A FREE GUIDE FOR SOFTBALL & BASEBALL PARENTS

The Mental Game of Recruiting.

The rules in plain English, the timeline by age, and the part nobody tells you — what college coaches are watching long before they're allowed to call.

By **Scott Mead** — 16 years a police officer, 14 years coaching youth ball, founder of Mirror Mindset Performance

1. The rules, in plain English

Updated August 2026. These are the ones that matter — everything else is noise.

THE BIG ONE

Softball and baseball run on different clocks — know your sport's date.

D-I softball: September 1 of junior year. All recruiting communication between D-I softball coaches and your athlete is against the rules before then — no calls, no texts, no DMs, no offers. **D-I baseball: August 1 before junior year** — a month-plus earlier, its own calendar. If someone claims a college coach is "recruiting" your 13-year-old, it's either going through a club coach or it's against the rules. (D-II runs earlier than D-I — softball opens June 15 after sophomore year.)

VISITS

Junior year opens the doors.

Coach-involved visits open with your sport's contact window — September 1 of junior year for softball, August 1 before junior year for baseball — with official (school-paid) visits following. Before that, you can walk any campus you want on your own dime — that's always allowed.

THE OPEN LANES

D-III, NAIA, and junior college have no NCAA contact clock.

Their coaches can talk to anyone, anytime. D-III has no athletic scholarships but a huge share of real roster spots (academic money instead). JUCO is a legitimate route up, not a step down.

NEW FOR 2026-27

D-I and D-II now run a five-year, age-based eligibility clock.

An athlete's five years start at full-time college enrollment anywhere — or the school year after their 19th birthday, whichever comes first. Translation for families: gap years and post-grad years now burn eligibility, and college rosters turn over a little slower for the next few years.

WORTH REPEATING

Verbal commitments aren't binding — either direction.

Only the signed agreement is. And your athlete can always email or message a coach herself at any age — but here's the part nobody explains: before her sport's contact date, the coach is **not allowed to answer**. If she calls, they can't pick up. If she emails, they can't reply. Silence before the date isn't rejection — it's the rulebook working. Keep sending the updates anyway; coaches read them and remember.

THE INSIDER PART

Before the date, the conversation happens in emojis — literally.

Coaches can't reply in words, but the rules leave them three lanes: they can **like** a message, **react with an emoji**, and answer a yes/no question with a **thumbs up or down**. (Camps are the one topic they can discuss freely — a camp invite is real contact.) So teach your athlete to use the lanes: send the video, the award, the schedule update — then watch the reactions. A liked message means *I'm watching*. And the honest half: if the updates keep going out and nothing ever comes back, that's an answer too — an early, kind one, from someone who isn't allowed to say it in words. Listening to it saves a year of hoping at the wrong door.

2. The honest timeline

What actually matters at each age — and what's just fear being sold to you.

Ages 8–13	**Zero recruiting rules apply. Zero.** Anyone selling recruiting services for a 10U athlete is selling anxiety. The only "recruiting prep" that's real at this age: love the game, get reps, and build the mental foundation — the reset, the response to failure, the identity that doesn't live and die with one at-bat.
Freshman / Sophomore	**Grades, video, the right schedule.** GPA matters as much as bat speed — it decides which schools can even say yes. Build a simple skills video. Play a club schedule that gets seen. Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center sophomore year.
Sept 1 of junior year (softball) · Aug 1 before junior year (baseball)	**The phone either rings or she starts dialing.** Both are normal. If coaches aren't calling, your athlete emails them — short note, video link, schedule, GPA. Proactive beats waiting, every time.
Junior year	**Visits, offers, honest conversations.** Unofficials from August 1, officials after. Ask coaches directly where she stands — they respect it.
Senior year	**Decisions and signatures.** The signed agreement is the only thing that's real. Fit — coach, school, distance, money — beats logo, every single time.

The number nobody posts

Roughly 8% of high-school softball players play college ball at any level — and most of those spots are D-III, NAIA, and JUCO, not the SEC. That's not a reason to quit dreaming. It's a reason to build a kid who wins from the game whether or not a scholarship ever comes. That kid, ironically, is the one coaches want.

3. What they're watching between pitches

I spent 16 years reading people under pressure for a living. College coaches do the same thing at showcases — and almost none of it is the swing.

The 10 seconds after the error

Ball goes through her legs. Every clipboard in the stands just looked up. Does she reset — breath, next pitch — or does the error follow her to the next three plays? That's the whole evaluation for some coaches. It predicts what she'll do down 4–1 in a conference game.

Body language after the strikeout

Helmet slam or handle-it-and-hustle? Coaches recruit four years of responses to failure. The kid who walks back like the at-bat is over — because it is — just separated herself from 80% of the field.

The dugout innings

What is she doing when she's NOT playing? Locked in and loud for her teammates, or scrolling in the corner? Energy-givers get remembered. It's the cheapest recruiting edge there is.

How she treats the umpire — and her parents treat the bleachers

Yes, they watch you too. A parent coaching every pitch from the fence or riding the ump is a red flag on the athlete's file. The best thing you can do at a showcase is cheer, stay neutral, and let her own it.

First warm-up rep vs. last

Same intensity on both? That's a trained habit, not a personality trait — and coaches know the difference.

Every one of these is trainable

The reset, the response to failure, the energy, the composure — they're reps, like swings. Mirror Mindset is the daily 60-second version: check-ins, guided programs, and the reset, built for young athletes. Your athlete's first week is free at **mirrormindsetperformance.com** — start before showcase season, not during it.

Rules current as of August 2026 and simplified for parents; always confirm specifics at ncaa.org and the NCAA Eligibility Center. This guide is general information, not individual advising. © Mirror Mindset Performance LLC.