

Athletic Scholarships: Expectations Lose to Reality

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)

At youth sporting events, the sidelines have become the ritual community meeting place, where families sit in rows of folding chairs aligned like church pews. These congregations are diverse in spirit but unified by one gospel: heaven is your child receiving a college athletic scholarship.

Parents sacrifice weekends and vacations to tournaments and specialty camps, spending thousands each year in this quest for the holy grail.

But the expectations of parents and athletes can differ sharply from the financial and cultural realities of college athletics, according to an analysis by The New York Times of previously undisclosed data from the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) and interviews with dozens of college officials.

Excluding the glamour sports of football and basketball, the average N.C.A.A. athletic scholarship is nowhere near a full ride, amounting to \$8,707. In sports like baseball or track and field, the number is routinely as low as \$2,000. Even when football and basketball are included, the average is \$10,409. Tuition and room and board for N.C.A.A. institutions often cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year.

“People run themselves ragged to play on three teams at once so they could always reach the next level,” said Margaret Barry of Laurel, Md., whose daughter is a scholarship swimmer at the [University of Delaware](#). “They’re going to be disappointed when they learn that if they’re very lucky, they will get a scholarship worth 15 percent of the \$40,000 college bill. What’s that? \$6,000?”

Within the N.C.A.A. data, last collected in 2003-4 and based on N.C.A.A. calculations from an internal study, are other statistical insights about the distribution of money for the 138,216 athletes who received athletic aid in Division I and Division II.

¶Men received 57 percent of all scholarship money, but in 11 of the 14 sports with men’s and women’s teams, the women’s teams averaged higher amounts per athlete.

¶On average, the best-paying sport was neither football nor men’s or women’s basketball. It was men’s ice hockey, at \$21,755. Next was women’s ice hockey (\$20,540).

¶The lowest overall average scholarship total was in men's riflery (\$3,608), and the lowest for women was in bowling (\$4,899). Baseball was the second-lowest men's sport (\$5,806).

Many students and their parents think of playing a sport not because of scholarship money, but because it is stimulating and might even give them a leg up in the increasingly competitive process of applying to college. But coaches and administrators, the gatekeepers of the recruiting system, said in interviews that parents and athletes who hoped for such money were much too optimistic and that they were unprepared to effectively navigate the system. The athletes, they added, were the ones who ultimately suffered.

Coaches surveyed at two representative N.C.A.A. Division I institutions — [Villanova University](#) outside Philadelphia and the University of Delaware — told tales of rejecting top prospects because their parents were obstinate in scholarship negotiations.

“I dropped a good player because her dad was a jerk — all he ever talked to me about was scholarship money,” said Joanie Milhous, the field hockey coach at Villanova. “I don't need that in my program. I recruit good, ethical parents as much as good, talented kids because, in the end, there's a connection between the two.”

The best-laid plans of coaches do not always bring harmony on teams, however, and scholarships can be at the heart of the unrest. Who is getting how much tends to get around like the salaries in a workplace. The result — scholarship envy — can divide teams.

The chase for a scholarship has another side that is rarely discussed. Although those athletes who receive athletic aid are viewed as the ultimate winners, they typically find the demands on their time, minds and bodies in college even more taxing than the long journey to get there.

There are 6 a.m. weight-lifting sessions, exhausting practices, team meetings, study halls and long trips to games. Their varsity commitments often limit the courses they can take. Athletes also share a frustrating feeling of estrangement from the rest of the student body, which views them as the privileged ones. In this setting, it is not uncommon for first- and second-year athletes to relinquish their scholarships.

“Kids who have worked their whole life trying to get a scholarship think the hard part is over when they get the college money,” said Tim Poydenis, a senior at Villanova receiving \$3,000 a year to play baseball. “They don't know that it's a whole new

monster when you get here. Yes, all the hard work paid off. And now you have to work harder.”

Lack of Knowledge

Parents often look back on the many years spent shuttling sons and daughters to practices, camps and games with a changed eye. Swept up in the dizzying pursuit of sports achievement, they realize how little they knew of the process.

Mrs. Barry remembers how her daughter Cortney rose at 4 a.m. for years so she could attend a private swim practice before school. A second practice followed in the afternoon. Weekends were for competitions. Cortney is now a standout freshman at Delaware after receiving a \$10,000 annual athletic scholarship.

“I’m very proud of her and it was worth it on many levels, but not necessarily the ones everybody talks about,” Mrs. Barry said. “It can take over your life. Getting up at 4 a.m. was like having another baby again. And the expenses are significant; I know I didn’t buy new clothes for a while.

