



Your Playbook to Prepare for Job Interviews

Going Pro After College

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OVERVIEW

As you advance on to “compete” in the working world, we want to give you coaching to prepare you for the next phase of your life.

The foundation you have built from your family plus the academic discipline and personal disciplines you developed in your time as a student athlete has groomed you to compete in the professional world.

Before you make the “team”, you must try out! It is our goal to make you ready for your “tryout” through this series.

WHY ME? - STUDENT ATHLETES POSSESS MANY OF THE QUALITIES DESIRABLE TO EMPLOYERS

Your time as a student athlete through high school and college has prepared you for making the next step in your life journey. As an employer, my experiences with former student athletes is that they have “it”. To me, “It” is the character and mental toughness to succeed when the work environment gets tough – when work and life does not follow the “happy path”. Your challenge in your “professional tryout” is to sell the interviewer and your prospective employer of that.

Let’s look at the qualities you bring as a student athlete that separates you from other candidates.

1. College athletes are goal oriented

- a. Think back on your time in high school. You needed to deliver strong grades to play and get accepted into school. You had thresholds to hit whether it was strength training, speed and agility, making the travel squad, lettering, starting, all conference, etc. We learn as Student athletes that goals are a part of our everyday life. More importantly, we learn that we must have the drive, desire and diligence to hit the goals.
- b. When you enter the workforce, goals will be a part of your everyday life. There are sales goals, service objectives, KPI’s (Key Performance Indicators) to name just a few. **Ask in the interview how you will be measured? What are the goals and metrics critical for success? Show the interviewer you welcome the challenge of being measured as an employee and as a team. It is how you succeeded as a student athlete and will be one of the positive attributes you bring as a candidate!**

2. College athletes are hard workers and good time managers

- a. Employers often say, “we are looking for people who will work hard”. What a great lead in for you as a student athlete. Think about your time in school. Classes, practice, strength training, study hall, community service, travel, games, film breakdown, etc. Your life was not the life of a normal college student.

- b. To be successful as a student athlete, you had to balance many competing priorities. You learned to be an effective time manager. You learned to focus on the task at hand and eliminate distractions. Leverage these skills with your prospective employer. **Its not that you just had to do a lot. You had to do a lot while competing at a high level and delivering on a minimum grade point average to be able to play. You are used to pressure not only due to the nature of athletics but also due to the many demands placed on you as a student athlete.**

3. College athletes are self-confident

- a. I often say I look for people with a little swagger. I don't mean a cocky "blow hard" but people who believe in themselves. People who are not afraid to fail. Athletes have that self-confidence. If you didn't, you likely didn't make it all 4 years as an athlete in college.
- b. Think about it, you all excelled in high school and were recruited to play at a division 1 school. You come in where now you are competing against a few other elite athletes. **If you didn't have self-confidence, you would have crawled in a corner and I love Wayne Gretzky's quote that I believe sums it up best - "You miss 100% of the shots you never take". Our athletic backgrounds have helped us overcome the fear of failure and to have confidence under pressure.**

4. College athletes are good teammates

- a. Many employers will look for people who are "team oriented"! I like that comment as I feel it is a term often used but not well defined. If this quality is presented to you in an interview, what a great chance to sell yourself. As a student athlete you embody this quality. Whether an individual contributor in a team sport or on of the starting 9, 5 or 11, you embody team.
- b. Think about it, each year you welcome and mentor people coming in who want your position but, for the good of the team, you welcome them and teach them. How many times have you had to wrestle a different weight, swim in the relay versus and individual event, change positions, etc. for the betterment of the team? Leverage these experiences and let the interviewer see what being a teammate really means. No, how does that relate to the work world? You may need to pull more than your fair share on the team for a project. You may need to take on a less desirable function because your skills are better suited for the task at hand. Simple but true - "There is No I In Team"

5. College athletes tend to be leaders

- a. "Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm." With this quote as a background, you all have been in a leadership role at many times in your career. Think about the game on the line and you need to focus your teammates to the task at hand. How about the time you had to make a tough decision in the heat of battle? When things go well, leadership is easy. When there is adversity around you, how do you motivate and rally others to move in ONE direction? Leadership is not being named captain, that is appointed. Leadership is about knowing the way, showing the way and going the way!

