

LEGACY SOCCER COLLEGE PATHWAY



Intro

The college selection process is a deeply personal one and each family and student will weigh different factors in determining what higher education option makes the most sense. This is an informal guide to help families who are considering next-level soccer as part of the equation. Please consult with your coach(es), teachers, guidance counselors, and others when evaluating options that are best for your situation.

In terms of soccer, specifically women's soccer, the landscape is evolving considerably. The NCAA is implementing significant changes in light of the *House v. NCAA* settlement, which apply directly to Division I, but will have ripple effects across Division I and Division II. Additionally, USL is developing more professional options and under the most recent collective bargaining agreement, NWSL no longer operates a traditional draft. Truly elite women's players are increasingly going from high school to professional clubs, skipping college entirely. All this is meant as a caveat that the rules and practices that have governed collegiate soccer are shifting—quickly.

The Stats

Per NCAA data...

377,800 High School Participants

29,959 NCAA participants (7.9%)

Based on Fall 2025 data, there are approximately 200 girls from Idaho playing some level of college soccer (approximately 32 in Division I). A significant portion of these players came from Boise Timber Thorns given how colleges in general, and Division I in particular, recruits. While daunting, it is possible for girls from eastern Idaho to play college soccer, to include at the Division I level, but it requires perseverance, commitment, flexibility, and a degree of luck.

The Soccer Pyramid

NCAA Division I

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is divided into three divisions. Division I is traditionally composed of the largest universities with the largest athletic budgets. Regionally, Division I schools include University of Idaho, Boise State University, Idaho State University, University of Montana, University of Wyoming, Brigham Young University (BYU), and the like. Division I programs offer athletic scholarships.

What is changing under proposed *House* settlement is that college soccer programs at Division I will now offer full scholarships for an entire roster. Previously, there was a cap on the number of scholarships that could be offered. This meant that many athletes at Division I programs may only receive a partial scholarship, as the scholarship dollars were allocated across many players. This is changing.

The vast majority of Division I women's soccer players are recruited from Elite Club National League (ECNL) or Girl's Academy (GA) clubs. Regionally, this means Boise Timber Thorns (ECNL), La Roca (ECNL), or Wasatch (GA). No club in eastern Idaho participates in ECNL or GA.

NCAA Division I and Division II athletes must register through the NCAA Clearinghouse and meet certain minimum academic standards.

Division II

NCAA Division II programs can offer scholarships, but typically only partial scholarships. Regionally, Division II programs include Northwest Nazarene University, Montana State University - Billings, and Westminster University (Utah).

A large number of Division II athletes also come from ECNL or GA clubs, but you will also see more players from ECNL-Regional League (ECNL-RL) and other clubs. Further, there is frequently movement between athletes transferring from a Division I program to a Division II school or vice versa. Some athletes change if their skills do not match the level of play, they are not getting playing time, there is a coaching change, or other factors.

Division III

NCAA Division III programs are characterized as "students first/athletes second." Division III programs do not offer athletic scholarships, but some schools can be creative in meeting financial need. More often Division III schools are private, meaning the cost of attendance tends to be higher. Regionally,

Whitman College (Washington), University of Puget Sound (Washington), George Fox University (Oregon), and University of Pacific (Oregon) are examples of Division III schools.

With the exception of a handful of nationally prestigious universities, there are less ECNL or GA-level players on Division III rosters.

NAIA

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) is a separate governing body for college sports. NAIA schools do not have the same recruiting rules as the NCAA, so it is important to recognize the differences. Generally, NAIA schools have similar quality to NCAA Division II as they can offer athletic scholarships. College of Idaho, Carroll College (Montana), University of Providence (Montana), and Eastern Oregon are examples of NAIA schools in our region.

Junior College

Many junior or community colleges have women's soccer programs. Junior colleges do not have the same academic requirements as NCAA programs and these can be a good option for families given their lower costs, location, and opportunities to play. If an athlete is developing late, playing at a junior college for two years and then transferring on can be an excellent pathway. A significant percentage of girls from eastern Idaho go to junior colleges. Regionally, examples include College of Southern Idaho (Twin Falls), Snow College (Utah), Central Wyoming, and Blue Mountain (Oregon).