“But the hardest part is that nobody educates the parents on what’s really going on or what’s going to happen.”

When they received the letter from Delaware informing them of Cortney’s scholarship, she and her husband, Bob, were thrilled. Later, they shared a quiet laugh, noting that the scholarship might just defray the cost of the last couple of years of Cortney’s youth sports swim career.

The paradox has caught the attention of [Myles Brand](#), the president of the N.C.A.A. “The youth sports culture is overly aggressive, and while the opportunity for an athletic scholarship is not trivial, it’s easy for the opportunity to be overexaggerated by parents and advisers,” Mr. Brand said in a telephone interview. “That can skew behavior and, based on the numbers, lead to unrealistic expectations.”

Instead, Mr. Brand said, families should focus on academics.

“The real opportunity is taking advantage of how eager institutions are to reward good students,” he said. “In America’s colleges, there is a system of discounting for academic achievement. Most people with good academic records aren’t paying full sticker price. We don’t want people to stop playing sports; it’s good for them. But the best opportunity available is to try to improve one’s academic qualifications.” The math of athletic scholarships is complicated and widely misunderstood.

Despite common references in news media reports, there is no such thing as a four-year scholarship. All N.C.A.A. athletic scholarships must be renewed and are not guaranteed year to year, something stated in bold letters on the organization's Web site for student-athletes. Nearly every scholarship can be canceled for almost any reason in any year, although it is unclear how often that happens.

In 2003-4, N.C.A.A. institutions gave athletic scholarships amounting to about 2 percent of the 6.4 million athletes playing those sports in high school four years earlier. Despite the considerable attention paid to sports, the select group of athletes barely registers statistically among the 5.3 million students at N.C.A.A. colleges and universities.

Scholarships are typically split and distributed to a handful, or even, say, 20, athletes because most institutions do not fully finance the so-called nonrevenue sports like soccer, baseball, golf, lacrosse, volleyball, softball, swimming, and track and field.

Colleges offering these sports often pay for only five or six full scholarships, which are often sliced up to cover an entire team. Some sports have one or two full scholarships, or none at all.

The N.C.A.A. also restricts by sport the number of scholarships a college is allowed to distribute, and the numbers for most teams are tiny when compared with Division I football and its 85-scholarship limit.

A fully financed men's Division I soccer team is restricted to 9.9 full scholarships, for freshmen to seniors. These are typically divvied up among as many as 25 or 30 players. A majority of N.C.A.A. members do not reach those limits and are not fully financed in most of their sports.

Ms. Milhous, whose Villanova field hockey team plays in the competitive Big East Conference, must make tough choices in recruiting. The N.C.A.A. permits Division I field hockey teams to have 12 full scholarships, but her team has fewer.

"I tell parents of recruits I have eight scholarships, and they say: 'Wow, eight a year? That's great,' " she said. "And I say: 'No, eight over four or five years of recruits. And I've got 22 girls on our team.' "

That can mean a \$2,000 scholarship, which surprises parents.

“They might argue with me,” Ms. Milhous said. “But the fact is I’ve got girls getting from \$2,000 to \$20,000, and it all has to add up to eight scholarships. It’s very subjective, and remember, what I get to give out is also determined by how many seniors I’ve got leaving.”

Two Brothers, Two Stories

Joe Taylor, a soccer player at Villanova, received a scholarship worth half his roughly \$40,000 in college costs when he graduated from a suburban Philadelphia high school three years ago. He had spent years on one of the top travel soccer teams in the country, F.C. Delco, and had several college aid offers.

“It was still a huge dogfight to get whatever you can get,” Mr. Taylor said. “Everyone is scrambling. There are so many good players, and nobody understands how few get to keep playing after high school.”

In 2003-4, there was the equivalent of one full N.C.A.A. men’s soccer scholarship available for about every 145 boys who were playing high school soccer four years earlier.

“There’s a lot of luck involved really,” Mr. Taylor said. “I can pinpoint a time when I was suddenly heavily recruited. It was after a tournament in Long Island the summer after my junior year. I scored a few goals. The Villanova coach was there, and so were some other college coaches. Within a couple of days, my in-box was full of e-mails. I’ve wondered, What would have happened if didn’t play well that day?”

