout if you stayed in the UK

"There are now serious UK options. We had three girls in the last couple of years who could've gotten scholarships in the States, and they'd opted to stay in the UK and go to universities that have WBBL teams. They get to stay in their home country." (Coach)

"It means I get to be there another year, so for them it's like we'll keep you longer." (Player who has completed UK university)

Life balance is better in the UK

When speaking to UK based players and those who had considered the UK route, almost all participants stated that being in the UK would lead to a greater life balance. Players believed that:

- There would be less risk of physical and mental burnout in the UK
- Basketball wouldn't be considered 'life' in the UK
- Academics and sport will get 50/50 attention
- You don't need to sacrifice your social life in the UK

"I think that's where English universities can compete if not be better than American colleges because for me the academics and the sport it was 50/50. I've got a fantastic degree, but I'm not missing out. I'm not sacrificing anything for that degree...Everybody says that university is probably some of the best years of your life. I chose this route because I wanted to make sure I was getting the most of that and I felt [UK university] offered that...great academics, but also great facilities and training and a great social side." (Player that recently completed study at a UK university)

"I love basketball but it's the reason partly why I came back to [UK university]...although basketball's taken very seriously, it is a high level, it's intense...I know that I'll be able to do things with my friends." (Player that has experienced UK and US system)

Opportunities to do postgraduate study

The findings from this research suggested that a popular route is for players who have completed college in the USA to come back to the UK to study a postgraduate degree. Players were excited about the prospect of furthering their education whilst also taking advantage of the support services on offer at their chosen university.

“I’ve got two British players coming back who I’ve worked with on the under 20s program. They went to the States, they’ve done their four years on full scholarships. When they come to me...typically our master’s programme for home students are around about £8,000, so I can cover the cost of that with our scholarship budget over two years.” (UK University coach)

“At [UK University] ...we’ve got the support services as you know in terms of the strength and conditioning, the sport psychology, I think it’s very much like an American model and that’s how I pitch it. In America... you have a four-year eligibility playing window...the next step is either to go into a graduate system which is post-graduate degree in the States...It’s a two-year masters in the States, but they don’t have any option to play because they’ve already used their four-year eligibility. Whereas in the UK, as you know, BUCS don’t have any regulations.” (UK University coach)

The above factors should be considered by players who are in the process of deciding whether the US or UK route is most viable for them.

Why do Basketball players choose to stay in the UK system vs. why players go against the UK system?

Why do UK basketballers choose to go to a UK university?

Coach influence -
desire to develop UK leagues

Club links with BBL
& WBBL teams

Opportunity to extend
university career

Opportunity to play in
multiple leagues

Option to work alongside
study and training

Postgraduate
study opportunities

Better life balance

Why do UK basketballers go against the UK system?

Lack of coach support to
pursue UK route

Limitations for female players

Recruitment activities to
UK universities is low

Lack of awareness about UK
sport scholarship opportunities

Staying in the UK equates
to failure

Lack of awareness of player
experience in the UK

Limited professional
opportunities



English Higher Education opportunities for basketball players

The majority of players that the research team spoke to in the study were not aware of the options to study at university and play basketball within the UK. That included youth level players (age group 11-15 and 16-19) and older players who had chosen the American route. To address this lack of awareness, the research team surveyed various universities and sought information about their support and sport scholarships that are available to Basketball players. The following table summarises the support and scholarship opportunities at universities where basketball is a “focus” or performance sport. Other university scholarships where basketball is not a focus or performance sport are available.

	Bournemouth University Click here for website	University of Brighton Click here for website	Coventry University Click here for website	Durham University Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	Two level 3 qualified basketball specific coaches that look after the performance programme and are employed by the university	Experienced club coaches in both men's and women's basketball	The head coach works in the sport department	One full-time coach and one part-time coach
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	Must demonstrate excellence in basketball, and be part of a regional, national and/or international squad (see website for more detail)	UK based athletes: National League experience or been part of a performance pathway US based athletes: Minimum of collegiate engagement in basketball	Minimum NBL junior/senior or equivalent level from an international league (e.g. Spain, Portugal). 'Potential scholars' have been invited to visit/train with the university basketball programme to see how they fit with their skill set	Undergraduate: Played at National League level Postgraduate: Played for 4 years within an NCAA/NAIA programme
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	Partnership with South Coast Tigers Currently talking to a company who are potentially looking to support and establish an NBL team South West Region	There are links with a local college and club to support athlete recruitment Affiliate to Basketball England and link with them for coaching and officiating courses TASS DC accredited site	Self-created 2 NBL programmes in Coventry Flames Men's and Women's Basketball Developing player pathway links with Coventry College (AoC Sport representative) Membership through NBL entries and officials training organised by Coventry University/Flames TASS DC accredited site	Links with Durham Wildcats (U18) and Hartlepool College WBBL franchise TASS DC accredited site
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	Sport Development Manager works with the athletes to work with Academic Programme leaders to find solutions to any clashes of classes and playing. The practice sessions and matches are scheduled to avoid clashes.	Academic flexibility support is provided to athletes where possible.	Access to academic flexibility, mentor and lifestyle support, including authorised absences, exam deferrals and coursework extensions. Game film analysis, psychology, nutrition, S&C, senior national league squads, and a variety of coaching staff for team and individual coaching sessions.	All scholars have access to sports concessions which provide academic flexibility.
Any Additional Information?	All athletes as part of TeamBU receive injury support services to help them back into sport if required. The strength and conditioning team work very closely with the performance athletes to give them the specific support they require.		From both a scholarship programme, and a focus sport avenue, basketball players at Coventry University have a huge opportunity to experience a positive student-athlete lifestyle.	

	University of East London Click here for website	University of Hertfordshire Click here for website	Loughborough University Click here for website	Manchester Metropolitan University Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	Our coaching provision is delivered in collaboration with London Lions and BA London Lions providing year round coaching support to our men's and women's teams. They also coach within the BBL/WBBL and national league teams through the partnership.	The Head Coaches for both the Men's and the Women's Performance Programmes are employed by the University with associated coaching links to our external club partnerships with Hemel Storm and Oaklands Wolves.	A partnership with Leicester Riders, with coaching staff part of this partnership	Both men's and women's basketball staff
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	A minimum of W/EABL, ABL or Senior National league experience will be required. Level of financial support available varies depending on previous playing standard. Final decisions are made based on head coaches decision.	Athletes apply to the Scholarship programme and applications are individually assessed and reviewed. Players with National League Basketball experience, Governing Body Pathway recognition, National Age Group representation or EABL/ ABL recommendations would be considered.	Currently under review	Players would have to meet university sport scholarship criteria (see website for more detail)
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	Our teams work in collaboration with London Lions, BA London Lions and NASSA to provide playing opportunities in the BBL, WBBL, NBL and WNBL. We are a TASS Dual Career Accredited Site as well as a Basketball England Regional Hub.	Key partners and pathway links include Hemel Storm (NBL) and Oaklands Wolves (NBL & WBBL). We have working partnerships with College and Academy focused Basketball programmes. Part of the Basketball England HE Network. TASS DC accredited site.	Partnership with Leicester Riders and Loughborough College Working with Basketball England to run the Aspire programme	The University run the Manchester Mystics. Also links with Manchester Giants, Manchester Magic, and Lancashire Spinners. Link with Loretto 6th Form Academy. One of Basketball England's hub academy sites TASS DC accredited site
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	The universities Dual Career Support Officer works with each athlete and academics to support their dual career, this includes flexible study and altered learning plans.	The University is committed to delivering a Dual Career Policy for all performance focused student athletes with academic flexibility a key core component of the policy. Lifestyle support available for student athletes, delivered through our TASS approved staff with the formal TALS qualification.	Academic flexibility is open to all students at the relevant performance level. That support is not connected to our sporting programmes or scholarships.	The university offers support for any elite sports people which includes flexibility and support processes for all high performing athletes at the university.
Any Additional Information?	Playing support includes extensive coaching through team and individual sessions, in addition to S&C, Physiotherapy, Lifestyle, Wellbeing, Nutrition and Psychology. If players are at a suitable level, our pathway offers an opportunity to progress through teams all the way to play in the WBBL/BBL.	Basketball at Hertfordshire enables student athletes to experience a professional performance environment, combining sporting and academic success on and off the court. Athletes benefit from a range of support services such as gym access, strength & conditioning, physio to support both their individual and team development.	For more information visit the university website.	For more information visit the university website.

	Northumbria University Click here for website	Nottingham Trent University Click here for website	Solent University Click here for website	UCLan Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	Two permanent lead basketball coaches for men and women focus teams.	Both the men's and women's programmes have a head coach and assistant coach.	Head coaches for both men's and women's basketball.	Both the men's and women's teams have Level 3 basketball coaches.
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Played internationally at Jun/Sen level • Players from AASE Academies • WEABL and EABL players • US NCAA college • Selection to Northumbria University BUCS 1st team 	Players who are able to make a significant impact on their BUCS basketball programme.	Players would need to have WEABL/EABL experiences, or experience in a national or international league. The university coaches help to scout for scholarship positions based on video evidence and coach recommendations.	Players would need to be competing at age-group or senior national or international level. Students would receive a varied scholarship offer depending on their standard of play at entry to the university; this would be evaluated each year.
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	Links with Newcastle Eagles WBBL and BBL teams Links with local FE sits such as Gateshead College and Tyne Met College.	Formal links with Nottingham Hoods (mens) and an informal recruitment partnership with Nottingham Wildcats (women's) Links to wheelchair basketball for a number of years, hosting a number of events.	Links with Solent Kestrels and Itchen College The university delivers the Aspire programme TASS DC accredited site.	The university works closely with the local FE network, including Myerscough College and Cardinal Newman College Close links with Preston Pride Basketball Club who use coaching students to support delivery in local schools. The university and Preston Pride are currently establishing a men's national league team.
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	The university has a TASS dual career academic flexibility policy.	The university will record lectures, move seminar groups/sessions, allow final year students to split years of study, provide flexible masters study, and support exam adjustments.	Access to online notes/resources, choice of assignments, catch up sessions, or reschedule deadlines/exam dates in exceptional circumstances. All basketball scholars have access to performance staff (Physio, S&C, Lifestyle).	The university is establishing a Dual Career process for 2021-22 as part of TASS membership. All students benefit from the Extensions and Extenuating Circumstances processes.
Any Additional Information?	Players benefit from a programme that rivals a professional team, with daily training including individual and team based court sessions, S&C, performance analysis. Highly experienced coaching team.	Players must be the standard to be in consideration for selection for the Nottingham Hoods/Nottingham Wildcats 1st teams (it is not compulsory for players to play for these teams as it is not always possible).	A dedicated athlete support officer and TASS lead who support students with balancing their sport commitments and their studies, enabling them to achieve their full potential in both.	The coaches will work closely with the wider university support services to ensure a sports science package is utilised i.e. match / video analysis; S&C; physiotherapy, athlete wellbeing and career guidance.

	University of Wolverhampton	University of Derby	University of East Anglia	Plymouth Marjon University
	Click here for website	Click here for website	Click here for website	Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	A full time head coach and also have 2 fixed term contracted coaches for male and female teams.	All performance coaches are contracted on a self-employed basis.	A Club Development Coordinator who looks after basketball and is also Head Coach across both men's and women's programmes.	A partnership with Plymouth Riders Basketball Club The lead assistant coach of Plymouth Riders works with the university team.
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	Players would need to be part of the national league or higher.	No specific criteria. It is down to coach recommendation.	Elite: National Performance Pathway Excellence: National Level Developing Excellence: Regional Level.	Tier 1: Senior national/international athlete Tier 2: Age group national athlete or member of a national development squad Tier 3: Regional representative or member of a National League team (visit website for more detail).
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	Links with WBA Albion Basketball Club which participate in NBL division 3 Through this partnership, there is a pathway from local colleges into the university TASS DC accredited site.	The university performance 1st team coach is the head coach of the local Division 2 National League side TASS DC accredited site.	Links with two local clubs (one male, one female) for coach and player development Both these clubs are National League structures Work closely with the Regional Lead for East Basketball and Norfolk Basketball associations.	Links with Plymouth Riders Basketball Club The university is a regional venue for the Aspire programme There are NGB relations through partners Plymouth Riders.
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	All scholarship athletes are given academic flexibility where deemed appropriate in relation to sporting competition.	The university performance 1st team coach is the head coach of the local Division 2 National League side TASS DC accredited site.	Not a present, but working on this across the board of all sports.	Academic flexibility is provided for tier 1 and tier 2 sport scholarship athletes.
Any Additional Information?	The university also encourage volunteer opportunities within the student network.	The University is a Dual Career Accredited site and have put in variety of support that enables academic flexibility for the high performers, including deadline extensions and exam dates being moved ahead of time.		Yearly-progressive opportunities for students, through the sporting and academic climate. The competition outlets look to progress into NBL Senior Mens. Students can also engage in local coaching & officiating opportunities.

	University of the West of England Click here for website	University of Manchester Click here for website	Buckinghamshire New University Click here for website	Anglia Ruskin University Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	Coaches for both men's (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and women's basketball (1st).	A service level agreement with their basketball coach	Reading Rockets coach the women's team and work closely with the Students' Union and Academic Schools within the University.	One full time member of staff who oversees the whole performance programme, head coaches for the men's basketball programme, and a second part-time member of coaching staff who is the women's basketball head coach.
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	All performance sports have criteria for their sport. Basketball has a reward system that is based on numerous factors: Level, coach reference, video review	Players would need to play at a semi-professional/professional level or be part of a national performance pathway, e.g. England U18s. This is also open to international students, e.g. Spain U18s	Reading Rockets' endorsement of national league playing standard.	Coaching staff evaluate players on a case-by-case basis, looking at: previous playing experience, consistent high performance levels within the programme, national team status and experience, NAIA and NCAA college experience, EABL and WEABL experience and attributes such as height, athleticism, personal qualities and leadership experience.
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	Links with Bristol Flyers and SGS College, Bristol	No formal links, but interested in exploring these opportunities further The university has had informal links with Manchester Magic/Mystics/Giants in the past but nothing at partnership level.	Partnership with Reading Rockets Through the Director of Reading Rockets, the University is kept informed of the NGB's plans for HE involvement.	ARU Basketball provides both BUCS and NBL/WNBL competition outlets for performance athletes; including all coaching, support services, and administration covered within our programme
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	Certain courses offer flexibility.	The university has an academic flexibility policy to guide academic departments and students on processes to follow to support all parties.	Performance lifestyle services are provided. Close working with academic staff to ensure that flexibility is provided. Regular access to Head of School and Associate Professor is provided. There is a strong dual career ethos and close working between academic and sports staff.	Student-athletes selected to represent university teams are supported to do so, and every effort is made for alternative teaching arrangements to be put in place. The sports department supports performance athletes on an individual basis to resolve any issues in this area.
Any Additional Information?		The university is well located geographically with the national performance centre, Magic/Mystics & Giants within 2 miles of the University campus. There are real opportunities at UoM for Basketball, the sport has grown significantly in recent years.	The partnership with Reading Rockets has facilitated both social and performance sport in basketball at the University.	Prospective players stand to benefit from; expert coaching for both male and female players, competitive team practice, individualised player development sessions, strength and conditioning sessions and programming, physiotherapy support, performance analysis, 3x3 off-season competition outlets

	University of Essex	Birmingham City University	Newcastle University
	Click here for website	Click here for website	Click here for website
Are there Basketball Specific Coaches or Staff?	Two level 3 coaches lead the performance programme. Both teams have an assistant coach/manager, a performance analyst and a sports psychologist. Teams have a dedicated p/t sports therapist, and S&C coach overseen by Head S&C coach. There is also a Basketball Development Officer.	Men's and Women's Head Coaches (Both Level 3 qualified)	Men's Head Coach (Full Time - BUCS-PREM / NBL1) and Women's Head Coach (Part Time - BUCS PREM)
What is the Basketball Scholarship Criteria?	Individuals are assessed on ability and potential and those ready to enter the top teams receive the full support package. Those players who show the potential to progress to the first team during their studies at Essex will also receive support.	Currently playing National League, EABL (WEABL) or Regional Level (please note there is a limited number of places available). Please visit the website for more information	Undergraduates must have played to a high standard in (EABL/ABL) Post Graduates must have played to a good standard in (BUCS-PREM / NCAA / NAIA)
University Links to Basketball or Support Organisations?	The Essex Rebels Club provides a broad pathway from juniors to 2 x men's senior teams (NBL Div 1 and 3), a women's WBBL team and 5 BUCS teams. The University is the BE Talent Hub, a TASS delivery site and dual career accredited, and supports scholarship students with overseas playing contracts and with alternative careers.	Official partnership with Team Birmingham (National League 2) - BCU Head Coach is also Team Birmingham Head Coach. BCU is the home of Team Birmingham Basketball.	Direct support and development pathway links with Newcastle Eagles (BBL / WBBL) and Team Newcastle (NBL1)
Academic Flexibility and Support Processes for High Performing Basketballers?	Undergraduates can qualify for a bursary (up to £3,000 pa) and postgraduates can receive fee waivers for the full course cost. Scholarship students are covered by an Academic Flexibility Policy. This provides some flexibility, allowing students to switch to part-time studies in order to concentrate on basketball.	Basketball scholars are fully supported by a Scholarship Officer and bespoke plans are made for those who require academic support or flexibility. Regular meetings are held with course leaders to ensure basketballers meet their potential on and off court.	Academic flexibility is provided for applicants who meet Performance Athlete status criteria
Any Additional Information?	Basketball training and competition takes place in Essex Sport Arena, just 30 seconds walk from the student-athlete accommodation. A scholarship includes daily basketball training, S&C, coaching, physio, lifestyle support and sports science testing.	Athletes receive full S&C, injury prevention, rehabilitation and performance analysis support. Reduced accommodation costs are available for a select number of basketball players who represent both BCU and Team Birmingham each year. BCU Sport support all athletes to gain coaching and other related qualifications and work experience.	Performance Athlete support includes a Head Coach, Strength and Conditioning Coach, Physiotherapy, Nutritional Planning, Performance Sport Manager

What factors influence player's decisions to enter the US collegiate system?

Following the knowledge and perceptions of the UK route, the third focus was to examine the factors that influence the decision to go to college in the US. These decisions fall into three main categories:

- (1) Perception that the US is the next logical step
- (2) Influence of others and social media
- (3) Use of the US system for other gains

(1) Perception that the US is the next logical step

A number of players described the US as the place where 'basketball is', with one parent describing the NCAA as 'the crème de la crème'. Many of the young players we spoke to were very focused on their desire to follow the US collegiate pathway, with the view that basketball in the US is best opportunity to progress their basketball career.

"My decision was based on experience, better opportunity to play against more people... the league [NCAA] is higher, I think it breeds more athletes and better play. There's obviously going to be better players as England doesn't have too many. For me, it was more just a new experience and just playing against high caliber athletes because there's more athletes being produced." (Pre-US player)

Linked to the lack of awareness of opportunities in the UK as mentioned above, many current and former NCAA players explained how they felt it was their only option. Players alluded to the idea that if they wanted to progress towards a professional basketball career, the US was the route they **had** to follow. Players often outlined that they didn't care where they went in the US, as long as they managed to get there.

"I didn't really consider anything else. You either go to America or you don't... I think my experience was definitely I need to go to America because I want to play basketball professionally". (Current US player)

"I'm going to the states regardless, I don't really care where I'm going. And then yeah, it was just like you've got a spot, let's go. I packed my bags, and I was off". (Post-US player)

(2) Influenced by others and social media

Social influences appeared to have a big impact on players decision to attend college in the US. These influences included:

- (1) Coaches
- (2) Family
- (3) Peers
- (4) Social media

As alluded to in previous sections, several players and parents had the perception that their **coaches** wanted them to go to college in the US, with minimal support to explore the options available in the UK.