Recruiting Timeline (General)

The recruiting timeline and the steps athletes and families should be taking at various points will depend on what the ultimate goal is. If the goal is to play at the Division I level, starting earlier is important. If the goal is simply college soccer at any level, there is less urgency to start early.

The key date to know is June 15th after your sophomore year in high school. After this date, colleges of any level can reach out directly and begin to make verbal commitments. Prior to this date, the rules vary by NCAA division level.

Idaho's high school season overlaps with the college season (mid-August through October). College coaches very rarely recruit on the basis of high school soccer performance, and given the seasonal calendars, it is highly unlikely they will attend any high school games. Most of the college recruiting activity will overlap with our club season.

Freshman Year

At this stage it is important to develop technical ability, tactical awareness ("Soccer IQ"), and speed/strength. Participating in high school soccer is a great way to develop core technical skills and increase

speed/stamina. Developing highlight film and keeping rudimentary stats are key, since these will be used during initial contact with coaches.

This year is the time to consider what your soccer goals are. This needs to be realistic and brutally honest. How much do you think you will continue to grow physically and technically? Can you set aside the extra time needed to develop technically? What might you and your family be seeking in a college education?

Over half of NCAA Division I programs will begin to evaluate and scout high school freshmen, so doing well this year is important if Division I is the goal. If Division I is the goal, it is acceptable to reach out to coaches to introduce yourself to get on their radar. Please know that Division I coaches can not/not recruit you at this stage. All they can do is receive your email and reply with camp information... but they will be hoping to see any highlights you have. This communication will look generic—because it is—but that is due to the NCAA rules. Colleges maintain spreadsheets of prospective athletes and this is how you get on them.

Participation in Idaho Olympic Development Program (ODP) can be valuable for several reasons. First, it is an independent evaluation of your level and skills. It provides an opportunity to play with and against other talented athletes. Participating in the try-out process itself will make future tryouts less intimidating. Finally, events like ODP Far West attract coaches who are seeking to scout and evaluate potential players. ODP is less important than it once was, but for players not associated with ECNL or GA clubs, it can be an important differentiator.

During the club season, it can be useful to reach out to prospective coaches who might be attending or could attend tournaments. Local tournaments (PVSC, IFFC Shootout, Twin Falls) do not ordinarily attract college coaches; however, if you are interested and serious about playing for Idaho State (or other area schools), it would not hurt to email the coach with the tournament schedule and note your jersey number. Due to NCAA rules, they can not reply with anything other than camp information, but they might try to see you play if the schedule works. While Division I and II programs can not communicate with you or your family until after your sophomore year, they can communicate with coaches.

Following freshman year, if resources permit, it is worth attending an identification camp (“ID camp”) run by programs you are interested in. Schools operate these camps as a way to evaluate prospective student athletes, to market their programs, and to have some contact with athletes while in compliance with NCAA rules. Each program will begin posting their summer camp schedules in December-February, unless they are running them year-round. Since so much of NCAA Division I recruiting is focused on the big ECNL/GA events and select major showcases, this might be the best opportunity to get seen and evaluated by these programs.

Sophomore Year

The goals and objectives of sophomore year are basically the same as freshman year, but be aware of June 15th. For the high school season, the goal should be to continue to develop technically, tactically, and physically. Further, developing highlight footage is important. If Division I is the goal, this is a critical year to engage with coaches and to get on their radar, so that they will want to reach out to you during the summer.

For the club season, playing higher quality events and showcases can be critical. Major events, such as Las Vegas Mayor's Cup, Surf Cup NW, SC del Sol, PacNW, etc, attract many college coaches of all levels. Having the opportunity to get evaluated in a game setting can make a big difference in the recruiting process, especially early on. NCAA Division I programs will begin extending verbal offers after sophomore year. In other words, they are filling out their projected rosters two years before graduation. Division II, Division III, and NAIA programs operate on a different timeline, as athletes begin to assess their options while Division I commitments are being made.

The summer following sophomore year is an important opportunity to attend select ID camps, specifically at schools you are considering. Colleges see this as a signal you are serious about the program and will take advantage of the opportunity to evaluate you. At the same time, camps are your chance to interact with the coaches, see the facilities, talk with current players, and decide whether this could be a good fit.