Mr. Taylor has a younger brother, Pat, who followed in his footsteps, playing on the same national-level travel team and for the same Olympic developmental program. “He did everything I did, and in some ways I think he’s a better player than me,” Joe said. “But you know, I think he didn’t have the big game when the right college coaches were there. He didn’t get the money offers I did.”

Pat Taylor is a freshman at Loyola College in Baltimore. Though recruited, he did not make the soccer team during tryouts last fall.

“I feel terrible for him — he worked as hard as I did for all those years,” Joe Taylor said. Their father, Chris Taylor, said he once calculated what he spent on the boys’ soccer careers.

“Ten thousand per kid per year is not an unreasonable estimate,” he said. “But we never looked at it as a financial transaction. You are misguided if you do it for that

reason. You cannot recoup what you put in if you think of it that way. It was their passion — still is — and we wanted to indulge that.

“So what if we didn’t take vacations for a few years.”

Pat Taylor, who started playing soccer at 4, said it took him about a month to accept that his dream of playing varsity soccer on scholarship in college would not happen. He looks back fondly on his youth career but also wishes he knew at the start what he knows now about the process.

“The whole thing really is a crapshoot, but no one ever says that out loud,” he said. “On every team I played on, every single person there thought for sure that they would play in college. I thought so, too. Just by the numbers, it’s completely unrealistic.

“And if I had it to do over, I would have skipped a practice every now and then to go to a concert or a movie with my friends. I missed out on a lot of things for soccer. I wish I could have some of that time back.”

Scholarships: Slicing the Pie

Division I and Division II statistics from the National Collegiate Athletic Association show the average athletic scholarship to be valued at \$10,409. But in sports like baseball or track and field, which routinely award partial scholarships, a player can receive as little as \$2,000.

	NUMBER OF H.S. BOYS PARTICIPATING	NUMBER AWARDED	STUDENTS RECEIVING*	SCHOLARSHIPS		YEARLY VALUE PER RECIPIENT
				TOTAL AMOUNT GIVEN (IN MILLIONS)	AVG. % OF FULL SCHOLARSHIP	
Ice Hockey	32,166	1,089	1,369	\$ 29.8	80%	\$21,755
Basketball	541,130	5,949	7,545	126.0	79	16,698
Gymnastics	3,495	94	186	2.5	51	13,351
Football	1,025,762	19,549	28,299	367.3	69	12,980
Fencing	777	48	127	1.4	38	10,814
Skiing	11,854	69	143	1.4	49	9,783
Tennis	158,796	1,257	2,927	26.5	43	9,050
Lacrosse	35,266	551	1,723	14.9	32	8,670
Soccer	330,044	2,357	6,047	51.6	39	8,533
Swimming/ Diving	86,640	1,080	2,806	23.3	38	8,294
Water Polo	13,871	83	282	2.2	30	7,756
Wrestling	239,105	789	2,160	14.5	37	6,703
Track and Field/ Cross Country	713,305	3,112	8,414	54.6	37	6,491
Volleyball	35,915	129	416	2.6	31	6,360
Golf	165,857	1,310	3,662	23.2	36	6,338
Baseball	451,701	3,983	12,272	71.3	32	5,806
Riflery	2,274	15	75	.3	21	3,608
Bowling	10,110	—	—	—	—	—
Field Hockey	213	—	—	—	—	—
Rowing	2,186	—	—	—	—	—
Softball	1,484	—	—	—	—	—

	NUMBER OF H.S. GIRLS PARTICIPATING	NUMBER AWARDED	STUDENTS RECEIVING*	SCHOLARSHIPS		YEARLY VALUE PER RECIPIENT
				TOTAL AMOUNT GIVEN (IN MILLIONS)	AVG. % OF FULL SCHOLARSHIP	
Ice Hockey	4,245	423	529	\$ 10.9	80%	\$20,540
Gymnastics	21,620	411	512	8.4	80	16,478
Basketball	451,600	6,217	8,000	123.7	78	15,459
Volleyball	382,755	4,352	6,614	84.2	66	12,726
Tennis	159,740	2,293	3,506	44.3	65	12,629
Fencing	641	81	176	2.1	46	12,040
Field Hockey	58,372	699	1,680	17.6	42	10,464
Skiing	9,307	95	192	1.9	50	10,022
Golf	54,720	1,224	2,302	22.6	53	9,801
Rowing	2,359	958	2,295	22.3	42	9,723
Swimming/ Diving	138,475	1,935	4,247	41.2	46	9,702
Lacrosse	26,677	630	1,756	17.0	36	9,685
Soccer	270,273	3,964	9,310	78.2	43	8,404
Softball	365,008	3,637	7,877	65.0	46	8,255
Track and Field/ Cross Country	602,930	4,506	9,888	80.1	46	8,105
Water Polo	11,856	153	445	3.5	34	7,793
Riflery	775	61	171	1.1	36	6,292
Bowling	9,603	97	263	1.3	37	4,899
Baseball	1,354	—	—	—	—	—
Football	673	—	—	—	—	—
Wrestling	2,474	—	—	—	—	—

* There are more students receiving athletic aid than there are scholarships available because many of the scholarships are divided among several students.