"Coaches obviously helped a lot with that [recruitment] and my college because that was where they wanted me to go... I'll definitely say that my coach didn't really look into many of the UK Universities... I still feel like they were very pushy towards America and didn't actually give me that balance." (Post-UK player)

Players also mentioned the influence of their **family** on the decision, with the opportunity to access a free education being a major pull factor towards the US. Players as young as 12 years old were aware of the financial demands of attending university in the UK and the unique opportunity to access a free college education in the US, reducing any financial burden on their families.

"My family didn't have a lot of money, so I was like, "I like basketball. Maybe I can find a way to get a school to pay for it. I don't want this massive debt, or my family doesn't have to give me any money essentially." (Player who has experience of US and UK)

*Player: "I think it would be quite an exciting experience. I would obviously like to go and provide for my mom".
(Player, 11-13 age group)*

Parent: "Since he started basketball, I was always keen on him getting a scholarship to the USA. For the financial reasons as well, but I think, exception is that that's the best of the best. If he works hard enough, that would be the place to go." (Parent, 11-13 age group)

Peer influence was also a factor that led players to the US, with some describing US college as a 'glorified route'. Peers are a strong factor that can influence any young person's decisions and therefore appear to play an important role in determining whether players want to go to the US.

*"It was quite interesting really because we were talking about how I didn't want to go to America and they were like, "Why would you not want to go?" I was like, "I don't know." There was such a big pressure of going to America. If you didn't go to America then that means you're not a good player, or you're just not relevant."
(Current US player)*

Linking to the earlier finding of a lack of awareness of opportunities in the UK, the 'trend' of attending college in the US impacted younger players decisions. Players described that they developed the assumption that they also needed follow the US route to be successful.

"I wanted to continue playing basketball...And it's just like, what's next? What's the next step and then everyone around you is going to the states, then it's like, that's what I want to do too." (Post-US player)

Finally, what became apparent through the interview process was the impact **social media** has on the recruitment process and the decisions that players make. Many players explained how they and/or their peers used social media as a way of sharing their recruitment journey, highlighting which schools they were visiting, which schools offered a scholarship, and ultimately which school they committed to. One player explained the impact that this method of sharing via social media had on her decisions.

"As much as I say it was my own decision, and it was, I did let other people influence it in a way because I put out [on social media], "I'm going to visit these schools," before I had even gone. No one cared about the other two apart from [college]. I was like if I didn't go to [college], it would have been like, not a fail, but it was like everyone was going crazy about, "Oh, she's visiting [college]." I felt like, "Oh, well, I'm going to go there," because it was like that." (Post-US player)

Players and support staff explained how social media always shows the 'success stories', with little insight into some of the challenges players face whilst they are at college in the US. One

participant explained how this can give an inaccurate representation to younger players, influencing the decisions they ultimately make.

“You only hear the success stories - I think that is massive as well. You see a kid who goes to America, does really well, and every kid thinks that's what they're going to get because they don't hear the ones that went and it didn't work for as well.” (Academy Coach)

To mitigate against the above, many players and staff spoke about the importance of speaking directly to players who have personal experience of studying in the US. This allows younger players to gain a more accurate representation of what they may experience if they do make the transition, helping to better equip them with the information they need to make an informed decision.

“I probably didn't speak with too many people about their experience in America. I probably just went off word of mouth and social media and that kind of stuff maybe more so than actually speaking to someone with experience of what it was actually like...I didn't have many conversations about what it genuinely was like.” (Current US player)

“I just feel like choosing a school that you're going to go to is something that you need to do by yourself. You should have as little impact and influence from social media. If you want influence from the people that you care about, you don't need to put it on social media, you could just pick up the phone and you can ring them.” (Pre-US player)

(3) Use of the US system for other gains

The third main finding when looking at the factors that influenced the decision to go to college in the US, is the use of the US system for other gains. These include:

- (1) Using basketball to access free education
- (2) Desirability of the offer (e.g., the lifestyle, crowds, kit, finances)
- (3) New challenge and opportunities
- (4) Chance to become a pro player

The first ‘gain’ was discussed numerous times by players, parents, and staff, and this is **using basketball to access a free education**. One participant described the opportunity to receive a free university education as a ‘no brainer’, with other players explaining how they wouldn't have been able to afford to go to university, without the US scholarship offer.

“From a financial point of view... some of them don't have the means to be able to afford university themselves and to pay for university here [in the UK].” (UK coach)

“That was the biggest thing for me, I didn't want any financial responsibilities for myself and my family.” (Current US player)

The second ‘gain’ described was the **desirability of the offer** in the US, including the financial offer, the sponsorship, the kit, the crowds at games, the facilities and amenities etc. The impact of this offer on players decision making is huge, with players outlining how the lack of equivalent offer in the UK simply pushes them towards the US route.

“You are sponsored by Adidas, Nike, or Under Armour, so you get a ton of gear which isn't the same here, that's the hardest part. When you're telling an 18-year-old to make a decision and some of these recruitment trips

are really impressive. Obviously, I can give them a Fruit of the Loom t-shirt and they go over to America and they're getting a ton of sneakers or whatever. I think the offer is just greater in the States.” (UK Coach)

The third ‘gain’ described by players, was the chance to experience **new challenges and opportunities**. When discussing these opportunities, players and staff spoke predominantly about moving to a new country and experiencing a different culture.

“I want to see what America is like. I'd love to experience it. I'd love to see different parts of the world and stuff. Obviously, if I get the opportunity, I'd love to be able to go. That's what I did.” (Player who has experience of US and UK)

“It wasn't pushed upon us, but it was a really good opportunity for us... you get to experience a whole new way of life, and culture.” (Post-US player)

When talking about new challenges, some players alluded to the importance of stepping outside their comfort zone and trying something new.

“[UK University] offer, what they offered me was very good. It's unseen. That made it harder for me... My decision was more based on that I lived in [UK town] for three years. I'd been there too long... I don't like being in the same place for too long... I was too comfortable. I think a new scenery was what I needed.” (Pre US player)

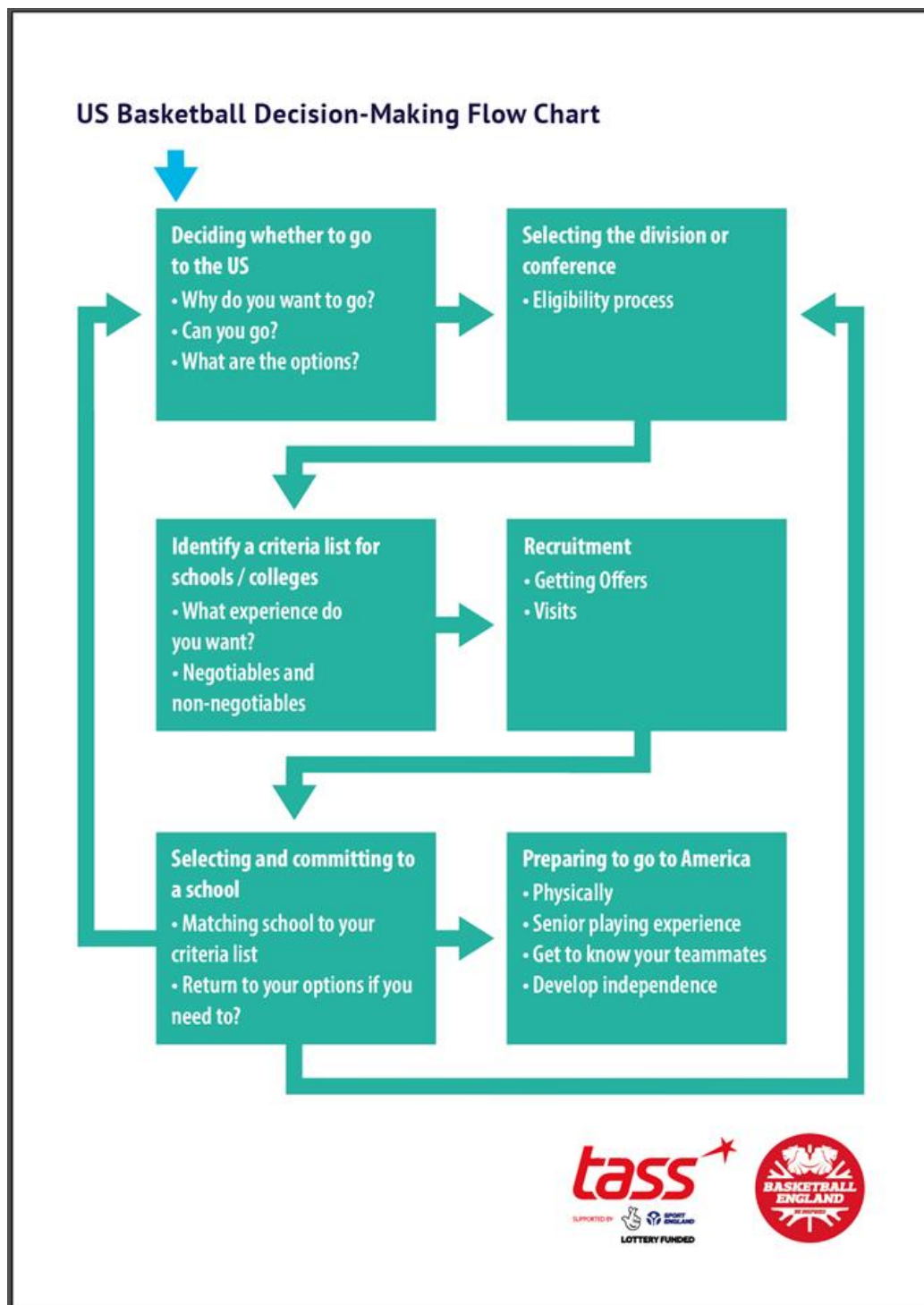
The final ‘gain’ was the opportunity for players to **increase their chances of becoming a professional basketballer**. Players used the examples of receiving better resources and funding, as well as the opportunity to generate statistics to support their professional goals post-university.

“I wasn't trying to go and just be a role player. Do you know what I mean? I was trying to go and actually generate some stats so that I could get some attraction when I was coming out of there.” (Post-US player)

“That being said, if those resources were over here, none of us who had gone to America would have gone... people like me, who really take pride in like, “I want to be a professional athlete and I want to make it a job,” there would be no reason for me to go to America because I would have all the resources and all the funding and the pay in this country. You know?” (Post-US player)

Decision-making flow chart

The following sections outline the decision-making process of athletes considering the US route for basketball and education. The research identified 6 key stages: (1) *Making the decision to go to America*; (2) *Understanding the options available within the US system*; (3) *Identifying their criteria list for a school or college*; (4) *The recruitment process*; (5) *Selecting and committing to a school*; (6) *Preparing to go to America*.



Making the decision to go to America

Three key questions that players should ask themselves when deciding whether to go to the USA

The findings of the research, particularly advice provided from academy coaches and recruitment or scouting agents who have experience support athletes migrating to America, suggested that athletes should consider three key questions before making the decision to pursue the American route.

1. Why do you want to go?

While there are a lot of things that players need to consider when contemplating migrating to America for college basketball one of the first questions should be to understand why they want to go, including:

- What kind of experience do you want?
- What is important to you in terms of basketball?
- What is important to you in terms of academic?
- What is important to you in terms of lifestyle and culture?
- What is your goal for after college?
- Would you still want to go if you were not playing basketball?

It is key for you to understand your long-term goals so that you can be sure you can find the pathway that will help you to get there. Whether your goals are to play professionally or to enjoy your time playing and studying, your answers to these questions can, not only guide you in deciding whether the American route is the best option for you but, they can also guide you in selecting which college will be best for you.

If your answer to why you want to go is because other players your age are going or considering going? Then you might not be making the best decision for you.

2. Can you go?

The collegiate system in America, particularly the NCAA colleges, have very specific rules relating to who can play in college, including their academic and basketball backgrounds. For more information on eligibility of different conferences - see [Different divisions and conferences in the US system](#)

Getting a Visa

All UK students that want to move to America to study will need to get a student visa before they go - [USA Visa Guide](#)

Affordability

You might also need to consider the cost involved in going to America. In some cases, you might be able to get a full scholarship that will pay for your travel, tuition and living cost. It is, therefore, important to be very clear in your offer what is covered.

“They say it’s a full scholarship but then you’ve got to pay flights, your medical insurance, your visa. All these costs add up. I wasn’t expecting that.” (Current US player)

“Even as an athlete on a full ride scholarship where almost everything is paid for, I still had to pay taxes on my tuition fees each year. This was something that I was not told up-front and I know it is school dependent, as one of my friends was on a full-ride scholarship too and she didn’t have to pay taxes at all.” (Post US player)

It is also important to consider, if you receive partial scholarships offers, would you be able to fund the rest of the cost yourself?

3. What are your options to consider?

The following section provides you with an overview of some of the different options for playing basketball and studying in America – see [Different divisions and conferences in the US system](#). Each of these options offer different benefits and drawbacks, so it is important to consider which one is best for you and the experience you’re looking for.

If you’ve not met all the eligibility criteria for one conference or you’ve not got an offer from a school that is right for you, you can consider staying an extra year in the UK or “reclassifying” to the following year. According to NCAA eligibility criteria, you have a 12 month ‘grace period’ between secondary school and enrolling full time in college. There are several advantages of this, including:

- Giving athletes extra time to get paperwork organised,
- Allowing athletes to re-take exams if needed,
- Giving athletes more time to talk to colleges and get the right offer, and
- Allowing athletes to develop yourself in terms of basketball and emotionally

“We’ve had a kid that stayed for an extra year this year. She just needed just that extra year to really cement everything that she’d sort of-- That’d been thrown at her. I think she will get a lot more choice having done that. I do think emotionally, it makes a big difference staying a third year.” (Academy coach)

Understanding the options available within the US system

Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law that states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." (NCAA, 2020)

Athletics programs are considered educational programs and activities. There are three basic parts of Title IX as it applies to athletics:

Participation: Title IX requires that women and men be provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports. Title IX does not require institutions to offer identical sports but an equal opportunity to play;

Scholarships: Title IX requires that female and male student-athletes receive athletics scholarship dollars proportional to their participation; and

Other benefits: Title IX requires the equal treatment of female and male student-athletes in the provisions of: (a) equipment and supplies; (b) scheduling of games and practice times; (c) travel and daily allowance/per diem; (d) access to tutoring; (e) coaching, (f) locker rooms, practice and competitive facilities; (g) medical and training facilities and services; (h) housing and dining facilities and services; (i) publicity and promotions; (j) support services and (k) recruitment of student-athletes.

The above detail regarding Title IX has been taken directly from the NCAA website.

Different divisions and conferences in the US system

Coaches, agents, and players explained that one important consideration when selecting a college to attend was the different divisions and conferences that American schools are a part of. For some players, they also considered or attended high schools in America. For players that were new to this system it can be very complicated to understand what the different options are and the key difference between them. The following section aims to outline the common perceptions about the different divisions options but also to advise players on what to expect from each and support their decision is selecting a school or college.

High school

A handful of players in the study had either attended a school in America or had considered this as an option. There are some advantages to this route, including a basketball program with more funding and coaches than in the UK.

"We [in a UK school] had like one coach and maybe an assistant coach that would come sometimes... whereas coaches or teams in America, they would have seven staff. One head coach, one assistant, one nutritionist, one strength coach, one video coach and one person for your mental health, something like that." (Post-US player).

There are also considered to be more opportunities to be seen by college coaches, including during summer schools. However, the summer leagues can mean that players spend all year focused on games rather than taking time to develop themselves and their skills.

In some schools they will be able to offer you a scholarship, but others offer means-tested support, meaning that you might have to pay for some of your tuition or expenses.

"You go from playing on one team to playing on another team, and you're basically playing on teams the entire year, so there's no focus period of skill development. I'm not a huge fan." (Coach)

It is important to note that you cannot graduate from a UK school and then go to high school in America. Furthermore, you have a limited number of years from year nine before your NCAA eligibility starts – by going to high school in America during this, it delays your colleges start and uses up some of your 4 years eligibility in NCAA. See [NCAA Eligibility](#)

Prep school

The term "prep school" in the U.S. is usually associated with private, elite institutions that have very selective admission criteria and high tuition fees. It is rare to get offered a full scholarship for prep school.

National Collegiate Athletic Association - NCAA

The NCAA is the biggest conference of four-year schools and colleges. Players in this study mostly attended NCAA schools. Within the NCAA there are three divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III.

There were two key differences between the divisions, identified by coaches, agents and players: the level of competition and the value of scholarship.

The level of competition

Division I was considered to be a higher level of playing competition than division II and III. However, players with experience of the US system explained that the level or division was not as important as they first considered and instead valued the opportunity to play and develop.

"No matter what level you are, if you are the type of player and you put up the numbers, the level you play at doesn't matter so much." (Player currently in the US)

"I drove it into my head that I needed to go to a D1 school. I have to be at a D1 school. Otherwise, there's no point in me going. Then really, you sit down and you look at it. I've committed to a D2 school now. I'm not even going to a D1. It's figuring out what you want and what you want to get out of the four years" (Player currently in the US)

The value of a scholarship

Division I schools are more likely to offer full scholarships to players, which include tuition, travel and living expenses. Division II are also able to offer full scholarships but also commonly offer partial scholarships. Whereas division III do not offer any sports scholarships but are able to offer some academic and financial aid. Without a full scholarship, players would have to fund the remainder of their fees and expenses.

“There’s over 350 D1 schools all offering full scholarship. Division two can be full or partial scholarship, division three there isn’t anything other than some financial aid.” (Recruitment Scout)

“Division III, they have no basketball scholarships, so that’s a massive thing. Often, for the kids we had, it just wouldn’t be possible.” (Academy coach)

Perceptions about Division I and II

Many of the players in this study perceived there to be a stigma around going to a division I college compared to other divisions or that others perceived there to be a greater achievement in attending a division I school than any other division. Due to this stigma, players explained that they ruled out division II schools without having fully explored it as an option. However, those players who migrated to America for college explained that they wished they had remained open to division II rather than ruling it out as an option early on in their decision-making process because it offered them more opportunities to play.

“Are you willing to sit on the bench, the first two seasons get up every day at five or six o’clock in the morning, practice every day and still sit on a bench because that might happen or maybe pick a Division II school if you think you’ll play loads and get more out of it or do try there’s those different options in terms of to get to the place you want to go to.” (Post-US player)

NCAA Eligibility

This association also has some strict rules on who is eligible to attend. There are two key areas to NCAA eligibility:

1. Academic Eligibility

If you are considering NCAA division I, or II colleges you will need to be certified by the NCAA Eligibility Centre. You can do this by setting up an account that can guide you through the process - [NCAA eligibility account registration](#).

While the rules are slightly different for the different division and you will need to check, in general you need to prove you’ve studied the core NCAA course and achieved the minimum GPA. You will also need to upload the official transcripts of all of your exams to this account. Here are some situations that might impact your academic eligibility:

- GCSE PE is not a NCAA core subject and does not count towards your GPA
- At GCSE you need English, maths, separate physical sciences, and a social science (See [NCAA core courses](#))
- If your GCSE core subjects don’t include one element you might be able to pick it up as an A-level
- You can’t combine A-Level and BTEC qualifications
- The minimum GPA is around a C grade equivalent in the UK
- The better your GPA, the more options you will have in terms of schools
- BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Sporting Excellence or DiSE is not a core subject and does not count towards your GPA

You will also need to sit an addition exam, either the SATs or ACT. There are only certain locations that do these exams and only on certain dates. While you can sit the exam as many times as you like to get the best score, there is a cost to sit the exam and colleges do look at how many times you’ve sat the exam.