Junior Year

At this stage, if Division I or Division II programs are the goal, hopefully you are having regular communication. There are no NCAA restrictions on contact, so interacting with coaches, sharing updates, and providing the chance to get to know you will be key. Official and unofficial visits can happen. Official visits means the college is paying for your travel, lodging, and meals. Unofficial visits are trips to a college at your own expense. Both are a chance to see facilities, see the campus, and talk with coaches.

You should continue to hone technical and physical abilities as well as develop good eating, sleeping, studying, and training habits. Developing and sharing highlights is important, particularly for Division II, Division III, and NAIA programs, which will be increasingly focused on developing out their rosters as Division I commitments are made and announced. Academics are critical and taking the ACT or SAT junior spring may be necessary to establish NCAA eligibility. More selective colleges might weigh the input of coaches, but ultimately admission decisions are made independently; however this really only applies to a handful of colleges.

The summer after junior year is another chance to participate in ID camps. If Division I has been ruled out, targeting good fits at the Division II, Division III, NAIA, or junior college level is all the more critical. In advance, you should be in touch with prospective coaches that you will be attending to ensure they pay attention to you.

Through this process, if you determine that junior college makes the most sense, it is time to engage with prospective coaches at this stage. There are a number of junior colleges in the region that attract Idaho players, so it makes sense to reach out in the junior year to assess roster availability, potential playing time, success in transfer to four-year colleges, and the like. About half of a junior roster will turnover every year, opening up plenty of spots.

Senior Year

The key dates are in mid-November with National Signing Day(s). For Division I and II programs, there will be a scholarship agreement or contract available, which represents mutual commitment. You should know before the school year begins whether you will be playing at a Division I school, but recruitment for Division II, Division III, and NAIA can continue through senior year as players pull out, ruled ineligible, coaches change, and the like. Having established relationships and communications with potential coaches can allow you to have options if changes unfold unexpectedly. It is not unusual for college coaches to get fired at the end of the season (ca late October/early November). If that happens, there will often be churn in rosters as new coaches are named and players transfer out/in.

If junior college is the goal, establishing communication and determining roster availability is key.

What the Club Can Do For You

Legacy is committed to helping all players enjoy and maximize their soccer journeys. For those that aspire to play at the next level, here is what we are doing:

Technical and Tactical Training: Each practice and training session is a chance to develop as a player. Technical abilities are a given at the next level, so focusing on good first touches, crisp passing, ability to defeat a player one-on-one, and finishing goal scoring chances should be honed every chance you have. You cannot rely on being one-footed, so spend time working on your less dominate foot. Tactically, Legacy tries to play a more possession-minded game. This places a premium on maintaining possession, passing, decision-making, and off-the-ball movement. It is probably easier to transition from this style of play to a more direct style than the other way around.

Vevo: Legacy's games are recorded with the Vevo system, enabling players to develop highlight clips and collect stats. Prospective coaches need highlights to assess their initial interest. Additionally, having full-game footage available can be an option for some coaches who might be unable to see you play in person.

Competition: We are trying to identify and participate at higher quality events against better competition as well as events that might attract college coaches in the region. While this comes at the

risk of not getting the results we might want, it is the only chance you will get to improve. Having the opportunity to play against more elite teams will provide a better measurement of where you might fit down the road. At the end of the day, you have to be seen to be evaluated and you have to be evaluated to be recruited.

What You Need to Do

Physical fitness and **technical abilities** are a given at the next level, from junior college to Division I. If you are weak in an area, you need to spend time on your own and in formal practice sessions to develop those areas further. The same applies to physical conditioning. As you move through your high school years, developing good conditioning and physical training habits will be essential and cannot be accomplished solely through formal training sessions.

Be realistic about where you might be able to play. Division I is a stretch for all players and even more so for non-ECNL/GA players. With luck, persistence, and excellent technical ability, it is possible to reach that level, but it may not be BYU, Idaho, or Montana. That said, there are a range of Division II and other programs that could be an excellent athletic and academic fit. For a comparison, Idaho ODP, CGA, and the top IFFC teams are roughly at the ECNL-RL level. Keep that in mind when looking at college rosters.