Note: N.C.A.A. and high school data encompass freshmen to seniors. N.C.A.A. data is for 2003-4, the most recent academic year that the information was gathered based on N.C.A.A. estimates from an internal study. High school participation figures are from 1999-2000, representing the academic year by which most college students receiving athletic aid in 2003-4 were playing high school sports.

Recruits Clamor for More From Coaches With Less

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)

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The country's celebrity college football and basketball coaches lead nationally ranked teams on television, controlling a bevy of full scholarships and a sophisticated marketing machine that swathes college athletics with an air of affluence. They are far from typical.

More common is the soccer, lacrosse or softball coach who sits in a closet-sized office beside a \$100 air conditioner and a 12-inch TV, trying to figure out ways to buy the best athlete possible for the least amount of scholarship money, which can be as little as \$400. A jack-of-all-trades, this coach has a job that requires the skills of a stock portfolio manager, labor lawyer, headhunter, family counselor and soothsayer.

"There have been days when you feel like a used-car salesman," said Joe Godri, the baseball coach at [Villanova University](#). "I've always been completely honest, but you can't get away from the fact that the process can be crazy. You pump up a kid so much to come to your place, and when he agrees, you say, 'O.K., and what I've got for you is 25 percent of your cost to attend here.'

"And no one believes you, but that's a good Division I baseball scholarship. You have to convince his parents that you're being really fair."

The current cost to attend Villanova is nearly \$45,000 a year, and it has cost more than \$35,000 since 2003. The average [N.C.A.A.](#) Division I baseball scholarship, compiled from 2003-4 statistics obtained from the N.C.A.A., is worth \$7,069.

"It's like we have a salary cap from the professional sports model," said Godri, whose baseball program can dole out the equivalent of six full scholarships across four years. "Except we're dealing in thousands, not millions, and we have to stretch it across 25 or 30 kids."

Working against these college coaches is a perception in the hyper and driven youth sports culture that scholarship money is plentiful. Online recruiting services and private counselors promote the notion that some athletic scholarships go unclaimed.

In interviews with more than 20 college coaches and administrators at two representative N.C.A.A. Division I institutions, Villanova and the [University of Delaware](#), the coaches said they routinely encountered parents with an almost irrational desire to have their children earn some kind of athletic scholarship.

Sometimes the amount is irrelevant, as long as the child can attend his or her high school's national letter of intent signing day and be feted in the local newspapers as a scholarship athlete.

“Parents say to me all the time: ‘Can’t you just throw her something? Just make her feel good,’ ” said Joanie Milhous, the Villanova field hockey coach. “I have to explain I don’t have money to throw around. I think these families have just invested so much in private lessons, tutors and camps, they can’t stand the thought of getting nothing at all back financially.”

The Delaware men’s track coach, Jim Fischer, added: “I’m somewhat amazed that the question of scholarship money always comes up, even when it’s an athlete I haven’t shown much interest in and who clearly isn’t a college-level player. When I meet with them, I sit there thinking, this parent will never even ask about money because their kid would have trouble making some high school teams. But you know what? They ask for money, too.”

Other coaches said athletes or their parents tried to be too wily in their scholarship negotiations.

“Families will try to play the coaches off each other,” said Kim Ciarrocca, who coaches women’s lacrosse at Delaware. “They’ll say that they’ve got a half or full scholarship offer from some school and want us to match it. What they don’t know is that we coaches all talk to each other, and we know the truth.”

She added: “We will call the other coach and ask, ‘Hey, did you offer that kid a full ride?’ When the answer is no, that kid might have lost the interest of two coaches.”

Godri said parents sometimes are misled by advisers who use the high-profile sports of football or basketball as a model for how to play the recruiting game. That is a mistake, Godri said, because the money in the nonrevenue sports is limited.