“The best thing about the SAT is it's split into two parts, critical reading and English and then Maths. If you do really well in one part, and terrible in the other part when you retake it they take your best scores from each test.” (Recruitment Scout)

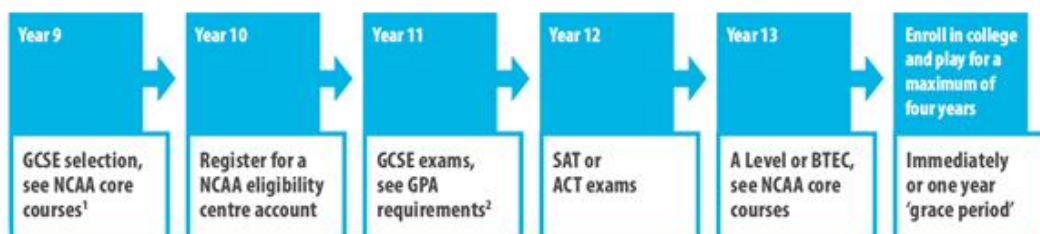
The ACT also includes a science element to the exam and most schools will take either.

2. Amateurism Eligibility

The NCAA have a strict rule that student-athletes must be amateurs before attending college in America. Here are some situations that may impact your status as an amateur athlete.

- Taking a break between secondary school and full-time collegiate enrolment, particularly if you are continuing to play basketball (you only have a 12 month ‘grace period’ for Division I and II)
- Using a recruiting agency, scholarship agent or a scouting service
- Receiving payment from a sports team
- Receiving funds or money to offset training expenses
- Accepting prize money based on performance/finish at a competition
- Being represented or marketed by a professional sports agent
- Promoting or endorsing a commercial product or service

NCAA Eligibility Timeline



¹ Make sure you have selected NCAA core courses - See NCAA core courses; NCAA International Student Guide - pg 440

² GPA requirements differ for each division - NCAA GPA Requirements



National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association- NJCAA

The NJCAA is a collection of two-year schools and colleges (often referred to as Junior College). This route offered an alternative to NCAA schools for several reasons:

- (1) The schools offer high level of basketball and coaching along with full and partial scholarships

“I went to a junior college first, that was my own decision. I wanted more options and I wanted to get better, so I went to junior college, where the coach is pretty famous for developing players that are centres, or forwards... I went there for two years and it was great. I got a lot of confidence, my body changed, I was more confident in my game and after that I transferred.” (Post-US player)

- (2) Particularly to players that did not meet the stricter NCAA eligibility criteria, it enables them to attend a two-year college and become eligible for NCAA

“The option that as you go to junior college for two years and you earn certain grades and then you become a qualifier, and then you can transfer to a division one or division two school and play two more years.” (Academy Coach)

- (3) For player who had not received offers from a NCAA school that they wanted to attend, this route offers exposure to NCAA schools and colleges.

“They have a thing called a pro day in junior college. Before the season starts, hundreds of college coaches just come and sit and watch your practice. From there, you just get a lot of coaches talking to you so it's the whole year. Then when you get to tournaments, state tournaments, national tournaments, there's a lot of coaches” (Player currently in the US)

Although there are benefits to the NJCAA system, there were also some challenges that players face:

- (1) Many of the players that attend NJCAA schools are also aiming to be recruited to NCAA division I schools. This can make for a very competitive environment between players.

“When you're a junior college, you're competing them with all the high school kids, all the junior college kids and all the other international kids? Then you compete with a lot of transfers as well.” (Player who graduated from the US)

- (2) Some coaches cannot be as focused on the long-term development of players because they are only at the school for two years.

“The other thing with junior colleges because it's only a two-year journey, tends to be less investment from the coaching staff on the development of the player and the care of the player.” (Scout)

- (3) Players can only stay for a maximum of two-years, and many players transferred after one year. In some cases, players found that they had only just settled before they had to move and adapt to a new environment.

“At JuCo [junior college], I had just got comfortable and then I was in a whole new environment. Everything just turned up by a level of 100.” (Current US player)

- (4) If players are considering transferring to a four year college, it is important that players check their the credits they do in Junior college are transferable to other colleges, otherwise you might have to take additional classes to be able to graduate

“I did two years of junior college, but when I transferred not all of my credits were transferable so that was why I wasn’t able to graduate” (Current US player)

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics - NAIA

The NAIA is a college athletics association for small colleges and universities in America. While no players in this research took this route, some players explained that they wished they remained open to it as an option. One advantage to the NAIA system is there are no age limits, unlike in the NCAA where you have to enrol on your college course within a certain number of years after graduating high school.

The NAIA have a similar eligibility system, but they have different rules to the NCAA and you will need to register for a NAIA eligibility account – see more info - [NAIA international student guide](#) and [NAIA UK grade conversion guide](#)

Identifying a criteria list for schools or colleges

What factors influence players selection of college?

The previous section focused on the factors that players should be aware of during recruitment. This section looks to build upon this and using the interviews conducted, outlines the different factors that we found can influence which college a player goes to in the US.

Limited options or taking the first opportunity that comes

Throughout the interview process, players explained that they were so focused upon attending college in the US they would take **any** option that was given, regardless of any other factors. This led players who only had limited US scholarship offers to accept an offer, without considering whether it met the criteria for their desired college.

"I guess I only had two options, so I didn't really have much of a, "I want this, I want this, and I want this," if that makes sense."(Current US player)

It became apparent through the interviews that players were so driven towards the US route, that they would take the first opportunity that comes, with concerns about looking at other options and potentially losing the opportunity all together. This led players to accept places at US colleges that may not necessarily have been best suited to them. Coaching staff in the UK explained that taking more time to consider each offer and fully understand what it might entail would be a benefit for many players.

"I think the problem you have with some kids is they're so caught up on, "I want to get to America at all costs," that they not necessarily sell themselves short, but jump on any opportunity they get without necessarily fully thinking or fully understanding what that might entail."(Academy Coach)

Lack of knowledge around options and information available

An area identified throughout the interview process, was players limited knowledge around the options available to them, both in the US system and in the UK. One player spoke openly about her lack of knowledge of the US system, which ultimately reduced the number of options available to her.

"I'll give you true honest...I had no idea about any of it. I didn't know what NAIA was. I didn't know that Division III had no scholarships. I didn't know that D II had partial or full. I didn't know NAIA had partial or full. I didn't know there was two freaking divisions in-- I had no idea about any of it. My only option, the only thing that I was told was, if you go Division I, you don't have to pay." (Post-US player)

Quotes such as the above highlight the importance of making information readily available to players, supporting them to make an informed choice of where they wish to study and play. A second player explained her lack of understanding of how to go about the process of selecting a college and how to determine which option was best for her.

"I was just told a whole bunch of schools who wanted me and then they call me and they were offering scholarships. So, it was more them calling me and me just scribbling down a whole bunch of pros and cons while I was on the phone with them and then just putting them side by side and thinking, which one do I want to go to?" (US college graduate player)

Finally, it became apparent that the majority of players had very little understanding of the options available in the UK. The desire to attend college in the US almost automatically overrode any consideration of options available in the UK. One player who completed her undergraduate studies in the US and recently returned to the UK for postgraduate study outlined some of the misconceptions.

"I say to like younger players now, you have to realise that basketball in England is getting a lot better. It is a very high level and there's players from all over the world who are coming to play in this league and it's not a bad league playing...I don't think that it gets the recognition that they necessarily deserve."(US college graduate, now playing and studying in the UK)

The desire to play division I basketball

A number of players spoke about the ultimate drive to go to a Division I college, with the 'stigma' and feelings of failure attached to going to a Division II or III college. Retrospectively, players described how they wished they had more information about options outside of Division I and didn't succumb to the need to gain the Division I 'label'.

"For the most part, I definitely feel like if I could change anything, it would probably be to look at D2 straight away rather than just dive into the stigma of, "You need to be a D1 person otherwise you've failed," thing." (Current US player)

"I never even considered a lower division. I just was like, "I'm going D1," because my-- I don't want to put a strain on my family or anything. Again, in hindsight, I wish that I had had more information because quite frankly, it's been-- it's put a massive toll on me as a person. My mental health has been very affected in the last four years." (Post-US player)

Based on the accounts above and other detail generated through the interview process, it is incredibly important for players to consider all options available to them, including those at the Division I and II level. Speaking to other players who have followed each of these routes can be a really beneficial process, opening players' eyes to what is available to them at all levels.

Player motivations – Going to the US for development vs. experience

When players are considering their options, it is important to determine their motivations for going to the US. Do players want to go to the US to:

- develop as a player, with hopes of a professional career following graduation? Or;
- do players want to go for the experience, i.e. to live in another country, to meet new people, to get a good degree?

Of course, it is likely that many players will strive for both development and experience, however, it is important for players to understand their own motivations which ultimately should influence their choice of college.

"You just have to figure out why you want to go in the first place. Is it for experience? Is it just to say you go? Is it to meet people? Do you want to gain something from it, do you want to live out there? Do you want to be a professional athlete? Somebody who wants to just go for the experience, it doesn't matter what college you go to Division I, Division II, Junior college, it doesn't matter the level because it's not part of your priorities, it's just for the experience. Whereas someone who wants to be professional, it matters. You want to go to a school where there are kids with your talent and your needs and your skill work." (Post-US player)

Getting game time and fitting within the college roster and within the style of play

Numerous players and coaching staff explained the importance of choosing a college where they would get game time and not spend their college career sat on the bench. The reward for hard work in training, early gym sessions, moving to the other side of the world etc., is the opportunity to play. Throughout the interviews, many participants explained the emotional toll that comes with not having the opportunity to play, in some cases leading players to transfer colleges or drop out.

“People have to remember as well if you’re going halfway across the world to sit on a bench and just practice day in and day out and get no reward for it, you’re going to hate it. You put literally your whole life in a status waking up, going to weights, going to class, going to practice, going to study or anything and not getting the reward of playing which is the whole reason people play basketball or play sports in general, you’re not going to like it.” (Post-US player)

Getting game time is a key factor that young players should consider when reaching out to colleges and when accepting a scholarship. Interviewees explained the importance of understanding the differences between a Division I offer and a Division II offer, and the potential game time opportunities within each based upon a player’s specific skill level.

“It’s just understanding what’s your end goal, and then saying is it more beneficial to be at a Division I school for four years and not really play and then come out at the end of it, or is it more beneficial to go back and maybe play at Division II level and play a bunch? For me, there’s no harm in taking that step back.” (Academy coach)

Another factor that players and staff discussed, was the importance of looking at the college roster and understanding where they would fit within the team, i.e. are there already numerous players in the same position on the team, or are there gaps in a position that can be filled. The following quotes outline the importance of this and the impact it can potentially have on a player’s college career.

“We look at players, how is the roster assigned? Do they have a lot of players at your position? Is it going to be three years before they’re gone or are they in their last year and they need someone in your position?” (UK coach)

“I’d look at all the rosters to see if there were shooters. That’s another reason why I was drawn to [college] is they were like a mid-range at the basket team. No one could shoot the three. I was the only shooter on the team. For me, I think that’s what drew me that I knew they needed me.” (US college graduate)

Players and staff also described the importance of considering the style of play of the team, including whether or not a player suits that style of play and what their role would be within this. Understanding a college team’s style of play will be a step towards helping a player understand whether that team is the best fit for them.

The influence of the coach and coaching staff

One of the main factors that influenced players choice of college, was the coaching staff at the university. Players spoke about the importance of coach interactions during the recruitment process, i.e. during initial phone calls and recruitment visits. Firstly, an important consideration was whether or not the head coach had reached out to the player during the recruitment process, or whether all communication had come from the assistant coaches.

“I was going to take a visit to [US college], but that school had been recruiting me since when I was really young, and I had never met the head coach. It’s always the assistant coach, and I was like, “Well, if I was a priority, I would have met the head coach by now. You’ve been recruiting me for what? Three, four years, but I’ve never met you?” Do you know what... that’s a bit weird for me?” (Post-US player)

Secondly, players described the importance of being seen as a person, as opposed to just another number the coach has recruited. Coach behaviors and attitudes during the recruitment process helped players to understand what the connection with the coach would be like, i.e. their concern about the players as people, or the strive for results and outcomes.

“The other one was the coach, I wanted a feel from the coach that I wasn’t just going to be a number to them, and have a connection with them as well... I would say the coach thing came across really quickly. My first phone call with my head coach, it clicked. It was incredible to-- if you meet her, you’d understand what I mean, the way she is with people, it’s not even necessarily about the game.” (Current US player)

The experience of an official visit

Players spoke of the importance of going on official visits to colleges. It is important to note that:

- A recruit can make only five visits to Division I schools, limited to one per school.
- Official visits to DII and DIII schools are also limited to one per school, but there is no limit on the total number of visits.

Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of the importance of visiting more than one school and not just committing based on only one visit.

“Then my D1 I just went on the visit and that was just like, oh my God, it’s amazing and just committed one visit and I shouldn’t have done that. I totally regret it.” (Graduated US player)

I literally just went on one visit. Rookie mistake. If I could go back to being that freshman, then I’d tell her to go look around. Definitely a mistake.” (Current US player)

Official visits give players the opportunity to see the campus, see the facilities and support structures in place, meet the head coach and coaching staff, meet the team, and in general get ‘a feel’ for what life would be like at that college.

The support available at the college

Support structures are vital in balancing a student-athlete college career. This support not only includes medical provisions, physical, and psychological support, but also includes support at the academic level. It is important that players consider the support available at their shortlisted colleges, using the opportunity of an official visit to see first-hand what this support looks like. The support available at division I colleges compared to lower levels may vary drastically.

“Different schools with different levels of budget might have a better range of support. It’s making kids aware if you end up in some local junior college where the head coach is also teaching as well as coaching the team and washing the kit, this is not the same experience as going to a power five division one level where you get massages and get taped after every game and stuff like that. It’s a different ballgame. Making sure that the families know that there are differences of provision.” (Scout)

Academic opportunities and college prestige

From an academic perspective, the key questions players need to answer are as follows:

- What subject do you want to major in?
- Is this major available at your chosen college?
- Will you be able to do your chosen major alongside the basketball schedule at the college?
- Does your chosen major hold credibility and transfer back to your vocational area of interest in the UK?

Many players and support staff spoke about the problems associated with not answering these questions prior to committing to and attending college.

"I originally picked international business... for international business you have to learn a certain level of a language... Then they're like, "No, you can't do that. You won't be able to fit in with all the basketball stuff you do, it'll be really challenging for you." Then I switched my major. I wanted to go into physiotherapy, I could train over there. You can't do that because it clashed with the [strength and conditioning] time. You have to go and do practical work. We've got practice, so you can't do that. I ended up doing communication, which is a very broad major. It covers a lot of things, but it's also known as the athletes major because lots of athletes end up doing it. Some do it because they just want an easy major to do, but in my case, it was one of the few options I somewhat wanted to do/could do." (Post-US player)

"Will you be able to do your chosen major alongside all the basketball that's required?... I was like, I'm going to be real with myself, with practices that we would be doing on top of the traveling, I would not have been able to do both, so I had to change my major." (Post-US player)

This links back to a previous point around players motivations. Players need to be really clear with their 'why' – If a good education and academic attainment is a motivator for going to the US, players need to pay particular attention to the four questions above and ensure their chosen college meets their educational needs. Another factor to consider is college prestige within a particular major. For players who are academically focused, it is beneficial to look at colleges with good rankings for that particular subject area, increasing the credibility of the degree that the player will come away with.

Geographical location and cultural diversity

An interesting factor discussed a couple times throughout the interviews was the geographical location of the college and the cultural diversity within that particular area.

"I'm the one receiving like these racial slurs and I'm put in these situations where there's shootings and stuff happening. I'm from this sheltered place in [town]. I have no idea what's going on. I really think you have to do your research." (Graduated US player)

"The list is always "location", is what we spoke about, "the lifestyle of that area", an example is, there's been a couple of schools who recruit some of our kids and it's an all-White school. It's an all-White area and they're Black kids. It's something they had to think about. It will be a culture shock to them. It's looking at those things." (UK Academy coach)

Coaches also spoke about the importance of players knowing where they are going within the US, i.e. is their college in a big city, in a town, or in the middle of nowhere? The geographical

location of a college can have a big impact on the overall experience a player has whilst in the US.

“The location’s important because a lot of the places-- I know some coaches in America who work in the Midwest and they’ll fly their recruits in at night so they can’t see that there’s nothing around them, they do a great tour of the campus and then they’ll fly them back out at night so they don’t realize that it’s obviously in the middle of nowhere.”(UK coach)

“Everyone talks about the lifestyle, American dream. Some kids are in Omaha, I’d rather live in London than Omaha. I’d rather live in London than a lot of places in the US, they do market US like it’s the dream. Don’t get me wrong, but some kids are living in cornfields, and they come from Manchester.” (UK coach)

Finally, players and coaching staff spoke about location in relation to the ease of returning back to the UK (i.e. east coast America vs. west coast America.)

“Then it comes down to then what part of the country do you want to live in. Is there a climate issue? The East Coast is easier for people to come and see you and to get home. It’s like a six-hour flight or if you go to the West Coast, it’s an 11-hour flight” (UK coach)

Before accepting a scholarship at a US college, players should ask themselves:

- How important is the location of the college?
- If they are in a completely different environment to what they have grown up in, are they happy with this?

Size of the college

Size of the college was also mentioned during the interviews as a factor that players should consider when moving to college in the US:

- Do players want to go somewhere small? ...or
- Somewhere with 50,000+ students?

Once again, this can have a big impact upon a player’s experiences whilst in the US, making this an important area of consideration.

“I mean, if you look at some of these top division one schools like say North Carolina, their intake they have 53,000 students. That’s like being in a small little town. Whereas you go to a junior college, a junior college is going to be like your little secondary school... It’s a smaller place. So a lot of people want to go div one, but then they just can’t take the amount of people that are actually at the school. I mean, you look at somewhere like Michigan, when they play American football, their stadium holds 109,000 people and they’re all students or alumni. It makes Wembley look a little bit small.” (Parent, 11-13 age group)

Other athletes’ experiences of that college

All factors listed previously are important to consider when making the US college decision, however, a key step is to hear first-hand from other athletes that have studied and played at that college. Whilst taking into account individual differences in motivations, priorities, and likes and dislikes, hearing from other players can be a crucial element in finding out what a particular college really is like.

“That’s something that we have on our checklist of things, if there is someone that is at that school, or who has been to that school, I will put them in contact with them or they’ll get in contact themselves. Yes, we try and do that as much as possible.” (UK coach)

It is, however, important to understand that 'one player's bad experience may be another player's good experience'. When listening to the stories of players who have gone to a particular college, it is key to understand the factors that impacted upon whether it was a positive or negative experience, i.e. was it due to the overall culture of the programme and the college, or was it a result of individual circumstances such as a player's position or injury.

"The problem is players coming back can only tell one story which was their personal experience of that particular environment at that particular time where they fit on the roster... It's difficult to get a good feel for the landscape." (Player scout)

Flexibility

A couple of players discussed the importance of a college being flexible, particularly with regard to summer school and the opportunity for players to return home and play for the national team during the summer. The following quote outlines the benefit this flexibility had on this player's opportunity to continue playing for the national team.