PREPPING FOR THE INTERVIEW – THE SCOUTING REPORT

In session 1 we discussed the qualities that make you, a student athlete, desirable to employers. In this session, we discuss preparing yourself for an interview. How you do prepare may depend upon the “interview event” but lack of preparation, no matter how “informal” the event seems to be will negatively impact your chances of success to get to the next round.

Preparation for the event is like a scouting report. What do I know about the employer? What do I want them to know about me? Have a prepped for questions? Why would I want to work at this employer and how could I fit in?

Recruiting Fairs

Many times, our first “baptism by fire” is the common practice of the “Recruiting Fair”. I often liken this to speed dating for young professionals. You often do not get to know a lot about the employers in time to effectively research. Your goal – impress the recruiters with YOU and get to the next round. Think of this as a scouting combine. Think of all those travel tournaments you played in or skills camps you attended. This is no different. To properly prepare for this type of event:

- Be sharp on “Why You” we discussed in Session 1
 - Have an “elevator speech” ready
 - Your ability to effectively communicate your strengths and interests may be what gets you a face to face with the company!
- Ask questions about the employer’s goals at the fair
 - What are you looking for in prospective recruits?
 - Why did the recruiter choose to work for the company?
 - How many recruits are they looking for from the event?
- Ask some general questions to understand a little about the company you cannot get deep here but show interest.
 - What is the company’s goals and objectives?

Researching Prospective Employers Before You Interview

Here’s where we build our scouting report! Just like you wouldn’t enter a game without knowing something about your opponent – trends, strengths, players, etc. – you should never go into an interview without researching your potential employer.

Why research a prospective employer?

1. To determine **if the company is right for you** and if you are right for the company
 - a. Does the company align with your skills sets, education as well as your values?
2. **To customize your resume & cover letter** to the position and the employer.

- a. Aligning these to things you learn about the company in research can separate your resume from the “generic” ones.
 - b. Position yourself as to how your skills can address the needs of the organization
3. **To prepare excellent interview questions.**
- a. The interview will / should be a dialogue and you will be asked if you have questions.
 - b. While there are “boiler plate” questions you can ask, knowing more about the company can help demonstrate your interest in the company.
 - c. Knowledge of the industry in which you may be working can also show initiative and extra effort!

What sources can I use to research a prospective employer?

Think Corporate - Company websites are a great place to start. The website shows how the company wants to be seen and how it sees itself. You can often find a mission statement, history, corporate values, goals and objectives and community engagement.

If the company is public, check out the Investor Relations tab. Here you can find the annual report. You can often see a letter from the CEO who paints his picture of the company – where its been and where its going as well as challenges faced. You can glean some information on financial performance. You can see its missions and values, etc.

Another great resource in investor relations is investor presentations. These are typically PowerPoint or Adobe slideshows prepared for the investment community. These often discuss where the company is headed in the following years – what is key to their success. This is an excellent way to parlay your skills and character into their goals.

Think Industry - There are several business sources that can give insights into a company and its industry. I like Crunchbase. Hoovers, Dunn and Bradstreet and Bloomberg are also good sources.

Think Social - There are numerous other ways to get intel on the company you will be interviewing with. Facebook pages for the company, twitter feeds, linked in and glass door are all opportunities to learn more about the company. Finally, use google updates to send you information about the company you are interviewing with. It allows you to better engage in the interview and shows interest.