“The first thing people have to understand is that they are probably not going to recoup the money they’ve already spent on their kid’s athletic career,” Godri said. “But that’s what they are told. People get exploited. I wish people would relax and talk frankly to coaches. I’d tell them to lower their expectations, and everything will probably work out fine for all concerned.”

At the same time, the coaches concede that there is a competitive nature to the recruiting system and that they are not above using tactics to sway or hurry high school athletes in their decision-making.

Ciarrocca's husband, Kirk, is an assistant football coach at Delaware. They discuss recruiting strategies.

"I think all the women's sports have learned from the men's sports, and right or wrong, we now do some of the things they do," Ciarrocca said.

For example, if she is looking for a goalie, she might bring to campus each of her top three potential recruits at the position in the space of a few days. She said she would tell them that there were three players, that all three had been on campus recently and that they had a week to decide whether to attend Delaware. The first player to commit gets the scholarship money. The others do not.

"I've waited patiently in the past," Ciarrocca said, "and lost all three."

Coaches said the rules of this recruiting engagement were understood by anyone who had been in the game before. That is why coaches say they are happiest when they make their first call to a recruit's home and find out the object of their attention had an older sibling who was recruited by colleges.

"Those people understand the landscape," Milhous said. "If it's the oldest child, I know it's going to be harder."

Among the principal things families do not know, the coaches said, is that there is a lot more money available outside athletics in the form of grants, loans and other institutional aid. In many cases, the athletic aid will be a piece of the financial package.

"The athletic money can also increase over time, because a good 17-year-old player can grow into a great 19-year-old player, and just about any coach will want to recognize that and keep the player happy," said Godri, who has had two recent graduates drafted in the second round of Major League Baseball's amateur draft.

For that reason, most coaches treat their pool of scholarship money as a reserve that must be strategically invested like a stock portfolio. And like a stock plan, it can be drastically affected by unforeseen outside forces — in this case, injuries and academic ineligibility. Other factors are the attrition of graduation and an always volatile position depth chart.

"Sometimes you have to try to predict the future, and if you think it's easy, you've never done it," Godri said. "This is why when a parent says to me, 'You must have more money,' I can say with a clear conscience, 'There ain't no more money.'"

Every coach interviewed said the battle over scholarship dollars would go more smoothly if parents and athletes did their homework and knew how few full scholarships the N.C.A.A. allowed in each sport (11.7 for baseball, 12 for field hockey, for example) and how few Division I institutions actually funded sports to those levels (far less than half). Most said there was an overemphasis on the potential financial benefit of a child's athletic success.

“What they should be doing is attending the games of a college they are considering,” Milhous said. “Go sit with the parents of the current players. That will tell you everything. By the end of the game, they'll know everything — good or bad. And that's what really matters.

“But people tend to just focus on the money. They chase the scholarship and I've had several families come back to me a year or two later and say, ‘Chasing the money was a mistake.’ It sounds like a cliché, but there's a lot more to being a happy college athlete than how much money you get. The money alone won't make you happy.”

It's Not an Adventure, It's a Job

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)

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A few months into her first year at Villanova, Stephanie Campbell was despondent.

As a high school senior in New Jersey, she had been thrilled to receive a \$19,000 athletic scholarship to play field hockey at [Villanova University](#), a select, private institution outside Philadelphia. But she had not counted on the 7 a.m. start of every class day, something required so she could be in the locker room by noon to prepare for a four-hour shift of afternoon practices and weight-lifting sessions. Travel to games forced her to miss exams and classes. There were also mandatory team meetings, study halls and weekend practices.

She was overwhelmed.

“Plus, her roommate had a typical college student's social life, while Stephanie was in her room on weekend nights trying to sleep because she had a game the next day,” her mother, Kathleen Campbell, said last month. “She came home crying.”

So Kathleen Campbell sat her daughter down, waited for a break in the sobs and said: “Villanova costs more than \$40,000 a year to attend. They're paying you \$19,000 to play field hockey. At your age, there is no one out there anywhere who is going to pay

you that kind of money to do anything. And that's how you have to look at this: It's a job, but it's a great job."

Campbell, 22, kept at it all four years, serving as a team captain last fall while majoring in marketing. She is expected to graduate this spring.

"I'm missing the sport terribly already," she said last month. "But it was a ton of work. Receiving an athletic scholarship is a wonderful thing, but most of us only know what we're getting, not what we're getting into."

Dozens of scholarship athletes at [N.C.A.A.](#) Division I institutions said in interviews that they had underestimated how taxing and hectic their lives would be playing college sports. They also said others share a common misperception that athletes lead a privileged existence.