"They were like, "If you want to do national team instead, that's absolutely fine, it's your decision." Also, they said if I needed to go home for national team mid-year, they would fund that, they would fly me home and fly me back. They were like, "National team comes first." Because we were quite an international group they knew that that was important to us." (Graduated US player)

Does it tick all the boxes?

Based on all the considerations listed above, there are a lot of factors for young players to think about prior to accepting a scholarship offer at a US college. It is very unlikely that one college will tick every single box – It is, however, important for players to pick a **top 3 criteria** based on what is most important to them. These criteria may change over the process, but will help to guide their decision, preventing players from being blinded by the first offer.

"I remember a girl was like, "I love it. I want to go there." I'm like, "Let's look at your top three." It doesn't tick any of them." I said, "Are we changing your top three now? Or are we compromising too much, because you're just excited about this conversation you had?" (Agent)

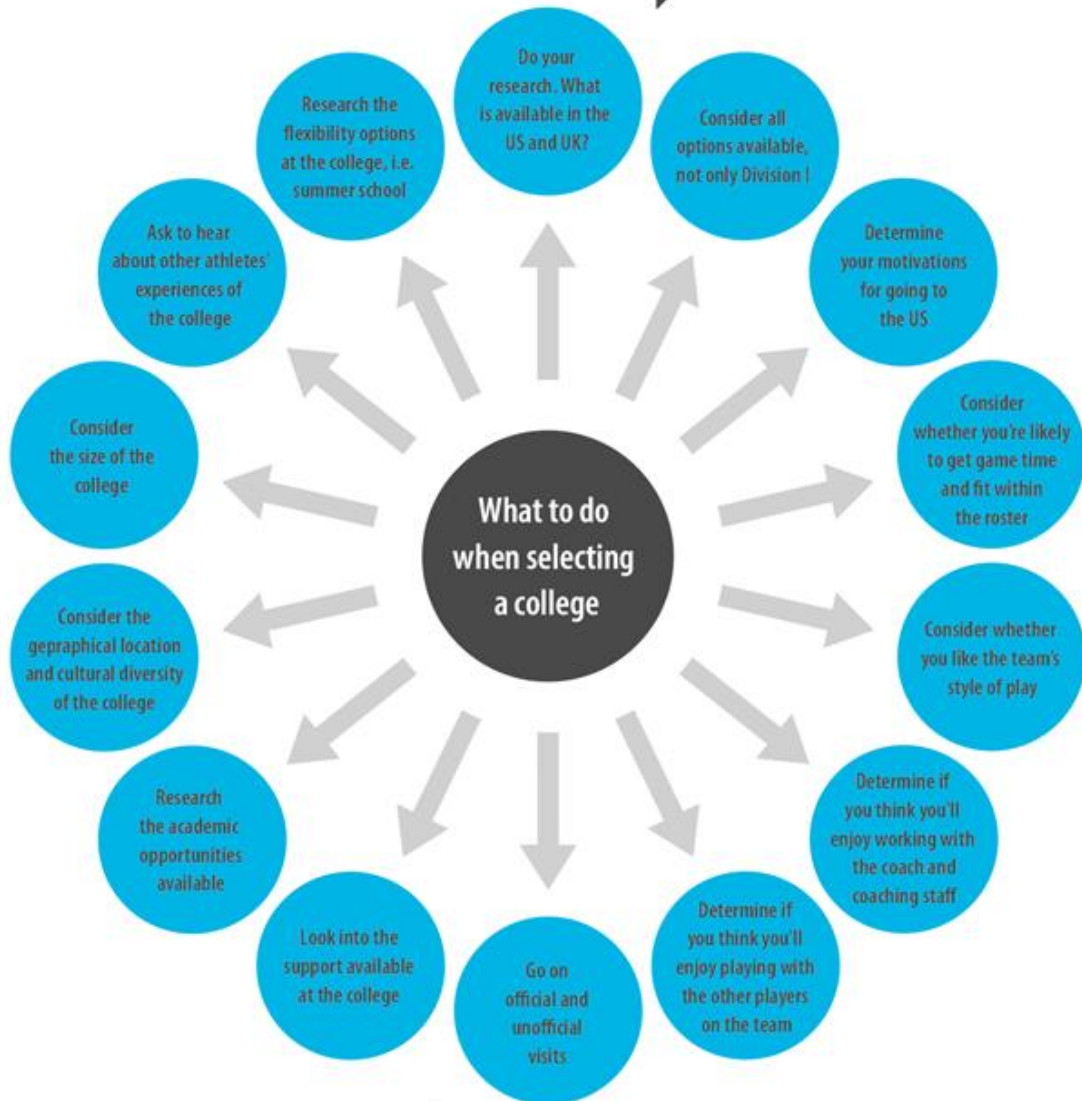
The key question ALL players need to answer is:

- **What are your non-negotiables?**

The below graphic supports players to consider what their non-negotiables and top 3 criteria are when selecting a college.

What to do when selecting a US college

What are your non-negotiables?



What are your top three criteria?



The recruitment process

A player has decided they want to go to the US...what do they need to consider in the recruiting process?

Following key considerations that players should make when deciding if the US is the right option for them, we asked for players and stakeholders' thoughts and feedback around what every player should consider when going through the recruitment process. This will not include considerations around which college to choose, as the next section focuses exclusively on this. The findings fall under 5 main categories:

1. Consider the "offer" carefully
2. Consider how you can boost recruitment opportunities
3. Timelines & locations
4. Consider whether you want to use an agent/recruitment company
5. Players should be in control of the process

Consider the "offer" carefully

Is it an offer...or are they just showing an interest?

During the recruitment process, we found that some players may not be clear on the difference between receiving a formal offer from a US college and a US college simply showing an interest in a player. If a coach shows an interest by contacting a player and talking about the college, this can lead players to stop searching for other options.

"I will reach out to a kid and they'll say, "Yes, it's going well. I've got offers." I'm like, "What do you mean by offers?" "I've got an email from this one coach." "No, that's not how it works." Getting a generic email, or a reply to an email that you sent just politely saying, "Yes, we'll take a look at your film." (Scout)

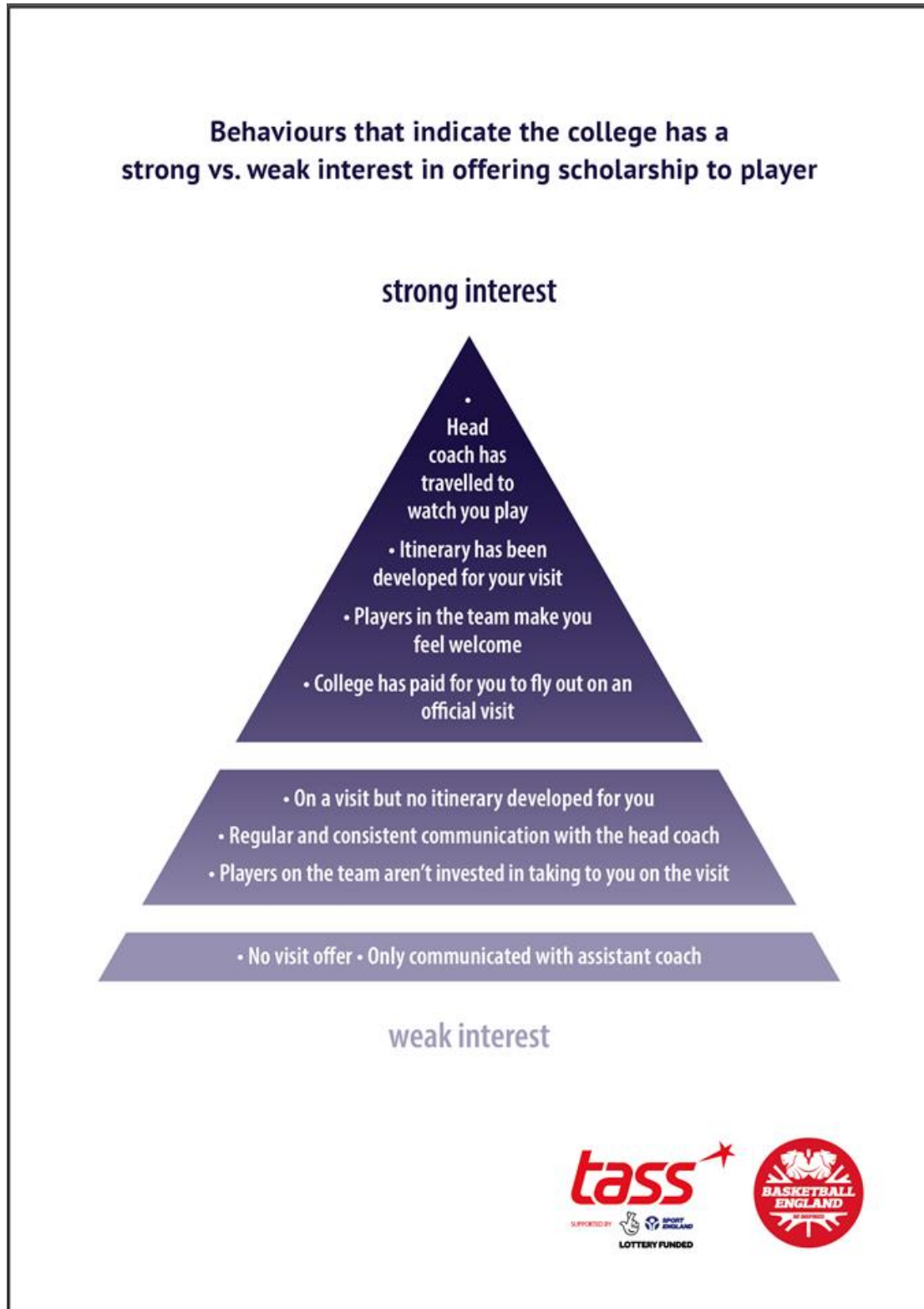
"The assistant coach speaking to you is not a scholarship offer." (Scout)

Some players described being put in difficult situations when they put all their hopes into one school because they believed they were going to offer them a scholarship, only not to receive a formal offer. Players and scouts discussed some of the key behaviours and actions that schools do if they are likely to offer you a scholarship.

"When you're facetimeing every week with the head coach and they're talking to you and they say, "Okay, we're paying for you to come and take an official visit. When you visit, we'll get to know you a bit more, and then we might offer you," that's a different ballgame to just a kid being on the slow replier of emails." (US Scout)

"You could tell who wanted you by who rang you and how enthusiastic they were when they rang you. Because lower schools that really wanted me, the head coach would always talk to me, they would always ring me, they'd always check how I was playing and stuff." (Post-US player)

The following table ranks behaviours that suggest whether the US college have a strong interest in offering the player a scholarship vs. those that have a weak interest.



Be aware of the sales pitch

Another topic of discussion during the interview process was that players should action some caution around what the US college is selling them about their experience at the college could be like. Stakeholders such as agents and scouts who work closely with players to get them a US scholarship suggested that:

- Players should always do extensive research on the college themselves, instead of trusting what they are being told.
- Players should be aware that the college may try to adjust their communication to make the offer more appealing based on what the player is looking for in their US experience.

“They’re just trying to snatch a deal and get a kid in. When you’re talking to them, telling them that you’re really excited about living in the city, even if they’re 45 minutes out, they’ll tell you, “Oh, it’s really easy to get to the city and it’s really fun and it’s great. If you sound a bit worried and scared, they’ll say, “We’re at least an hour out of the city and it’s really safe here. You don’t need to worry.” Whatever you feed, they’re just salespeople and that’s their job.” (Scout)

“I would say college basketball is probably, behind the NBA, is probably the second-best marketed sports, especially basketball. They market themselves incredibly well as “this is everything you need. You need this rather than we need you.” (Agent)

Players described how their colleges would send them postcards, continually trying to get their attention during the recruitment process. In addition, players described how coaches acted very friendly towards them during the recruitment stage, but that often changed when they had signed the scholarship agreement.

“The assistant coaches literally act like people that are my age, friends, they do call you and you could talk about life. It wasn’t basketball. They became your best friends, so I think that was what drew me there, but again, it was like all a facade. It all disappeared when you were there.”

Additional recommendations from players and stakeholders include:

- Speak to other players who have recruited by the same college – what was their communication with the college like during the recruitment stage?
- Ask a player who is at the college if they know why they have been in contact with you and why they might want to recruit you

Don’t jump at the first offer – wait to see what’s on the table

Another suggested consideration during the recruitment stage is to avoid falling into the trap of immediately accepting the first offer you receive without considering or exploring other options.

“It was the first place that I got a full scholarship, so everything’s paid for. Then, two days after I committed, signed, and did all the paperwork and stuff to say I’m going here, I got offered a full scholarship to a Division II school, which is a four-year school. I couldn’t go because I bet I would have been blacklisted or something as I’d already signed the papers and stuff. If I’d had gotten the Division II school before, I definitely would have gone to the Division II school. It was purely because they were the first ones to give me a full scholarship.”

Players may feel pressure to commit to their first offer. Players should however take some time to figure out whether there is a more optimal offer on the table. If the college wants you enough, they should be prepared to wait.

Consider how you can boost recruitment opportunities

Players and stakeholders also discussed lots of considerations that players should make around how they can boost their chances of securing a scholarship.

Be proactive in contacting colleges

Players and stakeholders described how, in most cases, you cannot sit back and wait for colleges to contact you. Players instead need to be proactive in the recruitment process and actively contact colleges themselves.

“I even did some research and found some email addresses for various athletics departments of some coaches in America and just sent them a game tape I think of the highlights of possibly her GB Youth European Tournament. I guess it just shows that you don't need a recruitment company to get your son or daughter's name out there.” (Parent of 14-16 player)

“As much as some people don't think that emailing coaches works, it really does. I got a lot of replies from coaches through email through emailing them. For me, I just didn't think that I needed a recruiting agent. It never even crossed my mind” (Player about to transition to the US)

A number of players described how they developed spreadsheets of athletic department/ coach contacts of schools they were interested in and contacted them with a highlight tape of themselves. Although many may perceive that you cannot get to the US without going through a recruitment company or agency, players in this project described having a high level of success just by contacting colleges themselves.

Be active on social media: but be careful what you post!

If players are looking to get recruited, they should be active on social media (in particular, Instagram – which was discussed a lot). To get noticed, players should be actively posting clips of their games and training on their social media accounts and building a ‘brand’. College coaches are very active on social media and like to follow prospective players several years before transition.

“[Player] has set up an Instagram account recently whilst we've been locked down, and she tries to record most of her training sessions and all her skills that she's doing. She records it, it's all on there. It's just for basketball, nothing else.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

A big topic of discussion amongst was the need for players who are trying to get recruited to be vigilant about what they post on their social media accounts. Some of the key highlights include:

- Market your brand carefully – how do you want to come across to colleges?
- Players should check all social media accounts and remove anything inappropriate, including pictures and bad language – colleges look for this!

“The first thing we look at when we are starting to look at a kid go on their social media. If they have got swear words all over their social media and pictures of them doing inappropriate things...We just drop them right away. So many schools are like that now. In terms of getting recruited social media is a huge, huge deal. Anything where you've got swearing, anything where you've got inappropriate pictures.” (US Collegiate coach)

“They might see something on your page, whether it’s a retweet, whether it’s a like, whether it’s you sharing an opinion which is a little bit too controversial. Again, some people, that might turn them off.” (Academy coach)

Do your highlights match the style of play of the college?

Linked to the above, players should have a highlight tape prepared in advance of the recruitment process (that should be no longer than 2 to 3 minutes long). Participants also discussed the importance of editing your highlight tape to meet the style/needs of the college you are trying to get recruited to. Players should:

- Be aware of the style of play of the college they are sending the tape to
- Be aware of what type of player the college looking for
- Consider whether their highlight tape matches this style

“Then they will put that centre or that person in the same position that they would put their main player. Then they would see how that player makes the situation happen. That would be a great highlight focal point of the video because then you send it to that school and it’s like, “Oh. That’s our player. Oh. that’s what they did? Oh, we like her. She knows that. Okay. Let’s see what happens.” That’s how the recruiting sessions start. You don’t just want to send a highlight video of you shooting. You’re doing all this different stuff but it has nothing to do with the style of play of the college you want to go to.” (Post-US player)

Timelines & locations

A lot of discussion emerged around recruitment timelines and it is clear that there is currently no clarity amongst parents and players around when they should be starting to look for a college. Key findings to emerge included:

- Parents aren’t clear when they should start looking for a college
- Players in the US believed they started the recruitment process too late and this limited their options
- Leaving recruitment too late can leave players unhappy with their options and this links to player’s transferring colleges
- Academy coaches stress the importance of starting the process at the very least – 2 years before players’ transition
- Covid-19 may impact recruitment for the coming years – players should be aware that a lot of American players signed early because of the panic created by coronavirus.
- You don’t need to be in the US to gain exposure to US colleges

Don’t start too late if you want to avoid transferring

One of the key pieces of advice from the interviews was the importance of not starting the process too late. Players described how starting late significantly limited their opportunities and, in some cases, can lead players to transferring. Starting the process when a senior in an academy was deemed to be too late, and instead players should start looking at options at least 2 years in advance of leaving for the USA if they are certain it is the right avenue for them. US based players often start this process even earlier, approximately 3-4 years before they go to college.

“I would say start the process way earlier than being a senior at Barking Abbey and deciding that you want to pursue going to America. Americans are starting when they’re sophomores in high school.” (Post-US player)

Starting the recruitment process too late can mean:

- Players become a back-up option for colleges – schools will be focused on other players

- Players options become limited (there might only be 1 or 2 options opposed to 10)
- Players haven't had time to explore which college is best for them potentially leading to a transfer
- College coaches don't have you on their radar before you are due to play at major events (e.g., European Championships), meaning they will not travel to see you

A scout noted how players are often not clear on how big the market is, and believe they have time to be recruited because they are currently the top player in their own club environment.

"A lot of the kids start the recruiting process late so they're not the number one choice of the school that's recruiting. They're a backup. That's always a difficult position. They start it late and they might have two or three options. I don't think there they are as informed as they should be and try and make that decision. There's been a really worrying trend over the last few years with the number of kids transferring once they've got out to the States. I think that's an indication of poor information in my experience." (Scout)

For the class of 2021, 750 kids have already signed. A new kid asking me who's a senior, like, "Can you help me?" I'm like, "I don't think I can. I've already got 60, 70 kids on my report who are unsigned, who are all national team level players." (Scout)

Parents of talent pathway players weren't clear on when to start the recruitment process, with some suggesting that they would wait until the player was in year 12 or 13. However, based on the suggestions former US-based players and scouts, this is too late.

So, when exactly should you commit to a college?

Many coaches expressed the concerns their players had around deciding when the right time to commit to a college is. If players have started the recruitment process early and have taken the time to explore all of their options (i.e., which college has the best for them personally), there is no danger in committing early. Players highlighted how committing early (over a year before going) relieved some of the pressure for them, and they were able to effectively prepare.

"There is an advantage of signing early. Because of that weight is lifted off your shoulders. Because if you are a highly recruited kid and you leave it late you are going to have to deal with a lot." (Academy coach)

"I committed in year 12. I was very early in my decision. Usually girls don't decide until year 13...I wanted to be set. I wanted to know what I needed to work on. I didn't want to have to stress about it and I wanted to focus on my exams." (Current US player)

Committing to a school could be beneficial for many players, reducing any stress on finding a school and meaning they can focus on their final exams. However, a player must only do this if they have assessed all their options in the both the US and UK, and they feel that the offer is the optimal choice for them personally.