Regardless of the sources, your “scouting report” should help you identify several key things:

- ***History or background***
- ***Mission or philosophy statement***
- ***Strategies and goals***
- ***Company ownership (private or public?)***
- ***Services or products sold or provided***
- ***Customers or membership***

- *Size and growth pattern*
- *Health of their industry and relative market share/position*
- *Number of employees*
- *Locations*
- *Career path or other opportunities available*

The scouting report will give you a solid foundation to:

- Confirm the employer is one you can see yourself grow with
- Ask meaningful questions to show an understanding of the employer and their industry
- Identify any commonalities you may share in terms of community involvement, employees, etc.

THE INTERVIEW – GAMETIME

The first interview is like your first scrimmage to make the team. Proper preparation is key. Know your strengths, know the employer and how you fit in to their culture, plans, etc. Be prepared to ask them questions specific to them. ***Be prepared to have a close as the interview ends that is your final sale*** --- *“I believe I am an excellent prospect for your company. Your plans to grow and diversify in your industry will require people who can work effectively as a team member, effectively handle multiple tasks, deal with pressure and push others to succeed. I hope you see by my background as a student athlete, I am the right candidate for this task!”*

You will be asked numerous questions and you cannot tell which ones of the common questions will come your way. My experience tells me however, most questions align with the ones we have listed below. Just as you prepare for various “schemes” with an upcoming opponent, familiarize yourself with these questions and possible responses. Rehearse them repeatedly so it becomes second nature and you will be prepared for your interview!

TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR ANSWERS

Can you tell me a little about yourself?	These questions are often icebreakers but also serve to see how well you can converse and articulate.
What are your strengths?	
What are your weaknesses?	
What can you offer us that someone else can not?	
Describe yourself.	Have an elevator speech about you prepared and practiced. Be consistent with the message and image you want to convey. As an example, if you say a strength is that you are focused or organized but you ramble in these questions, it is inconsistent with your assessment of yourself!
Discuss your resume.	
Discuss your educational background.	
Tell me about a time you made a mistake.	
Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.	
What is your dream job?	
Why are you interested in working for [insert company name here]?	Always research the company you are interviewing with if possible. Use Google, News articles, Dunn and Bradstreet, Linked in and GlassDoor if need be.
What do you know about the company?	
What is the name of our CEO?	
Who are our competitors?	Don't be afraid to be aggressive in your 5 to 10 year view. You got where you are as a student athlete by being goal oriented and driven, don't stop now!
What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/ 60 days/90 days on the job?	
Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?	
What motivates you?	
Are you willing to travel?	

Are you willing to relocate?	Don't be afraid to ask a question on what type of opportunities exist in other locations, etc. Get to the next round before you say no. A fair way to answer is I am willing to relocate for the right opportunity.
Give a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.	Many times a question to see how you perceive "above and beyond". Think about school projects, community service and even exceeding goals set by your coaches. What did you need to do to ensure you delivered success?
Who's your mentor?	These questions provide a great chance to sell the attributes / character you will bring to the employer.
Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.	
How do you handle pressure?	
Are you a leader or a follower?	
What are some of your leadership experiences?	
What are your co-worker pet peeves?	How did you handle disagreements with your coach, teammates or athletic administration? Pressure has been a factor in all your athletic life and then think about the pressures of a Student Athlete - training, travel, team, academics,, etc. - you have constantly been under pressure for many years. Leadership questions are great. You likely have many examples of leading others, coaching others and counseling others. Make sure you express these. The Leader or follower question is important as well. Remember, there are times that natural leaders have to follow and be comfortable with it!
What are your hobbies?	
What was the last book you read?	
What is your favorite website?	
What makes you uncomfortable?	