Develop your soccer intelligence. A good way to do this is simply watching high level soccer. The English Premier League is broadcast on NBC/Peacock, NWSL is broadcast on Ion/Amazon/CBS, MLS is on Apple, and there are scores of NCAA Division I games on ESPN+. Build your knowledge of the game, observe how elite players in your position move and handle the ball, and watch the off-the-ball movements. Pay attention to style of play, formations, and responsibilities of various players or lines. Even better, if college soccer is your goal, attend a game in person. Television does not fully convey the speed, intensity, and physicality of the college or professional game. Going to an Idaho State game will provide a chance to see the game up close and help you decide if Division I could be viable, or if you need further development.

Programs to Consider: A Starting Point

Based on a review of available roster data, the Division I colleges and universities in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming will be a stretch for players from eastern Idaho. There are a handful of Division II schools in Oregon, Colorado, Nebraska, and the Dakotas with a single or no Idaho players. That said, I've noticed several of these programs have girls from Wyoming, which has similar player demographics to eastern Idaho (i.e., no ECNL/GA). Given the relative proximity, these could be

options for some athletes, but would require some consistent outreach and/or camp attendance. Similarly, Westminster in Salt Lake City should be considered, given its location.

In terms of Division III, Pacific University (Oregon), Whitman College (Washington), Whitworth University (Washington), and University of Puget Sound (Washington), might be worth considering. Regional NAIA colleges like College of Idaho, Carroll and University of Providence in Montana, and Eastern Oregon all recruit Idaho athletes.

Finally, if junior college makes the most sense, in addition to College of Southern Idaho, it would be worth considering the Wyoming, Washington, and Oregon junior colleges given the number of Idaho athletes they historically attract.

Breaking Down A Roster

If you are interested in a particular college soccer program, research their current roster to judge whether it might be a possible fit. Most college rosters will list name, hometown, and high school and/or previous college (if they are a transfer).

Table 1

	Idaho State	Boise State	Washington State	Montana	Wyoming	Denver	Utah Valley	Saint Louis	St. Thomas (MN; 24)	UT Martin	St Cloud State (D2)	Colorado Mesa (D2)	CSU Pueblo (D2)	Nebraska Kearney (D2)	Black Hills (D2)	Whitman (D3)	Grinnell (D3)	Hamline (D3)	UW La Crosse (D3; 24)
ECNL	5	22	11	20	15	15	3	15	9	4	3	5		3	1	3	2	1	
ECNL-RL	1		1						1		5		3	2		2	1	5	
GA	8		3	2	3	3	6	4	14		12	5	3	2	2			1	1
Other/Unknown	2	7	3	4	2	3	6	3	7	8	8	3	15	13	20	22	20	29	24
International	1		2	3			3			7			7	1			2		
Transfer	5		9	4	5	2	13	5	1	5	1	3	4	8	10	3		3	3

Above is a sampling of various college rosters broken down by club type, number of transfers, and international players. This is hardly scientific, but provides a flavor of the types of clubs frequently represented at that level of school.

Broadly speaking, Division I rosters are heavily represented by players coming from ECNL or GA teams. Anecdotally these rosters are 90% ECNL/GA. You will find one or two players who did not come from these teams, but frequently you will notice that they are local to the school and therefore were able to

get seen/evaluated more easily. Division I coaches recruit heavily from the major ECNL and GA events, but also recruit at big showcases such as Surf Cup, PacNW, Las Vegas Mayor’s Cup, or VisitRaleigh.

Division II gets more interesting. Most Division II rosters will have some ECNL/GA players, but you begin to see more ECNL-RL players. ECNL-RL is a step below ECNL/GA; Idaho ODP and CGA is roughly equivalent to ECNL-RL. At Division II schools, you will begin to see more players from clubs near the school, regardless of league affiliation.

In Division III, a level that does not offer athletic scholarships, things can run a very wide gamut. In general, you will see far less ECNL/GA players and much more from local, high quality clubs. The exception is the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) and the University Athletic Association (UAA). These are probably the most academically elite Division III schools—often equivalent to the Ivy League—and therefore recruit nationally and attract an above average quality of player.

When looking at a roster, definitely take note if you see players from Wyoming or Montana. Since neither state has an ECNL club, this is a good proxy for eastern Idaho. If you research the individual players, you will often see they participated in ODP or Wyoming’s 307 Select program, which is probably comparable to ECNL-RL.