Where do players get noticed by US colleges?

Besides the exposure that social media can create for players, participants also described how US coaches 'noticed' them at various places, including:

- Playing for England across Europe
- US coaches visiting UK academies and other venues (often touring the country)

"That was one of my own goals for the team, was the further we go [in the tournament], the more recognition everyone could get" (Post-US player)

"We're very fortunate that because of the relationship we've had with some of the schools which have recruited previous players. Between the back end of September and start of October, we usually get three or four Division I coaches that will come and fly over." (Academy coach)

Some players suggested however that they thought they needed to be in the US environment to get exposure to US colleges, with one coach noting how a player had decided to leave the academy to travel to the US with the hope of being recruited.

"After one year with us, he isn't coming back for a second year because he bangs on about exposure and is paying to go and play in the US next year. That's a substantial amount of money to play in the US next year just because he feels that by paying to be there next year, that's going to give him more exposure to find somewhere in the US rather than being with us for our second year and finishing off his academics." (Academy coach)

Consider whether you want to use an agent/recruitment company

Another key factor to consider for players who want to go to the US is do they need to use some form of agency or recruitment company to help them. Key areas to emerge from this research were:

- Parents don't know what to do when a recruitment company reaches out to their child
- Don't trust the service at face value – do your research
- Players need to consider the 'type' of service they want – individually tailored vs. mass marketing
- Player service companies or agents may 'oversell' a player for their own gain
- Players must understand their playing level before using any services
- Education on recruitment companies and agents should be introduced earlier in the talent pathway

Go it alone or seek assistance?

This research only scratched the surface when looking at the world of agents and recruitment companies, and we therefore recommend that Basketball England explore this area in greater depth. However, we did find that there is currently a lot of confusion from player and parents and the value of using a service (such as an agent) opposed to going it alone. players should consider is what are the practicalities of using an agent? A key question that players should ask themselves is:

- What more will I get from using an agent/service that I either can't do myself or get help with through my academy/coach?

Parents outlined that their children regularly received messages from different companies over social media but had no idea how viable these companies were and suggested how easy it must be for some to go down that route when they aren't receiving any support elsewhere.

So I'm aware that there are a people out there selling it, but what I'm not aware of is just how valid and viable it is, so it's not something we've taken up so far" (Parent, 14-16 age group)

"It does sound amazing, doesn't it? Someone from America gets in touch, and basketball is so huge in America. You could potentially get a bit carried away or excited about it all... "Oh wow, a big college in America has contacted." If you haven't got any support or anyone to speak to, you could make the wrong decisions, or push your daughter into doing the wrong things." (Parent, 11-13 age group)

Parents described experiences of using recruitment services that went bust during the process, after they had already paid in excess of £600. This emphasises how important it is for players and parents to do their research before choosing to use a specific company. Specific questions they should consider include:

- How many other UK athletes have successfully used this service? Where did they go in the US?
- How much is it? What's the value for money?
- When are you expected to make the payment (before or after gaining a scholarship?) - paying before could mean you risk becoming ineligible
- Could someone in the UK system help you do it for free?
- What exposure will they give you?

Basketball England may wish to consider developing a list of 'approved' companies and agencies. In some cases, players as young as 13 described being approached by recruitment companies, suggesting that education within this area should be introduced very early on in the talent pathway.

Another key factor to consider regarding agents is that players need to establish what 'type' of agency that want to work with. Players and agents within this research spoke about how the type of support offered by agencies and companies vary drastically. They include:

- Marketing firms – they send out emails with a player's highlight video to coaches across the US hoping that someone will open the email. RISK - players must take into consideration however that thousands of other prospective players' highlight reels are also landing into coach's inboxes.
- Scouting services - college coaches pay scouts an annual subscription approved by the NCAA and they get access to the scout's database of players across Europe. Player's recognised by scouts can sign up to this service for free. RISK – players may lack choice of college.
- Individually tailored support – these support services focus more on understanding player criteria around colleges, what they want from the experience and matching this with colleges. RISK – may be costly and limited compared to other services.

"You need to establish how the agency is working. Some are email marketing firms. Literally, all they're doing is you put all your information, you organize your video, you send them out and then all they're doing is pinging an email out to 3,000 coaches, it's fishing, hoping that somebody is going to open up the email and read it. Are you working with an agency that is more directly involved?" (Scout)

Players must understand their level - don't risk being 'oversold'

An interesting topic to emerge that links with the recruitment stage and working with agents is the importance of players having a clear understanding of their level in relation to what level they could be recruited to in the US. Some highlights include:

- Players and parents can lack knowledge around their 'level' in relation to the US system.
- Players may not be good enough to get a scholarship at their desired level after paying an agent.
- Players can be 'oversold' in the recruitment process by agents leading to players not being matched to the right college for their level – potentially resulting to poor experience and possible transfer.

- Before entering the recruitment process – players need to be supported in understanding their level in relation to the US system.

“I don't think the kids know how to target the right level school. If they're going about it themselves, they could waste a lot of time.” (Scout)

“For me really one thing that I think is key for parents and the players as well is not to get blinded by the lights in the sense of a lot of the times parents and players want to go to the highest possible college division one top of the bag, and sometimes that might not be the best thing for the player, because they may not play that much. They might spend two years on the bench and then transferred to another college.” (Parent, 14-16 age group)

Before entering the recruitment process, players must seek to understand what a realistic level for them in the US is to avoid transferring or having a negative experience. They may do this though speaking with other players that have transitioned to the US system and their coaches. Basketball England may wish to produce some additional guidance around how players can assess their levels in relation to where they may fit best within the US Collegiate division structure. Without doing this, players risk being ‘oversold’ for the benefit of the agent.

“The player is oversold...and then the kid's unhappy because they're encouraged to leave or they don't get playing time. The college coaches are unhappy because they've wasted the scholarship on a kid that can't help them win... Player services are doing it because you're going to get the money if they get a scholarship. They might oversell you or over promote you because, at the end of the day, that's how they're going to get paid.” (Scout)

Players should be in control of the process

During recruitment, we found that it is extremely valuable for players to:

- Be in control of their own decisions – managing the process can assist in the development of valuable skills when they make the transition
- Being in the control of the process will help players to understand how invested they are in going to the USA vs. Someone else leading on the decision
- Have a plan B – if they don't get a scholarship in the US... what's next?

“I think that it's important and one of the reasons we stress that they're in control of the [decision-making] process is because I think if they're not willing to do the work, there's a theme of things being done for them and then they're not being able to cope when they go away... I think it's about, how do they manage it? I think this is quite a good way of being able to see, do they really want it?” (Academy coach)

“If kids just have it all done for them, and they're just a bit like, “Okay,” and it's easy, and it's, “I've got all of these schools,” and they go, they can struggle to be in control of what happens when they go out there because they don't have the skills to be able to deal with those things.” (Academy coach)

If the player is the one leading the recruitment process, this will not only help them to develop management and communication skills that will be valuable during their transition to the US, but ensure that the US route is the pathway that the player is motivated to take. Although support from parents, other players, agents, and coaches may be critical in guiding the player through the process, they should be mindful to allow the player the autonomy to make key decisions themselves.

An additional finding was that many players attempt to gain scholarships in the US but fail to do so without having any substantial back up plan. Those players that did do their UCAS applications to UK-based universities alongside looking for US scholarship options described feeling comforted that they had another option if they failed to get recruited to the US college of their choice.

“Yes, I did apply. I still have my place at Uni. I applied to different Unis. I still have that option, technically. I'm happy that I did apply for it because I do have that option... It just gave me a bit more comfort that like, 'I don't have to make a decision right now'... I think it's important to have that, even as a backup” (Player about to transition to the US)

Areas for basketball players to consider in the US recruitment process

Consider the 'offer' carefully
Is it a firm scholarship offer or are they just showing 'interest'?
Don't stop looking at schools if you don't have an offer in writing.

The sales pitch
Be aware that the college may adjust communication to make it more appealing to you. Do your own research!

Be active on social media
Post highlights on social media but build your brand carefully. How do you want to come across to colleges? Check for any inappropriate content from years ago!

Match highlight reel to college style of play
Be aware of the style of play at the college you are sending the tape to and what type of player the college are looking for. Edit your tape accordingly.

Start the process early!
Start looking at least two years before transition. Starting late limits research time, means you may become a back-up option and could lead to a transfer.

So when should you commit to a college?
Committing a year in advance can relieve pressure, however, make sure it is the right college for you!

Go it alone or seek help?
If you're looking at agents, ask: how many UK athletes have successfully used this service? How much is it? Could someone in the UK system help you do it at no cost?

What type of agency do you want to work with?
Marketing firms - send fishing emails (risk - may get lost). Scouting service - coaches get access to scout database (risk - may lack choice). Tailored agency support - work with you to understand what you want (risk - may be costly).

Understand your level!
Players can be 'oversold' in the recruitment process by agents, leading to players not being matched to the right college for their level - seek help to understand your level in the US system.

Player should be in control of the process
Be in control of your own decisions - managing the process can assist in the development of valuable skills. Have a plan B - if you don't get a scholarship in the US... what's next?

Selecting and committing to a school

Advice for players during the decision-making phase

While the previous section aimed to inform players about the decision-making process and the key questions they need to consider in deciding upon the American route, players and staff within the study also offered some useful advice to players going through this process. This advice fits into 3 areas:

Reflect

Prepare

Be aware

Reflect

Take your time

The decision-making process is long and can become overwhelming when you have lots of information to take on board. We would encourage players to take their time to understand their options, understand what they want and to make their decision on their terms.

“Don’t feel that you need to rush to make a decision or anything like that. Really take in all the information around you” (Current US player)

It is also important not to be pressured or rushed into making a decision. If the school or college that you are considering values you as a member of their team, they’ll allow you to make a decision in your own time.

“I tell them [players], don’t let them [US coaches] pressure you. If they say, “We need you to sign by Wednesday,” obviously, they have another player lined up who they’re almost just as happy to have” (UK coach)

Is this right for you?

Players were urged to make the decision that was right for them as an individual.

“I’d advise them just to do what you want to do and don’t give in to the pressures of social media or the basketball community because at the end of the day you’re going to be living that life. You’re going to be doing whatever you’ve decided to do.” (Current US player)

One aspect of making sure the decision is right for you is thinking about balance and matching your preference for balance with that of the school. How do you prefer to approach basketball and education?

- A higher focus on basketball and doing the minimum in school,
- 50/50 focus on both, or
- School is more important, then basketball comes second.

It can be tempting to show college coaches that you are 100% committed to basketball, but if this is not how you prefer to balance your life, you might not enjoy the experience when you get there.

"I don't see it [basketball] as something that I eat, live, and breathe kind of thing. I feel like to be a D-I athlete, it has to ultimately be that because you have to devote summer school, you have to devote all your time and attention to it, all your focus to it. Don't get me wrong. D-II I've learned is similar to that as well, but I don't at least have to commit myself in the summers and spend all this extra time with the program which for me, it was just such an unnecessary thing." (Current US player)

"I did feel like as soon as they [US coaches] brushed off anything else other than basketball [social and education] it did worry me a bit." (Player, graduated in the UK)

Don't forget about all of the options

In making sure you make the right decision for you; it is important to remember that you could reconsider the other options available to you in the UK and the US. It is suggested that youth players:

- Reflect on UK opportunities
- Don't forget about Division II – could this more suitable than Division I?

One player explains how they chose to stay in the UK, after the recruitment process because they hadn't found a school that was right for them.

"I didn't want to just go for the sake of going. I wanted to go somewhere where I actually felt like I could go and play and improve. I just didn't have anything offered to me where I thought it would benefit me compared to going here [UK university], so I decided to take this route." (Player, graduated from UK university).

Many players explained that they wished they'd considered their options in NCAA Division II, junior college or NAIA, rather than being fixed on NCAA Division I.

"If I would have known, I would have gone to a Division II or an NAIA school and played... I think I would have had a really good experience." (Post-US player)

"Are you willing to sit on the bench, the first two seasons get up every day at five or six o'clock in the morning, practice every day and still sit on a bench because that might happen, or maybe pick a Division II school if you think you'll play loads and get more out of it." (Post-US Player)

Have you considered all of the aspects?

Lots of players in the research focused their decisions only on basketball but regretted this approach and encouraged other players to think about what it will be like to live in America on a daily basis.

"I think a lot of people from England don't think about the things that come along with that in terms of, "Where are you going to be living? How far is the commute to training every day? What are your food options? Do you have access to all the things you need?" Most players don't think of living in America. They just think of, "I'm playing basketball in America. It looks great"... You're ultimately the one that has to live with the decision you've made and it is really important that people understand that." (Post-US player)

One key aspect to consider is your education. You will be spending a significant portion of your time in classes and studying, it is therefore important that you are able to take a subject that you want to study and that the college major you select will help you in the future.

"If I could go back, the only real regret I have in my life is that I did what I did at university and I didn't do something that I was actually really interested in because now my options are basketball or sit down and seriously think about starting from scratch and having to go and do something completely different. I have a degree in psychology, but I have no real use for it. I did it at the time because I was good at it and I didn't know what else to do" (Player, graduated from the US)

During the reflection phase, players should consider:

- Are there any **red flags?** (i.e., is there something that doesn't feel quite right?)

If there are – address these before accepting an offer/position at a US college.



Prepare

Gain as much information as possible

"I just think information is power, the more you know the more informed you are, you can make a better decision." (Recruitment Agent)

In the end, it will be you who has to live with your decision, so we would encourage players to do the research themselves and use multiple sources of information, including:

- Players and coaches on your team
- National team coaches
- Family and friends
- Players who have been to America
- Players, students, head coaches, assistant coaches, and teachers in the college you are considering
- College brochures and websites
- College rosters

It could also help to prepare questions you have for coaches and players in advance and make sure you have them answered.

"Always make sure you ask as many questions as you can while you're out there because although you're probably 18 or whatever, and you're probably a little bit shy or within yourself, you might be on a visit by yourself or whatever, just have a set list of questions that you want to go out there with and make sure you get all of them answered before you leave in person. It's probably better if you're really considering that school, you go for an official visit. Asking in person is better than over email because it's easy to see whether you are getting blocked or not." (Post-US player)

Part of gaining as much information as possible is also keeping an open mind when talking to or visiting different schools and avoiding committing to the first school you come across.

Be aware!

The recruitment process might not be as transparent as you might think

One of the best ways to understand what your American experience might be like is to go on an official visit to a college.

"I would say 100% that you need to visit the school that you're going to go to." (Post-US player)

However, it is important to remember that official visits are designed to encourage you to pick that school. The coaches and players will be showing you the best bits of the school. As a player, it is important that you try to gain honest opinions about what it's like at that college.

"They're just trying to snatch a deal and get a kid in. When you're talking to them, telling them that you're really excited about living in the city, even if they're 45 minutes out, they'll tell you, "Oh, it's really easy to get to the city and it's really fun and it's great". If you sound a bit worried and scared, they'll say, "We're at least an hour out of the city and it's really safe here. You don't need to worry." Whatever you feel, they're just salespeople and that's their job." (Recruitment agent)

"That sometimes its the American dream. How they live out here and how they market America. I would say college basketball is probably, behind the NBA, is probably the second-best marketed sports, especially basketball. They market themselves incredibly well as "this is everything you need. You need this rather than we need you." (Recruitment agent)

Are other people influencing your decision?

There can be a lot of different people involved or interested in your recruitment process, parents, siblings, coaches, teammates, and teachers. While they might all have your best interests at heart and offer their opinions on which option you should take, you need to make the decision that is best for you and that you are most comfortable with.

"As much as I say it was my own decision, and it was, I did let other people influence it in a way because I put out, "I'm going to visit these schools," before I had even gone. No one cared about the other two apart from [US college]. I was like if I didn't go to [that college], it would have been like, not a fail, but it was like everyone was going crazy about, "Oh, she's visiting [US college]." (Player, currently in US)

"A lot of it was me listening to what I thought others wanted me to do, where they wanted me to go. I initially decided to go to another school but when I was met with resistance, I changed my mind. I think your intuition from visits and your relationship with the coaches shouldn't be overlooked." (Post-US player)

Don't get distracted by the 'bright lights'

Many of the players and coaches we spoke to in the research warned others not to allow themselves to be distracted by the 'bright lights' of America. What they mean but this is the facilities, scholarships, and kit that you can be offered by colleges can be overwhelming. While these things can be exciting and great to have they are only part of the experience and you need to consider all the aspects, e.g., education, coach relationship, team atmosphere, potential to play.

"It is one of the things that everyone says, "Don't get distracted by the big lights and stuff," but you do because everything they had was just amazing. I look back at it now and I'm like, "Oh, I shouldn't have got distracted by that." (Player, dropped out)

"For me really one thing that I think is key for parents and the players as well is not to get blinded by the lights in the sense of a lot of the times parents and players want to go to the highest possible college division one top of the bag, and sometimes that might not be the best thing for the player, because they may not play that much. They might spend two years on the bench and then transferred to another college and have to sit out for a year... It is really about finding the right level for your child both in terms of the academics and the basketball." (Coach)

Your relationship with your college coach will impact your experience

Many of the players described how they based their decision around the relationship they developed with the college coach during the recruitment process and those players that didn't, explained that they wished they had considered this aspect more.

"Definitely what I enjoyed most about my basketball in England was my relationships with my coaches, and I can't lie. I went to America and that's just something that's been really missing for me. (Current US player)

Social media***What others are putting on social media***

Some players, academies, agents and coaches might choose to post details of the recruitment process or the US experience on social media. While this can give you an idea of what the process and experience is like, remember – people tend to only put their successes on social media and not post about the negative aspects. They could also be exaggerating their success. In other words, this might not give you the full picture.

"Some schools post that this kid and this kid and this kid and this kid are all going to America and everyone thinks it's great. Are the kids going back to them and asking, "But that kid transferred and that kid transferred and that kid came back home?" (Recruitment agent)

Preparing to go to the US

The following section begins to explore English players' experiences of Colligate basketball in America. First, there were some key points that athletes and coaches identified as helping players to prepare for their migration to the US. This included physical, mental, social technical, and tactical preparation.

Physical Preparation

For many players that went to the US, one of the challenges as adapting to longer or more regular training sessions than they are used to in the UK.

"I feel I was not ready for three-hour practices...but that is something I would train for. I feel if I've ever done anything, it's been two-hour practices or one intense, an hour and a half or something like that... and then on top that, weights and conditioning or whatever they want to do. On top of the three hours, you then add another 30 minutes to an hour. You'll end up doing four hours and you've just been in the gym the whole time. It's so draining mentally, physically in every aspect. It's just a lot for the body to take and the mind." (Player, current in US)

To help with this adjustment, preparing for longer and more regular training is something that players can start to do themselves before they leave for America by working on their fitness level and their weight training.

"I went there in the best shape I could, ready to like be killed all the time, and it was easy, really. It was really easy." (Current US player)

It is recommended that players do this with a coach or strength and conditioning coach to make sure they don't overtrain and are using good technique when weight training.

Get senior playing experience pre-USA

As a freshman in a US college, players will need to be able to compete and play against others who are 2-3 years older than them. The level of basketball and quality of play might also be higher than they are used to in the UK.

"I think one of the worst things that can happen is you only play junior basketball, then if you do go to the US, you're now all of a sudden 18-years-old going against 18, 19, 20, 21 and that's a big adjustment if you've never had any experience of going against men's players. That's one of the biggest things." (Academy/GB coach)

To prepare for this, players are encouraged to play in senior teams within the BBL/WBBL to help them gain experience and develop as players physically and tactically.

