



High School host scholarship meeting for Mountie athletes



John Porcelli (left), Dennis McCarthy (center) and John Fiore (right) hosted a seminar for athletes and their families on pursuing scholarships to play at the collegiate level.

PHOTO BY ANDREW GARDA

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One of the aims of high school — and by association, high school sports — is to prepare young people for life beyond high school, directing them to not only figure out what the next step should be but how they take that step as well.

For five of his seven years as the head football coach of the Montclair Mounties, John Fiore has hosted an Athletic Scholarship Night with former MHS Athletic Director John Porcelli. This year they were joined by

Dennis McCarthy, a local scout who publishes The McCarthy Report each year to give people an idea of what to look for when putting a highlight tape together.

The aim of the seminar, which took place last Thursday, March 9, is to help give athletes and their parents an idea of what they are in for if they want to play their sport in college.

It's not an easy process, but one thing both Fiore and Porcelli stress is for student-athletes and their parents to avoid getting locked into one school or even one level of play.

"There are a lot of good Division III schools," Porcelli said. "Most of the people in this room will be playing for Division III schools."

On the other hand, Porcelli said, while you don't want too small or limited a list, you also don't want to cast too wide a net. Only having a pair of schools or refusing to play for anything but a Division I school is too narrow—but having a list of 15 to 20 schools is far too unwieldy.

Once you have your list, you can go about contacting them and their coaching staff. Porcelli said that athletes as well as their parents, have to play an active role in getting a school's attention. While this is especially critical when it comes to lower-level, it's important even for more well known schools.

As all three speakers pointed out, "Blue Chip" athletes—the best of the best—are getting recruited by sophomore year. So unless you happen to be one of those rare athletes, you have to work.

According to the NCAA, while there are nearly 8 million students currently playing high school sports, only around 480,000 will compete as NCAA athletes. Breaking it down further, there are only a limited amount of scholarships per sport, making the percentage for each revenue generating sport (football, basketball) and non-revenue generating (crew, fencing, wrestling) small.

For example, according to the NCAA's most recent numbers, there are approximately 1,083,617 football players at the high school level. There are only 72,788 at the collegiate level, though. That means just 6.7 percent of high school athletes are likely to play football in college. Broken down even further, 2.6 percent will play Division I, 1.8 percent will play Division II and 2.4 percent will play Division III.

That's for a sport which tends to have a lot more scholarships to offer. Smaller sports like water polo, volleyball or tennis don't have as many opportunities.

There are more chances for girls due to Title IX, but still, all but the top athletes have to work to stand out, and for the right reasons.

All three men warned that schools and coaches look at all aspects of an athlete. How do they do academically? How is their character? Do they get into trouble? Are they involved in the community?



Mounties Football Head Coach John Fiore explains to students and their parents what it takes to attract the attention of a college

Social media is a factor as well, and Fiore warned that recruiters will check how an athlete behaves online.

“People lose scholarships,” by acting foolish online, he warned.

That also goes for parents as well, the trio pointed out, as recruiters and coaches will take a look at them as well to avoid overbearing and difficult moms and dads.

Standing out the right way isn’t easy, either. Marketing yourself isn’t something which comes naturally to a lot of parents and that’s where a guy like McCarthy comes in.

McCarthy gave some tips for setting up a highlight reel that catches the eye.

“It’s a highlight reel,” he said. “Make it exciting, right at the start.”

McCarthy also pointed out that while we know what coaches like for some sports, like football and basketball, for smaller sports it’s worth asking coaches what they look for so you can edit your reel to highlight those things.

This is all just a fraction of the work which goes into a high school athlete getting a scholarship at the college level. Being an athlete at the collegiate level is a full time job, and it turns out just getting there is a full time job too.