<p>Would you work 40+ hours a week?</p>	<p>You can easily express you do more than that now with the demands of being a student athlete</p>
<p>What questions haven't I asked you?</p>	
<p>What questions do you have for me?</p>	<p>Always have questions – Several. Use your research on the company to help here. If you can get to any investor relations data or presentations or annual reports, they often have goals for the coming year. Ask about that. Ask about growth plans for the company or an industry related question – as an example, if interviewing in the healthcare world, “how has the “affordable care act” impacted the company and do you foresee any changes with the new presidency?</p> <p><i>Also ask – based on our interview, do you believe I have the qualities XYZ company is looking for and what feedback can you give me to improve my interview?</i></p>
<p>Why should we hire you?</p>	<p>Closer –sell yourself, ask for the deal. Close with your elevator pitch – I believe I make an excellent candidate because I have qualities that most people my age don't have based on my academic and athletic experiences. I am a goal oriented team player who realizes we have to work hard to achieve results, support others while doing that and need to be flexible enough to adapt to change in order to meet our goals and objectives. I do not shy away from pressure and I am coachable so constructive feedback helps me succeed.</p>

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Job seeking can be a frustrating process. Much like recruiting, there is a period of high contact and intensity and then, there can be periods of silence. It is up to you to keep the flow of communication going. To do this, establish a pattern of correspondence with your interviews.

First is the thank you immediately following the interview. While a personalized card is nice, snail mail can get lost and email gets prioritized. You can do both and its not a bad touch but ensure you send out a thank you immediately after the interview. (This necessitates you get a business card). There are several areas your Thank you letter should address:

- Start with showing appreciation and interest
- Try to identify several key attributes they are looking for or problems they want to resolve from your interview
- Describe how your personal skills and attributes can help them fill their needs or help with their problems
- Close with thanks again and express desire to pursue next steps – suggest a follow up.

Second is the check in note. I like to send this out one week from the interview or one week from when the interviewer said they were looking to make a decision. Follow up shows' initiative and intent! Several areas to consider when drafting this correspondence:

- Thank the interviewer again
- Express continued interest in the role
- Re-iterate why the role is right for you and why you are right for the role
- Ask when they may be making their decision
- Show empathy on busy schedule but suggest an opportunity for a time to follow up

Finally, is the response to a turn down. We won't bat 100% but a turndown is not the end of the world. First, we learn through the interview experience. Second, we have a chance to make a connection with a recruiter or employer that could turn to future opportunity. So, if you get the turn down letter, write the recruiter/interviewer back and:

- Thank the recruiter for their time and interest in you as a candidate
- Wish them good luck – incorporate their stated needs and objectives
- Express interest in company and if future needs align with your skills, you would welcome an opportunity
- Stay in touch

Don't Let Your Past Determine Your Future, But Let it Be Part of Where You Are Going

My time as a student athlete were possibly the most important time in shaping who I am today. The lessons I learned about myself, team, adversity and effort could not be obtained in a book. They happen in the Gym, Court or field. In addition, the friendships last to this day – decades later.

You have been “coached” to succeed for life after college. Make no mistake, it is a big transition. For the last 4 or 5 years, much of your identity has been as a student athlete. Things will change a bit, but those foundations will help you be a great teammate in your new role.

Be prepared for sudden change

Change is inevitable. As athletes we are prepared to handle change and do all the time. Think about teams changing their approach too you – what you saw on film vs what really happened. Think about change in team dynamic. Injury, eligibility, graduation all bring change in who you play next to, play with, etc. Think about change in coaches and schemes and your need to learn. Think about the changes we have seen in the Athletic department administration. Change is a constant and we don't lose our focus. There is a great quote – “it's not what happens to you but how you react to it that counts.” We are conditioned to deal with change and maintain the course. In the working world, teammates will change, leaders/managers will change, goals will change. You can show your mettle by asking what can I do to help drive this change versus worrying about what it means to me?

Know where your help is

Through your time as a student athlete you have been blessed with a support system. Position coaches, strength coaches, academic advisors, Athletic development, teammates and classmates. I often think about how my teammates coached me up before I was a starter. Their unselfish support, advice and coaching pushed me to succeed. I know once on the field where my support was in blocking schemes. On the basketball court, where is your outlet for the trap, for softball, where is your cutoff? We all have help. This doesn't stop once you enter the workplace. Get yourself established but find a mentor. Seek out a coach. Establish time to learn for a top performer.

Be Great

Most people are afraid to be great. Don't be one of them. Go be great!