"I didn't find the basketball schedule shocking at all. I think playing in the women's [senior] game here really made the transition easy, in terms of basketball." (Post-US player)

"I think I was lucky that I did play WBBL for quite a long time. My IQ coming into the game was ahead of a lot of people on my team. That put me in a good position." (Post-US player)

Developing independence and looking after yourself

Moving to America for college basketball also means a move away from home, family and player's usual support network. This will also mean that players need to be able to manage themselves

and be independent in getting themselves to training and classes. For some players, being in the academy system help them to do that:

“I think being at the academy and moving away from home at 16 really helps, as being away and being a part of the academy and a program...Like it helped me mature and it helped prepare me. I feel like I'm quite prepared” (Player)

““One of the big things that, I think, we're able to do with kids coming to us at 16, you're living by yourself and you're having to figure stuff out at 16. Now, okay, yes, there's living wardens and other wardens around campus but primarily you're adjusting to being away from home at a younger age than most people. I think, there's a bunch of kids that sign to go to the States, that would have never been away from home before they'd gone. I think, it's really beneficial if you can live away from home and have that exposure early, because you are developing some of those life skills.” (GB/academy coach)

The academy system enabled young players to experience living away from home and develop life skills, such as independence, in a safe environment. While players can prepare as much as they can, there will always be aspects of the experience that they did expect and aspects of the experience that they find challenging.

“I was expecting that to be my year where I was growing, learning from other players, thus, that, the other. In actual fact, I went in and they wanted me to start and all this stuff. As a person, I'm not the most confident and don't have the biggest ego on the court especially not. In that situation, I drowned almost. I had one or two good games, but other than that, I cracked into the pressure of it all.” (Player, currently in US)

Understanding this and mentally preparing to cope with the unexpected can help players to handle the adjustment. It is recommended that Basketball England look to develop a US transition programme that focuses on the lifestyle and mental preparation that is required for players to develop prior to entry into the US system.

Get to know your teammates

Once players have signed to a college it could be helpful for them to connect with players on their team or players who are also joining that year to begin developing relationships and a support network for when they arrive. Doing this could also give you an idea of what it might be like and help you to mentally prepare for your transition.

“I think it's encouraging the kids to make connections with players out there beforehand... I think if you speak to the players that are on the ground that have been through the system, you can get more of a picture of what it's like to be in that environment.” (GB/academy coach)

Arriving before the semester starts

Some players might be asked to attend college for pre-season training or summer school. This will mean that your first experience of your college will be when the rest of the student body are not on campus. You need to be prepared for it to be much quieter and there to be less people around.

“I got there, I went for summer school, and none of the senior players were there at this point. It was just literally just the freshmen there. I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere for four weeks and there was nothing open-- Well, things were open but like campus wasn't really open. It was a tough first few weeks” (Player, dropped out of US).

Key individuals in the decision making and preparation process

This section will look at some of the key individuals and stakeholders that may have an influence on a player's decision-making processes. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that some of these individuals are key in supporting players through the recruitment process. In some cases, however, too much input from others can sway a player's decision away from what **they** want or from what is best for **them**.

Coaching Staff

Coaching staff can be a fantastic resource in supporting players through the recruitment process, with support including, but not limited to, the following:

- Helping develop a mix tape
- Identifying the different options that are available
- Identifying the positive and negative aspects of each option
- Providing US college contacts
- Supporting players through the process in its entirety

The following quotes highlight the invaluable support that UK coaches had on the players recruitment processes.

"My coaches gave me the different options rather than pushing me to an option. We sat down and we hit all the positives and negatives that we could. The positive and negatives of staying at [UK University] against to a JUCO and then specific. Then also overseas options. We sat down. I think that was the best thing because then you take in the positives and negatives more if you write them down." (Player about to begin college in the US)

"We've also got the other coaches there. My dad's not very technical, so they will make the mix tape for you to send to your coaches or pick the games and upload them and send all the emails out." (Post-US player)

Some players described the challenges involved with UK coaching staff becoming **too** involved in the decision-making process, and on the reverse, not being involved at all. The following quote outlines the impact a coach can have on the process, 'putting players off' certain schools based upon personal views and relations there.

"He didn't like a lot of people so he would put me off school. He didn't want to go to [US college]. He put me off schools where he didn't get on with the people or they've done him wrong in the past. He was like, "No, don't go there. They're bad people". He had a lot of bad blood with a lot of people and he tried to use that to influence my decision." (Post-US player)

On the contrary, the following player explained his disappointment in receiving minimal support throughout the process.

"I think that was more stressful because my initial view about going to [UK Academy] was like, "I want to play basketball." I thought they were going to really help me with the process of getting me out there [US], and that wasn't the case for me at all. I don't really feel like they helped really that much." (Post-US player)

What also became apparent throughout the interview process, was the view that 'UK Academies will get you to the States'. Many players and parents explained how their choice of basketball route whilst in the UK was impacted by the desire to go to the US and view of who would be best to get them there.

"There was a kid not from my club, came and was training at my school. She says to me, "Coach, where is the best place to get a scholarship to the States? Is it [Academy] or is it [Academy]?" I looked at this kid and behind her was our display board of 30 plus players from [club] that have played college basketball." (Scout)

"We do have conversations with some of them where they're like, "I don't know. Isn't this why you go to an academy?" It's like, "No. You don't need to go to an academy to go to the States, that's not why you should go to an academy." (Academy Director)

A point also discussed numerous times was the following view: 'What's the point of going to an Academy if you're going to stay in the UK?' The following quotes from a player and a scout highlight this.

"There are people at every academy that will stay in UK uni, but some people will look at it and be like, "Well, why are you going to an academy for two years if you're not going to go to America?" (Player about to begin college in the US)

"There's this false sense of entitlement, "Oh, I go to a basketball academy. I'm an elite player therefore, the pathway for me is to go to America." It's insane." (Scout)

Parents

There were mixed findings with regards to parental involvement in the decision-making processes. We identified variation in the basketball specific knowledge and US collegiate knowledge between parents. Some families had a long history of involvement in the sport, so were able to provide additional support and guidance with the decision. Other families had little understanding of the opportunities available and were keen to learn more to best support their son or daughter in making the best decision for them.

A key finding from interviews with parents, was the importance of education and not just basketball, as well as the need to look at all options including the UK. The quotes below highlight these points.

"Making sure she picks the right place for her, for what she wants to do, and for her education, obviously because it's not just basketball. It's what she wants to- She'd have to find the right college." (Parent, 14-16 age group)

"My parents, they were actually quite supportive, and they helped me look at UK universities as well because they said, 'listen, you've got to have another plan if you don't want to go to America.'" (Current US player)

An academy coach also alluded to the difference in parental involvement in general. Some parents are heavily involved, whereas other are quite the opposite. In addition, it is not uncommon for players to live away from home to attend an Academy for example. In cases such as this, it is likely players develop greater independence at an earlier age, reducing the level of parental engagement. The quote below highlights how this looks over a period of time working with a player.

"50-50, to be honest. Again, we're in a slightly unique-- We're in East London, so parental involvement is really up and down. Some parents-- To this day, I've helped their kids for two years of school, four years through university, helped them into a professional job, and never spoken to the parent in my life. For others, the parents are heavily involved. More often-- Again, it depends on where those parents are based. We'd have

some kids who lived away from home. Those parents, there would be a lot more time on the phone.”(Academy coach)

Agents and Scouts

As mentioned previously, marketing firms, scouting services, and individual recruitment support systems can have an impact on a player’s recruitment opportunities and therefore have a role in the decision-making process of a player. The following points outline some key areas of consideration when using these services to impact decision-making:

- Have they built a relationship with, and got to know, the player?
- Are they emotionally invested in the player, or do they just see them as another number?
- How much are they charging the player and the family?
- What is their motivation for helping the player?
- Do they truly know what is best for the player based upon their background and individual characteristics?

In some circumstances, these services can be beneficial in helping players to gain a scholarship to a US college. For players who may use services such as these to inform their decision making, it is vital that they consider whether the agency or firm knows enough about them to accurately match them with a suitable college to allow them to thrive and develop. If the answer to this is **no...** players should strive to make their own decision with support from some of the other individuals and stakeholders mentioned within this section.

Peers and Other Players

From the interview process, it became apparent that peers and older players can play an important role in a player’s decision-making processes. Those who have made the decision themselves and experienced life at college in the US have insights that can benefit and support other players hoping to follow a similar route.

“Just speaking to girls that have been out there, the girls that left the year before me, speaking to them and their experience and staff. They have been a big support.” (Player about to begin college in the US)

“I think it’s just using the kids that have come through your program as much as possible to bridge that gap with kids that are coming through.” (GB and Academy coach)

One player discussed the support he received from a mentor and the benefits this provided when navigating through the various options available.

“I think for me, to be honest, I didn’t really trust my own judgment mainly because I didn’t know really anything about the college system or anything like that. At the time, I had essentially a mentor who was pretty clued in and he gave me a blueprint of what to look for, basic stuff like will you be able to play, what’s the school side of it like, how many people go there, stuff like that. I essentially just took that and ran with it for making a decision.” (Post-US player)

Numerous players and support staff spoke of the benefits that would come from an enhanced network of current and former players who followed the US route. The opportunity to share experiences, learn from other’s mistakes, and understand a little bit more about what life as a

collegiate basketballer would be like, would be a huge benefit in sporting younger players with their upcoming decisions.

“I think the biggest thing is for people like me to just talk about what they went through. I think that’s why I was so quick to be like, “Yes, I want to do this,” because I have a little brother who’s trying to do it and obviously he has me as a resource but I’m one of however many hundred people who have done it before me. If I had an opportunity to look at a study from players older than me who spoke about what they went through, it would have a huge impact on my decision.” (Post-US player)

“Definitely to have a platform that really just openly puts it all out there and just explicitly says it all would be a really good thing. I feel like it definitely would have been something that I would have personally looked into.” (Current US player)

A key factor to emphasise, however, is that **every player’s journey is different**. Players can benefit from hearing other experiences, but they must follow the route that is **best for them**.

School Staff

In some cases, school staff can play a supportive role in helping players with the decision-making process. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that this school support was most likely to come from staff members who went to the US themselves or had an investment in that route, i.e. involvement in the basketball world.

“In our school, we have the head of year 12 that went to the States for four years to play basketball, one of the kids that I coached earlier on. He would then do workshops with them on setting up their online portals and talking about the process. It’s very varied. It depends what they need.” (Head of an Academy)

What Should the Support Look Like?

It is fantastic to see the numerous individuals and stakeholders willing to provide support to players in their decision-making processes. It is important that players have access to this support, however, ultimately the decision is their own... players should have the ability to choose where **they** want to go.

“Having that support and just that almost respect that I have the ability to choose where I want to go and I can make that decision for myself was really helpful because speaking to other people that have committed from different academies and stuff, you can sense that they just go in because that’s where their coach wants them to go.” (Player about to begin college in the US)

During-USA

This section focuses on the experiences of basketball players during their time in the US Collegiate system

Positive aspects of the US college experience

Throughout the interview process, when looking at the positive aspects of the US college experience, the following areas were discussed.



Benefits to basketball development

When speaking of their experiences in the US, players who followed high school and JuCo routes spoke positively of benefits these routes can have, particularly in terms of:

- Exposure to colleges
- The opportunity to prepare physically, mentally, and emotionally for the step-up to college.

The following quotes from graduated US players illustrate these benefits.

“You have these college coaches sitting there, watching you all day from more different levels. D1, D2, D3, and there’s just so many opportunity in that area, even though, compared to the amount of players that play and the amount that get scholarships, there still is so much opportunity in comparison to trying to get recruited from playing in England.” (Post-US player)

“I feel like if I went into [US college] straight from being at [UK Academy], I feel like I definitely would have been sitting on the bench for a while because I don’t think I was physically prepared to go straight from [Academy] to college. Whereas, when I went to JuCo, it was my first taste of being in America My first taste of, this is how they play basketball out here. It definitely prepared me mentally, physically, and emotionally as well for moving on to being at the college level”. (Post-US player)

Interestingly, throughout the interviews, none of the players outwardly discussed the impact of their US college experience on their basketball career during and beyond college.

Many players also spoke positively about the basketball specific support and resources available in the US. Due to the investment in collegiate sport, many college basketball coaches work within the sport full-time, with time available to provide additional coaching and support to players if required.

“My coaches in America because the sports is literally just for them anytime, anywhere. You could ask them to come shoot with you at four or five o’clock in the morning, they’d come and work out with you. Not saying I ever did that, but I got up early like seven o’clock or whatever and I’d go and shoot extra with some of the coaches just to improve my game. They are really passionate because that’s literally all they do.” (Post-US players)

Other basketball specific support may include (*please note, this may vary depending upon each players college*):

- Access to an athletic trainer (in the UK this may be known as a physio)
- Access to medical provision
- Strength and conditioning
- Access to a team of coaching staff

Benefits to academic development

Throughout all interviews, discussion around the academic elements of the experience was fairly limited. A couple of players spoke about the different structure of assessment in the US, i.e., regular tests throughout the year, as opposed to having two main exam periods. Some players spoke of the benefits that come with having exams throughout the year, whereas other players alluded to the fact that they were ‘constantly studying’.

Once again, none of the players spoke of the impact of their US college experience on their academic goals and future career aspirations. The scope of this research wasn't to track what players are doing in the educational and vocational careers after US college, however, this would be an interesting topic of future research for Basketball England.

From an academic perspective, players discussed the benefits of having access to academic advisors and equivalent support staff, assisting players with areas such as scheduling classes, and providing tutoring. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that this support played a vital role in guiding players through their Collegiate journey, ensuring they had the necessary resources to balance academic studies with the high demands of collegiate basketball.

"We have a lot of resources as student-athletes. We have academic advisors; we have psychologists and therapists on campus that we can go to... With regards to the resources, we have many resources that we can use almost throughout the entire day. Just having that safe space was extremely helpful. I know over time, a lot of my teammates ended up utilizing that resource as well. I think that was a big, big part of it." (Post-US player)

"They have enough time throughout the day to see us if necessary, to help us with scheduling or certainly tutoring, scheduling classes, anything like that. If we are having trouble again, we can go to them and express that concern, and then they see what they can do for us." (Post-US player)

With regard to personal support, a couple of players discussed the access they had to therapists and counsellors. It became clear that this support had a big impact on supporting players mental health, particularly those who were struggling personally.

"We had a counseling center. I saw a counselor like every week pretty much for like two years and that was phenomenal and that like really helped. Again, the root cause was something that they couldn't change, and I couldn't change so it helped me and my mental state, but it never got to the root cause of the issue." (Player who graduated from the US)

Personal/social development benefits

Many current and former US-based players spoke of the positive benefits on their personal and social development through their experience in the US, including:

- 'Fast tracked' life skills
- Living with people from different backgrounds and cultures
- Moving out of comfort zone
- Coaching development opportunities

First, players spoke about becoming independent and learning a vast array of life skills whilst at college in the US. The distance from home somewhat 'fast tracked' the development of these skills.

"In general, having that experience of living somewhere, completely away, like you can't even drive home. Do you know what I mean? You have to get a very expensive 11-hour flights to go home. Just home independency to know that you can do it. I think I learned my life skills, obviously, doing it. Everyone learns life skills at uni but being away from home they're forced on you quicker." (Player who graduated from the US)

Players also spoke of the invaluable experience of living in a different country and getting to know different people from a variety of different cultures. The following quote from a graduated player outlines this as a highlight of his experience.

“I had two years in America. I have friends to this day that I will speak to from being in America. I have a lot of experience that none of my other friends did. I would recommend to my kids to live in a different country, different culture. All of these types of things I experienced it.” (Post-US player)

From a personal development perspective, players spoke of ‘moving out of their comfort zone’. It became apparent through the interviews that the US experience helped to stretch players socially, athletically, and psychologically.

“It was me and one girl that came in as freshmen, that year, and she got injured our very first game... I didn’t have expectations, but I ended up playing a bigger role than I would have thought. I think it was helpful because it kind of, not really forced me, but it challenged me to be a leader at that beginning stage.” (Post-US player)

Finally, players spoke of additional opportunities for development through coaching. Many colleges run summer camps every year, with college players given the opportunity to get involved with coaching the young players, another experience to add to their repertoire.

“In college, every summer we have summer camps, and it’s all different levels. As young as 3 years old, to as old as 18. During the camps, the younger age group, it’s a lot of keeping them engaged and just teaching them the basics and allowing them to have fun while still learning.” (Post-US player)

Summary

Although many players did describe the benefits of their time as student-athletes in the US Collegiate system, it is interesting to note that players didn’t expand on them in detail as they may have perceived these benefits to be ‘obvious’ or factors that people already know. These include things such as the high-level resources available to student-athletes, the experienced coaching staff, the ‘free’ education, and the opportunity to play in front of thousands of fans. Players may not have perceived these areas to be particularly prevalent to discuss. Instead, players tended to lean towards discussing some of the challenges they were facing or had faced when in the US, perhaps because they wanted to use the discussion to air some of their frustrations.

Players who took part in the interviews acknowledged that they really wanted to play an active role in helping up and coming talent pathway players who are currently in the process of deciding which route to take. Therefore, players put more energy and focus into describing challenges they faced and areas to be aware of, to help younger players avoid making the same mistakes that they have.

What challenges did English players face during their US collegiate journey?

During their time in the USA, current and former players detailed various challenges that they faced. These challenges are valuable information for prospective players to be aware of when making the decision about whether to go to the US and where to go in the US. We didn't notice any difference regarding the challenges faced by male and female players, and it is important to note that each individual experience is unique. The following themes, however, are challenges that were consistently discussed across many player interviews.

Adaptations and adjustments players had to make after transitioning

First few weeks on campus may be tough

After moving to the USA and starting their collegiate experience, one of the first things players highlighted was that the initial experience on campus may be tough and may not be what you had expected. Players described first arriving on campus (having not previously visited) and being surprised about how little there was to do in the area, experiences with difficult flatmates, and generally feeling apprehensive about the upcoming year.

"Campus was empty, it was isolated. There was nothing to do in Maine anyway. There's these guys that weren't the most friendly, weren't the most accommodating. My roommate, who was another freshman, was so antisocial, never wanted to step out of his room, and I'm the complete opposite of that. It was a really tough six weeks, and that was my first experience of college basketball. I was like, "Is this what it's going to be now?"
(Current US Player)

"I got there, I went for summer school, and none of the senior players were there at this point. It was just literally just the freshmen there. I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere for four weeks and there was nothing open...campus wasn't really open. It was a tough first few week's (Post-US player)

This challenge was particularly apparent for those players who had gone to a summer school prior to starting their semester. The campus can often be empty during this period, with limited things to do. This challenge emphasizes the importance for players to:

- Make connections with other freshman that are starting at a similar time (other transitioning students, either US-based or international, may act as a valuable support source during what may be a tough first few weeks in the US).
- Stay connected with family and friends at home during this period

Big fish in a little pond

After moving to the States, players also described how they had to adapt from being someone who is 'known' to someone who is completely 'unknown'. Players may have achieved success in England, however, in the US, they will need to work hard as soon as they arrive, in a bid to prove themselves as a player. Players described how being a 'small fish' inhibited their confidence on the court.