As an example, looking purely at rosters, Black Hills State University (Division II, SD) is a school east Idaho players should consider.

Number	Name	Position	Height	Hometown	Year	College
3	Paige Hill	F	5-5	Casper, Wyo. / Kelly Walsh H.S.	So.	Laramie County CC
4	Karla Truong	MF	5-3	Englewood, Colo. / Heritage H.S.	So.	
5	Makayla Selsensky	MF/D	5-8	Fargo, N.D. / Fargo Davies H.S.	So.	
6	Chloe Looneman	MF	5-4	Sioux Falls, S.D. / O'Gorman H.S.	So.	
7	Bria Sargent	D	5-8	Pierre, S.D. / Pierre H.S.	Fr.	
8	Lena Homan	MF	5-4	Omaha, Neb. / Westside H.S.	R-Jr.	
9	Anacel Valenzuela Acosta	F	5-4	Phoenix, Ariz. / Millennium H.S.	Jr.	Phoenix College
10	Leah Day	MF	5-5	Brighton, Colo. / Brighton H.S.	Jr.	
11	Makalah Carlson	D	5-6	Centennial, Colo. / Arapahoe H.S.	So.	
12	Karla Osegueda	M	5-5	Thornton, Colo. / Niwot H.S.	So.	
13	Bailey Smith	MF	5-3	Baldwin, Kan. / Baldwin H.S.	Fr.	
14	Zoe Evans	D	5-6	Naperville, Ill. / Waudonsie Valley H.S.	Fr.	
15	Kylie Hayes	F	5-4	Gillette, Wyo. / Thunder Basin H.S.	R-Fr.	
16	Audrey Sillansaa	F	5-1	Spearfish, S.D. / Freedom Project Academy	So.	
17	Jayla Hammer	F	5-7	Aberdeen, S.D. / Aberdeen Central H.S.	Jr.	Presentation College
18	Whitney Hansen	MF	5-6	Lander, Wyo. / Lander Valley H.S.	Jr.	Laramie County CC
19	Ainsley Wilson	D	5-8	Loveland, Colo. / Mountain View H.S.	Jr.	
20	Tea Whitlock	MF	5-5	Erie, Colo. / Holy Family H.S.	Fr.	
21	Teagan Droll	F	5-2	Mandan, N.D. / Mandan H.S.	Fr.	
22	Oceanna Solis	D	5-5	Brighton, Colo. / Eagle Ridge Academy	Jr.	Northeast CC
23	Ella Cornelius	MF	5-6	Thornton, Colo. / Riverdale Ridge H.S.	So.	
24	Taylor Hernandez	MF/D	5-4	Centennial, Colo. / Smoky Hill H.S.	R-Jr.	
25	Madison Christler	D	5-8	Cody, Wyo. / Cody H.S.	Fr.	
26	Allie Brown	D	5-7	Ellettsville, Ind. / Lettsburg H.S.	So.	

From an athletic accessibility stand-point (think “Moneyball” type logic), this and similar Division II schools should be on your radar. Not shown on the screenshot is a girl from Kalispell, MT, who did not play ECNL/GA, but did participate in Montana ODP. Two of the Wyoming girls went through junior college and transferred, but some did not. In fact, of their total roster, only three played ECNL or GA. The Colorado girls were at good clubs, but not necessarily on their premier/ECNL squads. CSU Pueblo and Nebraska-Kearney are similar Division II programs.

If you are looking at a roster and it appears particularly large, over 30 players, the school might have a developmental or “junior varsity” team. This appears to be increasingly common. If they are, it is worth clarifying with the coach where they see you fitting, what the developmental team experience is like, and if they expect these players to move up to play on the senior team.

One significant word of caution is required. Due to ongoing implementation of a proposed *House* settlement with the NCAA, the landscape of Division I is changing rapidly. Rosters will get smaller as colleges provide scholarships for all players. Most observers expect a great deal of player churn over the next year or two, greater reliance on the transfer portal, and some trickle down impact into Division II or less elite Division I conferences. Generally speaking, Division III rosters tend to be more stable year over year and generally less transfers into Division III programs.