"It is weird being European or English person coming to America because I played in Europe, I played the national team. I've been starting five and accolades, accolades, accolades. Then you come here, and nobody knows who you are. They don't know about England; they don't know about European Championships. They don't know anything like that. Then you got to prove yourself all over again... That was strange in the sense

that I had to perform but also didn't really have much confidence, just because I've been knocked off my pedestal." (Player in the US)

Academy coaches also recognised the 'big fish small pond' effect within their players that had transitioned to the US, noting that establishing a reputation from scratch isn't easy.

"When they go to America, nobody knows them. Whereas, when they're here, they've already established their reputation. They've spent five, six, seven, eight years, whatever it might be, establishing that they are the best player in the country. You go to America, and nobody knows who you are at all. You have to completely start again. That's a real slog." (Academy coach)

This emphasises the importance of players entering the Collegiate system with the mindset that they will need to work hard from the moment they arrive to establish their presence within the team.

Basketball as a 'job'

An additional adjustment that players had to make after transitioning to the US was the perception that basketball changed from being something that they enjoyed alongside other activities to basketball now being perceived as a 'job'. Players noted that this meant they had started to fall out of love with the sport.

"I knew it was going to be at that level, but at the same time, I just feel I was overwhelmed by how job-like it became. For me, it's a sport, it should be fun, it should be something that you wake up in the morning and you want to go do." (Current US player)

"When you're a student-athlete, which seemingly is like a job or like an occupation. You just get involved in this one identity when in fact, there's such a spectrum of identities that you have." (Current US player)

A scout also suggested that their players are often unprepared to transition from an English club environment to a professional sport environment where there the investment in resource and coaching is much greater. However, this transition also means entering a 'cutthroat' world which could change players perceptions around basketball (i.e., it becomes a job).

"It's really cutthroat...A lot of the kids are coming from an experience where their club coaches or other teachers or volunteers. It's great and it's happy and then they suddenly get the reality of a professional sport. If they're not prepared for it, it's going to be bad." (Scout)

Not being prepared for the intensity

Although many youth players in the English talent pathway said they expected basketball to be more intense in the USA, players who were currently in the USA identified not being prepared for the level of intensity that they experienced when they arrived.

"Basketball just went downhill for the most part. For me, I didn't really enjoy it. I started disliking basketball which is something that I'd loved for so many years. It got to the point where I just hated training and wasn't enjoying it. I knew it was going to be more intense than the UK, but I wasn't expecting it. I don't think I was ready in a sense for how intense the coaches were." (Post-US player)

In two cases, this challenge led players to leave the US and return to the UK education system. Speaking to other players who are already in the environment before transitioning may help players to understand what level of physicality they can expect to face when they arrive.

“The basketball part, I didn't really enjoy it. I found they were stupidly intense. We were running until we were throwing up and stuff. Running until we were all the time nausea. You're supposed to be enjoying it? I just wasn't enjoying it. I stopped playing.” (Post-US player)

“I think I would definitely have been burnt out by the time I graduated.” (Post-US player)

New style of play and game approach

A challenge that players also described facing on arrival in the US was adapting to the style of play of the college and the differences around game day in the UK vs. game day in the US.

Players described:

- How their style of play did not match those on their team leading to poor performances
- The need to learn to play in new positions they have not played before
- Being surprised at the level of intensity and time required before games
- Having to adapt to thousands of fans and spectators at each game

“It was a position I could have played, like I could play and I've played before, but the way that you wanted me to do it was like someone else, so then, it was like now I've got to learn basketball all over again as a different person, as a power forward, which is not what I am... they're like ‘this is what the team needs.’” (Current US player)

“I remember being shocked at the fanfare around pre-game or everything up to the tip. It was just a much more stressful environment. Here, you just show up, you warm-up, you go play, whereas there, it was pre-game talk. Warm-up for 30 minutes, back to the locker room, another pep talk, back for the warm-up, one final huddle pep talk, national anthem, final yelling pep talk, and then by the time the game started, my anxiety was through the roof, I could barely play.” (Post-US player)

Again, this goes back to the level of research and preparation that player have made regarding their US college decision. Players should be clear on the position they will be expected to play, whether they may be able to ‘fit with the style’ of the team and coaches could facilitate transition by mimicking some of the same game day preparations that players may experience.

Leaving home support network

The final challenge under this section is having to adapt to life without your UK support base. For many players who made the decision to go to the US, it was the first time they had ever lived away from home. Players described:

- Struggling to cope with not being able to see their parents and family whenever they were stressed or upset
- The difficulty of adapting to a new coach they don't know on a personal level
- Not feeling comfortable sharing issues and challenges with teammates that they had been able to do in their UK club

“When you're out there, you suddenly lose your entire support base. You don't have your coach, your coach hasn't known you their whole life. You don't have that support system, the teammates that have known you for that long, especially if you're not comfortable relying on them at the start.” (Post-US player).

“Being away from home for quite a long time. I don't really get homesick that much but you do go through

phases where you're like, "Oh I just wish I could just go see my parents for a little bit." especially when you're struggling a bit and you don't really have anyone. (Current US player)

"It was kind of like a shock, I didn't have someone I was able to go talk to and help me." (Player who left US)

Players described how feeling lonely and isolated impacted their confidence on the court. Every player who transitions from the UK to the US will have to adapt to new coaches and teammates and thousands of miles away from family and friends. If a player is not prepared for this reality and not comfortable living so far away, then they may need to reconsider if this route is for them. This also highlights the importance of connecting with new players who are also moving to the college at the same time, particularly international students who may be able to connect with the player's experience.

Inconsistent playing time

Limited opportunity to get game time

Numerous players throughout the interviews spoke of challenges associated with getting limited or inconsistent playing time whilst at college in the US. Players struggled with the transition from playing the majority of every game whilst in the UK, to getting limited minutes in the US. In many cases, this limited game time was inconsistent with what was promised upon being recruited to the university.

"My freshman year I came in and there was five seniors playing and one of them was in my position. She played 40 minutes a game, she didn't really get subbed out, ever. That was hard in the sense that I was coming from playing in England, playing 40 minutes a game, being the top scorer, being the best there was to sitting on the bench and I was like, it's really strange for me." (Current US player)

"To me, it was like, "You told me this is the way it's going to be and now just because we're winning games that I'm not getting a look in even though I'm supposed to be your number two or number three option on the team." (Post-US player)

One player spoke about the mental toll this inconsistent playing time had on her during her time in the US. Little understanding of the rationale behind playing many minutes one game and limited minutes the next, created confusion and disappointment.

"Honestly, that was probably the hardest part of my year. I would play 40 minutes and the next game I would play two. Then I would play 37 then, I play eight, then I play six... You go to practice every day and you're like... As soon as I went from that 40 to that two, then I went back up to 37, I thought, "It's just a one off" but it plays with you. You're like, "Why did I only play two minutes?" Then I went to six, eight, 12, and I'm like, "This is so confusing." (Post-US player).

A key piece of advice for players looking to be recruited to the US, is doing thorough research into the current roster, as well as researching the players that have been recruited for the upcoming freshman classes. Through understanding the future team make-up, players will have a better idea of their opportunity for game time and where they will likely fit within the roster. If there are already 5+ players recruited for your position, it may be best to look at other options available! Remember – one of the pieces of advice provided by players was that division II may be a better option if you want to have consistent game time!

Being 'recruited over'

Throughout the interviews, UK coaching staff introduced the concept of being 'recruited over'. Colleges who may have lost numerous athletes one year through a big graduating class, dismissals from the team, or players dropping out, suddenly become desperate to recruit a big freshman class. The challenge described was that these players get many minutes their first year, however, the college then recruits new players each year, quickly reducing the playing opportunities available. The following quote outlines the impact this can have on a player, eventually resulting in drop-out from the sport.

"An example would be I had a player who had an offer from a division-two school and she got an offer from a div-1 school... They had lost a lot of players from the year before, they kicked some off, some quit, and they knew they needed players for that next year. So that next year she did play a fair amount, but the year after, they recruited a whole bunch of new players, so she went down along with it and by the third year, she was completely recruited over. She ended up quitting. Whereas if she had gone to div-2, I think she would have done better and had a better experience and enjoyed it more." (UK Coach)

Once again, advice for players is to research the team in depth, with the potential of flagging being 'recruited over' in advance. Of course, it is not possible to predict every possibility, however, doing as much research into the team as possible can help to mitigate some potential challenges in advance.

Barriers to transitioning back to the National team**Summer school vs. playing for the National Team**

A number of players discussed the challenges of what to do throughout the summer period of each year at college. In the US collegiate system, there is the opportunity to do summer school, whilst enjoying a well-deserved rest period following an intense season of training and playing. This does, however, coincide with international basketball events, i.e., European Championships. National team players therefore must make the decision to either stay in the US and miss out on the opportunity to play for their country or return to the UK to prepare for a summer of national team training and competition. Those that make the decision to return to England have the bonus of being able to travel home to see family and friends yet miss out on the opportunity to rest and recuperate before the next US collegiate season.

"I had to decide between playing for my national team and coming here for summer school... In that sense, they weren't so supportive just because they obviously wanted me to play for the national team. It was upsetting just because I got where they were coming from and I was sad that I couldn't do both as well... I feel it was, "You either play for the national team or we're just going to forget about you," kind of thing. That was painful to me-- I don't want Basketball England to think badly of me. I want to be involved. Eventually, it's fine, but at the time, it was bittersweet that I was going to America, but I had to choose not to play. It was hard from both ends." (Current US player)

"Summer break is really important because you work so hard throughout the year. Your body is completely broken and that time you would rest. You'd still be working out, but it'd be a rest period. You're going to go and you're going to spend camps and then that 13 days or whatever it is, in a different country playing games every day. I don't think the federation really gets that." (Current US player)

The following two points identify best practice when it comes to national team participation during a US collegiate career:

- Consider the opportunity to play for the national team when selecting a college, i.e. is summer school compulsory, or do you have the opportunity to return home and play in national team events.
- Where possible, keep in contact with national team coaches whilst in the US, staying in touch with the opportunities that may be available to play for the national team if this is something the player wishes to do.

Transition between different styles of play

A challenge identified by one player, was the different styles of play between a US college team and the national team. Players who do make the decision to return to the UK and play national team basketball, must then adapt their newly developed style of play. This was identified as something that the national team system needs to understand, to help players make a smoother transition between the different styles of play.

“They don’t even think about what’s been going on in America or how that might shape you. Let’s just say I was a top scorer at my team at [university name 3], and then I come to national team... There’s not thought about the transition between the two. Because if I’m playing one type of basketball the whole year. I’m not saying they need to make accommodations; it’s just understanding.” (Current US player)

Before returning to a national team camp or event, US collegiate players should reach out to national team staff, discussing how their style of play can fit best within the team. Making coaching staff aware of this challenge is a first step in improving the transition between the two basketball environments.

The Journey may be rocky

Expect highs and lows

As can be seen throughout this report, players have discussed a selection of challenges faced whilst in the US collegiate system. One player nicely outlined that she expected to experience high points and low points regardless of where she continued her education and basketball career.

“I knew there’d be highs and there’d be lows. That’s what you expect anyway. I could have gone to Australia and had the same experience, highs and lows. I could have stayed in England and had highs and lows as well.” (Post-US player)

Another player outlined that when facing challenges, it is easy to think you’re the only one struggling. In reality, the highs and lows are faced by most student athletes, particularly international athletes who are far away from home. It is important to emphasise that there are many people willing to help and reaching out for this support is so important.

“That little part of the year, it was a good couple months, but it was a really difficult point. A lot of people go through it, but at the time, you don’t think that, you don’t see anyone else going through it, it’s just you and it’s hard to deal with, especially by yourself and other people do try to help.” (Current US player)

When discussing the highs and lows, players outlined that ‘anything can happen’, with the possibility of unexpected things taking place during their time at a US college. The quote below provides a good example of this.

“Any situation can happen. Like a coach gets fired and a new one comes in that doesn’t like you and the uni doesn’t have any money for scholarships, or you’re not playing, or you redshirt and you get injured or things like that.” (Current US player)

Scenarios such as the above are unexpected and hard to predict, making them difficult to plan and prepare for. If an unexpected challenge arises, it is important for players to reach out for support. Talking to other players who have been through similar challenges can be really beneficial and a good opportunity to hear advice first-hand from someone who has been through something similar.

Goals may shift

A number of players spoke about how their basketball goals shifted before and during their US collegiate career. Some spoke about goals shifting between committing to a US college and attending the college, whilst others spoke about changes in goals throughout their US collegiate career.

The quote below highlights one player’s challenge with shifting goals.

“Because when I was here, I was always, “I want to be in WMBA. I want to play basketball as a pro career.” All up until around February, March time, where I just struggled a lot with my mental health. After that, I never wanted to work out... I think I committed to [college] when I was in that place where I want to be the best player I want to be, and then when I actually went to [college], I wasn’t that person anymore. I found it hard because I had to try and force myself to go and shoot every day because that’s what I used to do. I just wasn’t that person anymore. I found that transition hard because I got there, they’re expecting me to be this person that I just wasn’t anymore. Everyone thought I was that person when, in my heart, I just wasn’t.” (Post-US player)

The following quote highlights the benefits that can come with shifting goals.

“My goals and expectations have shifted in that it’s not about what I’m doing on the court as much as I’m grateful that I’m happier now in my environment.” (Current US player)

It is really important for players to regularly reflect on their goals, not just in a basketball sense, but also from an education and personal perspective. Changes in goals throughout a 4-year period is completely normal and staying true to one’s own goals and aspirations is a key part of having a positive experience at college.

Culture of the programme

Throughout the interviews, players described the culture of their US basketball programme as ‘cutthroat’, with a ‘shut up and do it mentality’. Players also described the system ‘like business’, with little room for mistakes and always the potential of being replaced. The following quote from a UK coach outlines that challenges that players may experience when adjusting to a culture that is so different to what they may be used to in the UK.

“I think, also, the mentality of American basketball players is so cutthroat in comparison to English players-- incredible. That’s a tough thing for them to adjust to just the competitive nature of everything in America.” (Academy Coach)

The following quotes from players outline how the culture of their collegiate programme influenced their experiences whilst at college in the US.

"They kind of had that, "Just shut up and do it mentality," there was no real room for creativity or anything like that or at least it felt that way for someone who was coming into the playing group. It felt like the big dogs on that team it was like they could kind of do what they wanted to but only to a degree even for them... It was like, "Why are you asking questions? Why are you not just doing what I'm telling you to?" (Post-US player)

"Especially when you're young, it's one mistake, two mistakes, you're out. Then you make that same mistake in the next game, and now you have a reputation, the coach thinks, "Okay, she can't do that thing, she can't execute that pass into the post. I'm not going to put her in that position" because he doesn't have time for that. It just feels much more like a business, and it feels like you're replaceable." (Post-US player)

Finally, one player explained the cultural challenges that come with not being classified as 'one of the best players. It became apparent throughout the interviews that within some colleges, players are treated differently depending upon their basketball ability and/or role within the team.

"Just stuff like you just expect to be said. Like people say, "Hi," when you walk in the door. If you're not one of the best players, they just don't. It's not, "Oh, we're not going to say hi to you because you're not good," but you're not in their head, so they just don't recognize you as a player on the team. It didn't really affect me, but I can see how it affects other people." (Post-US player)

The above findings highlight the importance of speaking to other players within the team, or those who have recently graduated from the programme, to get a feel for what the culture of the programme is really like. As mentioned previously, this should be a key step that players take during the recruitment process before accepting an offer to a particular college.

Coach relationships and philosophy

When players discussed the culture of their collegiate programme, many also referenced the philosophy of the coaching staff, as well as their personal coach-athlete relationship. Worryingly, some of the key words used when talking about their coaching staff included: punishment, abusive, extreme, aggressive...

It is clear that the coaching philosophy may differ greatly to what many players have previously experienced with their coaching staff in the UK. One player spoke openly about the differing relationships she had with her US and UK coaches, as well as the differing motives between the two.

"I think what I've learned now, even from my second school, it is all about the coach. It is literally all about coach-player relationship, and that's something I'm just lacking in general in America. I'm just learning that it's a system. It's just built to provide statistics and numbers... and not actually there for player sanity, development... Definitely what I enjoyed most about my basketball in England was my relationships with my coaches, and I can't lie. I went to America and that's just something that's been really missing for me." (Current US player)

When discussing day-to-day training practices, players provided detail around what some of their training sessions looked like. The following quotes outline some of the challenging practices within their US collegiate environments.

“Certain situations or certain drills and then the punishments, having to wake up at 5:00 AM to go run for miles. For me, I wasn't prepared for it to be like that... I feel, in America in general, they're very extreme with some of their trainings and reactions and practices.” (Current US player)

“Holding each other accountable was a big thing. Obviously, we have the same workouts but if someone's asleep and their alarm didn't go off, if they miss it, you all run in. If someone does something, you've all done it.” (Post-US player)

“Verbally [abusive]...There's a freshman, I remember the day she did something in practice and one of the coaches was face to face with her and was like, “You are a fucking retard. This is why you sit at the end of the fucking bench and will never play on my team.” That's how they talk to people. Then there was another freshman, she was a big girl. She wasn't fat, but she was chunky, and they just used to run her and run her and run her. She used to run till she puked and literally, it got to the point where coaches said something, and she raised her hand to go question it. She's like, “Why raising hand? Go run” You literally couldn't do anything.” (Post-US player)

Finally, when discussing challenges with their coach, one player described the challenges of being an international player and not having her family around to support any discussions with the coach.

“A lot of the players' mothers would come in and email and get aggressive with her [head coach] and then she would cater to their needs but my mom's in England. My mom's not going to fly on a plane to come fight, so I had to do things myself.” (Post-US player)

As noted previously, it is important for players to consider the coaching staff when selecting a college or accepting a scholarship offer. Speaking to other players who have worked closely with the college coaching staff can also be beneficial in understanding what their philosophy is, generating a better understanding of what daily training may look like. It is important to note that colleges may have a change of coaches whilst a player is in the US, a potential unexpected change part-way through their collegiate career.

Challenges with the US education system

Players also expressed issues around their education in the US system. These issues centered on:

- academic goals being downplayed from when they first moved to the US
- lack of control over what you study
- how they apply their American degree back in the UK/Europe
- wishing they had thought more carefully about where their American education could take them long-term

It should be noted that although many players discussed challenges around their education (including it not being challenging enough), this is on a college-by-college basis, and not all US schools are the same. Basketball became so encompassing for some players that they felt their attitude towards education changed, shifting from wanting to do well to ‘just getting it done.’

“It was so much practice, so much lift and the classes were so easy. I was like, ‘I could just get this done and not even think about it’... Basketball was mentally and emotionally so taxing that freshman year, my goals that I had were so downplayed by my goals on the court that it set the tone for the rest of my college career that I would just get this degree.” (Current US player)

Players also outlined concerns about applying their degree in a work environment when they returned to England because they lacked connections that UK-based students may have gained. Players perceived that to be on the same level as their UK-based counterparts when they returned, they may need to engage in postgraduate study.

"I do find myself questioning what was the point in America is, in the sense of my degree really. I ultimately want to come back to England...I have no intention whatsoever of staying in America. American students are making connections with these American companies and they're going to leave and have these opportunities where, for myself, I'm just stuck in this place where the opportunities aren't really arising from the sense of these connections I'm ignoring because I don't want to stay there." (Current US player)

"I'm going to have to come back and potentially do a master's somewhere in order to bring up my profile and CV within the country I want to stay in again. I feel like that's also the other thing that's not brought up to you from a young age or just, again, tunnel vision...this is what I want to do and that is it. I'm just thinking of these four years," when in fact, you have a lot more to think about." (Current US player).

Players wish they had thought more clearly before they had started their US journey about how they could use their education in the workplace in the future. This is a clear recommendation that players should take the time to match their US college choice to their desired academic goals before they transition.

The educational system in the US is different to the UK, whereby students are required to take classes in a variety of topics prior to majoring in a specific area. This means that English players in the US may have to take a number of classes they don't enjoy. Players also described how their college didn't major in their area of interest, meaning they just had to do what was on offer.

"It was obviously a Baptist school too. I had to take a bunch of religion classes, I had to take US history classes, I had to take theology, critical thinking, stuff that I would never choose to take. That was really tough for me. My first two years there, my GPA was a 2.5. I did struggle. (Post-US player)

"Academically, I really had no plan academically. Because I turned up and they didn't have the major I wanted to do even though I was made aware that they did, but they didn't. I just was put in classes by the academic advisor." (Post-US player)

Before transitioning, players should seriously consider:

- Does the college major in my area of interest?
- Am I prepared to have to study subjects I am not interested in?
- Do my future career goals align with my American degree (i.e., will it enable me to enter a certain profession)?

Winning can sometimes be more important than player development

A key challenge to emerge from this research is that many players felt that their coaches were primarily focused on winning, to the detriment of their own development on the court. As players are stepping into more professional 'business' environments where there is a lot of money at stake for colleges and coaches, many stated that it was clear that 'winning came first.'

"Coaches can, a lot of the time, get caught up in the wins. We didn't really excel as much as we should have throughout my four years of being there. The coaches became too caught up on, 'We just lost this game, we

need to win the next one', as opposed to the process of what needs to happen too, in the game." (Post-US Player)

"Basketball in America, especially the Division I level is a business. I wish it was told to like 17, 18-year-olds...it is a business like, coaches, livelihoods are dependent on how many games they win, and so they're going to treat you however they want to treat you in order for that to happen." (Post US player)

As such, this may potentially, as the player has described below, inhibit post-college opportunities.

"They're [coaches] going to develop you to be very successful in your position for these four years... but it doesn't feel like they're trying to develop you for a career after college because most players don't play after college." (Post-US player)

Before accepting a scholarship, players should consider:

- Are they aware of the culture that exists within the team – are focused more on winning or development? – Former and current players may help to answer this
- How this culture could impact their experience at the college?

Psychological challenges

Worryingly, several players discussed experienced low wellbeing whilst on a scholarship in the US, with many feeling isolated from support and made to feel like there was something wrong with them by seeking help.

"I'm sure there were counselling services, but back then, I wasn't comfortable enough to reach out. I knew I wasn't ok. But it was trivialised by our coaches, we all felt like there was something wrong with us for needing help. We would all tell each other; you should go and get help and we were all like no." (Current US player).

"I have worked on my physical body. I looked good, I felt good, but my mental side wasn't right...the only support I feel like I had was from my mom, my mentor, some teammates I was close with, but as far as the actual staff, they would be the minimum, like, "You'll be fine. Get stronger. How are you feeling today? Great." (Post US player)

Facilitating a community of UK athletes in the US may help some help athletes avoid feeling alone during any tough times during their experience. This will be discussed in greater depth in the recommendations section.

Physical expectations and injury

One of the challenges discussed by players was the physical expectations placed on them during their US collegiate experience. Athletes described:

- having high expectations placed on them physically when they had limited gym experience
- length of time doing physical training substantially increased from UK academy to the US
- pressure to be at a certain physical level and punishments if this level was not attained
- having to red shirt because of injury
- being pressured to play matches whilst injured

"I had never lifted...I got in there and like, I didn't know how to squat, complete zero knowledge in the gym and having these really high expectations put on me." (Player in the US)

"The demands of training especially early on... having to meet times with all the running and the sprints. If you didn't make it-- If you didn't make the mile in a set time, you weren't allowed to touch a ball. You would just be stuck on the track running until you made it...One day, I think we ran 27 suicides in a row because people kept missing. This went on for six weeks. It was horrible." (Former US based player)

It is important to note that physical demands and expectations may vary depending on which division level players are at in the US and the head coach's philosophy which will be discussed later in this report. A sudden increase in physical demands had damaging consequences for some players leading to injuries.

"There was something within it [the injury] that I just didn't feel healed properly, and they gave me a steroid shot in my ankle, which I would have said no to if I had a choice, but we don't really get a choice in this. Sometimes your coach is like, "We need you to play, so just put it in." (Current US player)

An injury early on in the season meant that some players experienced being red shirted (they didn't compete in anymore games). To be redshirted, players must compete in a limited number of games. Being redshirted means that players maintain another year of eligibility (students have at most 5 years to use 4 years of athletic eligibility).

"In my sophomore year, I had to red shirt because I had a shoulder injury. That was the first time of doing nothing. I got pretty bored not doing a lot of stuff. It's hard being away from home at those points because they're the points where you've not got any playtime." (Post-US player)

One player even noted how their college made them 'fake an injury' so that they could be redshirted, because they weren't playing many minutes:

"Then after the fourth game, I didn't play at all. They came to me afterwards in the week and were like, 'we're thinking about redshirting you.' I took the redshirt option and then they made up this injury. I went and got MRI scans and stuff for something that wasn't there." (Current US player)

Before moving to the US, players may benefit from:

- physically preparing – by increasing the intensity of training sessions to prepare for upcoming demands
- be conscientious during periods of injury – check in with family and friends and try not to get back on the court until 100% ready
- understanding when they might be redshirted and when it is a good decision to do so

Limited time and life balance

The final challenge to highlight is the limited time and poor life balance that players often felt they had during their US Collegiate experience. Players stated:

- they were not prepared for the time commitment of being a collegiate athlete
- they had limited social life outside of basketball and time to explore the area/stat
- a usual day could be nonstop between 6am to 8pm at night

"My usual day was up at 6:00 lifting, class all morning, and then practice, it was 12:45 until 4:00, 4:30. Then we'd have to go eat and then we'd have study hall. You don't get back to your room until eight o'clock at night because you're just busy constantly." (Former US based player)

This was also reiterated by a scout:

“For the [UK] players, the thing that they really don’t grasp is the time commitment of being a professional athlete and a professional college student. Some kids will say, ‘I chose the school because it’s near the beach.’ I’m like, ‘You’re not going to the beach. You’re not going to have any time.’ They hardly have any social life outside of basketball and training.” (Scout)

This challenge will vary depending on the college chosen. Players that want to go to the US for the life experience and lifestyle, should try to gain insight from players at the college prior to making their choice. This links back to the discussion about players top criteria when choosing a college.

Questioning decision and choice

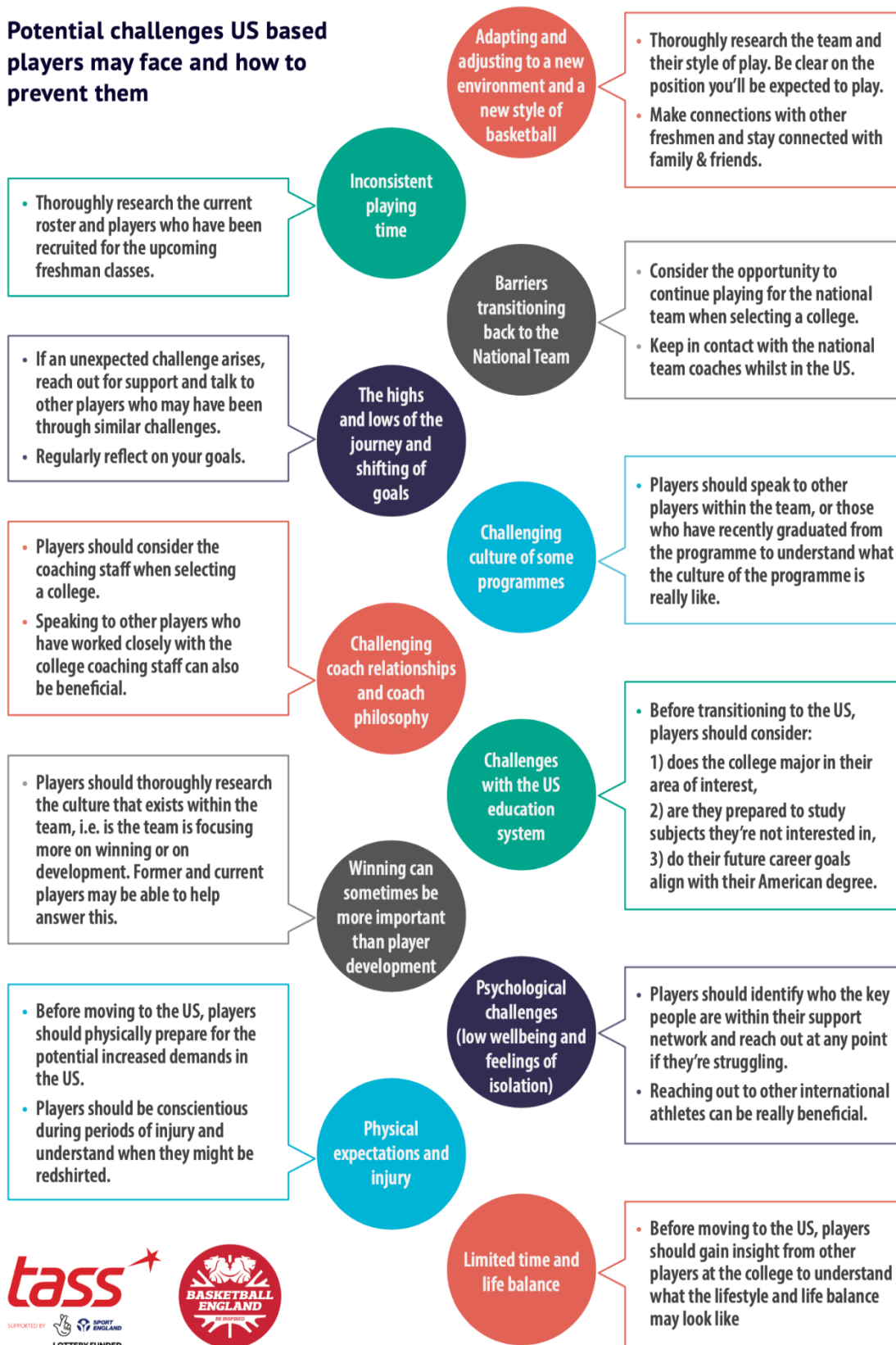
Many of the challenges outlined led players to question whether they had made the right choice in terms of both their college and going to the USA. Some players detailed how they began questioning their own ability, whether they would graduate, and about going home.

“I ended up in a place where I was thinking, “Do I really want to do this? Do I want to play? It was kind of a generic thought process, but I did have that thought of, “Do I still want to play? Do I have what it takes to be at the next level? Do I have what it takes to even continue at this level?” (Former US-based player)

“There was points where I was like, “I’m going to come home. I don’t want to be here.” Then I put that behind me and was like, “I’m about to graduate. It’s not that serious.” I moved on from that I guess.” (Former US-based player)

Although there are many challenges we have outlined in this section, several could be avoided through thoughtful research in the decision-making phase and preparation once the decision has been made. Refer back to page’s 44, 46 and 55 for graphics that support this. In addition, despite the challenges outlined, many players did express that overall, they would still choose to go through the process. Challenges can often create positive learning experiences for players and assist them in their overall development.

Potential challenges US based players may face and how to prevent them



Things to consider around transferring colleges

There were several reasons why a player might transfer to a difference college:

- If players were not satisfied with their college selection

"Honestly, it was just very toxic from the get-go but I was determined. I just kept hearing that, "Oh, once so and so leaves, then it will get better," and then once this happens, then it'll go better. Once we start winning more games, it will get better, and so in hindsight, I should have seen all the red flags and like transferred my first year." (Post-US player)

- To change division or conference level (e.g., junior college – NCAA, or division I to II)

"I lost my love for the game completely. I'm trying to get it back". And being at a lower level, definitely gave me a platform where I could play like myself again." (Current US player)

- It can be the coach's choice to no longer have a player on the team

"He made it very clear, "I do not like the way that you play. You're not going to play again". He basically forced me to leave, he was like, "I'm never going to play you". (Current US player)

- Coach transferring colleges

"She called us in and said: "Look, I don't think I'm going to be here. My recommendation to all of you, you can do whatever you want, but my recommendation to all of you is to get your release forms so that you can at least have the choice of if you want to stay, or if you want to leave at the end of season." (Post-US player)

- The program's funding being cut

"Essentially, I was left with the choice of keeping my scholarship but not playing or trying to go somewhere else or going back home. I knew I didn't want to be there and not play." (Post-US player)

The Transfer Process

In general, players need to consider:

- *What they want from a new school?*

Players can refer back to their criteria list for selecting their first college, has this list changed?

Refer back to the college selection process

- *Eligibility*

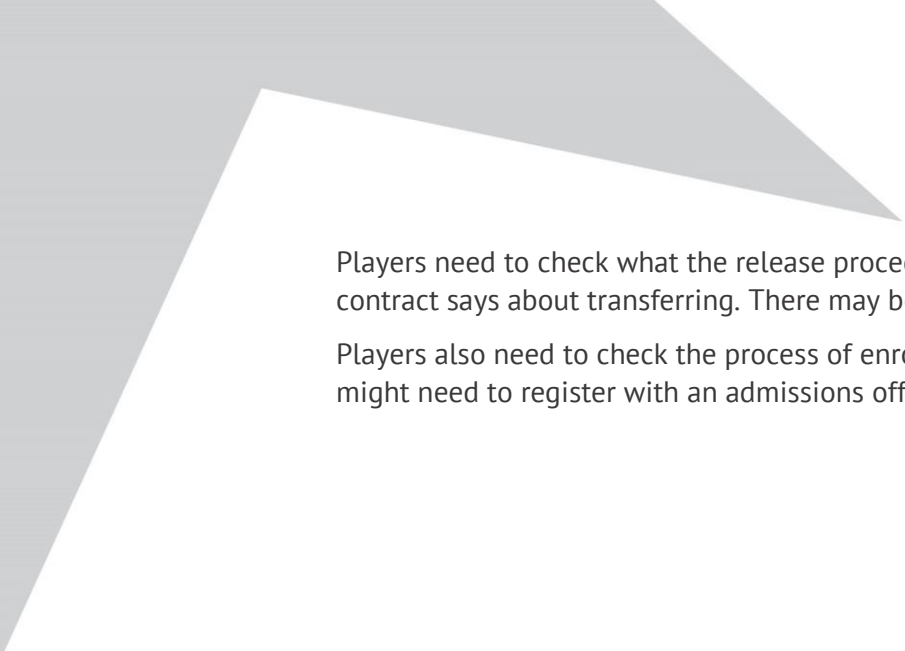
The NCAA have some strict rules on transferring in and out of NCAA colleges that players should be aware of before going ahead. The rules are different for different division and for 2 or 4 years schools, but all the information can be found here:

[NCAA transfer guide](#)

- *Red shirt year*

Depending on the school players are transferring to and from, they might need to sit an academic year out of playing.

- *College transfer protocol*



Players need to check what the release procedure is and what their scholarship contract says about transferring. There may be paperwork to fill out.

Players also need to check the process of enrolling into their new college. They might need to register with an admissions office.



Post-USA

This section focuses on what players do when they leave the USA

After graduation from the USA...what's next?

For those players who graduated from a college in America, they had to make an important decision as to what they do next. Below are outlined some of the routes that players took after graduating, including professional basketball careers, coaching careers, and further study.

"It's not an endpoint, it's part of your journey." (Post-US player)

One reason why players may have found the decision around what to do when they left the US system difficult was that the support provided to them in the US **did not cover their options in Europe and in the UK**. This was an area where players identified that they needed more support.

"I considered lots of options. I considered getting my master's and not playing, staying at home, get my master's. I considered working full-time but that was all personal research. I didn't really have anyone giving me great advice. I think it would be different if I was staying in America because they have great resources if you're staying there obviously, because they can network and give you details of businesses locally but because I wasn't doing that, I just didn't really need any of that information." (Post-US player)

Professional basketball career

In the UK

Some players chose to return to the UK and to seek professional or semi-professional playing opportunities in the British leagues.

"I'm playing in the WBBL, this was my, I'm going to say, fourth season or three-and-a-half because I came halfway through that year, December 2016, which I love. As long as we resume playing, I'll still be playing. I'm staying until my body falls apart, but I don't know, I definitely want to play for as long-- Honestly, I'm 27, I feel like I'm getting better. I'm still getting better, it's amazing. I feel like I have a long way to go." (Post-US player)

Coaches in the UK explained how the transition back to the UK style of play from an American college can be equally as challenging as transitioning out to America.

"The style of play in America is a lot different than here, and the players tend to become very role-oriented, and it may not be the role that's them at their best, it's just the role they need at that school. It takes a long time to get them to be free, to be a bigger, more complete player. I've seen this with multiple players, the longer they're here, the more they flourish and they become better...I had another girl come from a big university and she was pigeonholed into doing one thing and she's capable of doing 10 things." (Coach)

In the US

Many of the players we interviewed in the research explained how they had hoped to play professional basketball in America, but we were not able to speak with any players who had achieved this from the UK.

"The only professional route for women in the States is WNBA. That's a lot of people's dreams I guess. I would have loved to do it, but it just didn't happen for me." (Post-US player)

This may suggest that this route is particularly difficult to attain.

In Europe

For many players, the American college experiences opened opportunities for them to continue basketball and play professionally in Europe. The European route was believed to be a high level of basketball and an opportunity to play professionally

“A lot of the girls from there, from the WNBA will come over and play in Europe anyway. I get to play, especially playing on the top of the leagues in Spain and Italy. I get to play against some of those people anyways... Playing professionally in Europe is like top-level basketball, that some of those that would play in so.” (Post-US player)

Master’s degree or further study

In the UK

The UK university system is offering an increasing number of opportunities to play basketball for a WBBL team that is linked to a university. This option enables players to gain further education to support their career and play to a high level. In some cases, there were scholarships available to support living cost or tuition fees.

“He then made me an offer to come play for him at the WBBL level and to get my master’s from the university team and I just couldn’t turn it down because I want to end my basketball career on a good note or at least around good people and good players...” (Post-US player)

In the US

The options for further study with the college the players had attended were often clearly laid out for players. However, due to the NCAA eligibility rule (players only have a maximum of 4 years playing time), basketball scholarships were not offered.

Transition into coaching

In the UK

After graduation, players were able to use their basketball experiences and pursue a career as a coach. By returning to the UK, they were able to do this alongside playing in national leagues or whilst working.

“I also coach juniors. Now, I’ve just entered the GB coaching pathways and assistant for the under 16s, I’m committed to that for two years, which I’m really excited about.” (Post-US player)

In the US

Equally, there were opportunities for players to take coaching roles within the US, either in high schools or colleges. However, due to the NCAA eligibility rule (players only have a maximum of 4 years playing time) this usually coincided with an end to their playing careers. If players chose this route whilst still in the US, they were able to use their time to gain work experience and network with teams or coaches they might want to work with in the future.

“My focus totally switched from me to how can I make other people better? I did an internship with my coaches my senior year where I went in the office and I did scouts. For me, by the time I graduated, I was totally out of the idea of me as a player and totally into the idea of me as a coach.” (Post-US player)

Summary

It should be noted that the transition out of the collegiate system was not much of a focus area within the player interviews. To depict an accurate overview of what English basketball players do when they leave the collegiate system, this would also need to be conducted quantitatively, to gain larger numbers. It is an area that requires more in-depth research and could be a focus area for Basketball England following this project, as players outlined the difficulty they faced during this transition.