"You know, maybe if you're a scholarship football player at Oklahoma, everything is taken care of for you," Tim Poydenis, a scholarship baseball player at Villanova, said. "But most of us are nonrevenue-sport athletes who have to do our own fund-raising just to pay for basics like sweat pants and batting gloves. We miss all these classes, which obviously doesn't help us or make our professors happy. We give up almost all our free time. Our social life is stripped bare.

"Friday happy hour or spring break? Forget it. I haven't had a spring break since I was a sophomore in high school."

The athletes were interviewed over several weeks from a cross section of sports at two representative Division I institutions, Villanova, a charter member of the Big East Conference, and the [University of Delaware](#), a state-run institution that is a member of the Colonial Athletic Association. None of the athletes asked for or expected sympathy. They know there are many overscheduled college students who devote extra hours to academic and extracurricular activities or part-time jobs and internships.

"We love what we do, and it is worth it," Poydenis said. "But everybody thinks every college athlete is on a pampered full ride. The truth is a lot of us are getting \$4,000 and working our butts off for it."

The life of the scholarship athlete is so arduous that coaches and athletes said it was not unusual for as many as 15 percent of those receiving athletic aid to quit sports and turn down the scholarship money after a year or two.

“I came in with 10 recruited girls,” Stephanie Campbell said. “There are four of us left as seniors. Not everyone was on scholarship, but maybe half who left were getting money.”

Campbell said she had a teammate who wanted to be an engineer but that the classes and off-campus projects in that major clashed with field hockey practices and trips.

Katie Lee, a senior softball player at Delaware, said at least one scholarship player had quit the team in each of her seasons. Of her former teammates, she said, “I see them around campus, and they look happy.”

Emily Schaknowski, a sophomore lacrosse player on athletic scholarship at Delaware, said 5 of the 12 women she entered with were no longer on the team. Most had relinquished their scholarships.

Joe Taylor, a junior soccer player at Villanova, said he was one of four left from a freshman recruiting class of 10.

“You wonder if you should try to talk them out of it,” Taylor said. “But for most of those guys, it probably is the best decision to walk away.”

At Villanova, Poydenis said he thought the defections resulted from the shock that set in after a youth sports culture ethos collided with the realities of college athletics.

“Kids who have worked their whole life trying to get a scholarship think the hard part is over when they get the college money,” he said. “They don’t know that it’s a whole new monster when you get here.”

His coach, Joe Godri, says he tries to warn recruits before they accept athletic aid. He tells them that being a Division I student-athlete is a full-time job. “It’s not even close to being a normal college student,” Godri said.

The Division I athletes interviewed indicated they devoted at least four hours a day to their sport, not counting the time it takes to play or to travel to games. Classes must be scheduled in the early morning to free the afternoon for practices and games. Practices often last from 4 to 6:30 p.m., although several athletes talked about how they had to arrive early for treatment of injuries or to have old injuries taped or harnessed. Highly competitive, demanding practices come next.

There is often a team dinner, perhaps a short meeting and a mandatory study hall in some cases. Weekday away games, which are common, can mean a bus ride that begins at 1 p.m. and a return trip that reaches campus at 10 p.m.

“You come back to your dorm room ready to crash,” Taylor said. “But you’ve got homework or maybe a test the next morning. The rest of the dorm is starting to get a little rowdy because those guys have all finished their homework. They might be getting ready to go out. A lot of them took a nap in the afternoon.”

College athletes routinely said there was one accouterment not often mentioned in recruiting trips but essential to the athlete’s equipment bag: ear plugs.

“They help you sleep on those nights when you have a game the next day,” Jamie Flynn, a junior soccer player at Delaware, said.

Many athletes tend to gather together in off-campus housing, so at least their apartment is quieter on the nights before games. Most teams have a rule prohibiting alcohol 48 hours before a game. The Villanova field hockey team, for example, pledges to not to drink alcohol for the entire season.

And the players police other teammates who might not be abiding by the rules about partying before games or practices. Jillian Loyden, a senior All-Big East goalie on Villanova’s soccer team, said it was usually first-year players who slipped up.

“They get to college and want to be normal college students on a Friday night,” said Loyden, who has raided parties to usher first-year teammates out of a building so they would head home to bed. “You have to make them understand that our team is not a social club.”

Athletes from the nonrevenue sports also customarily have to do extra work on campus to raise money to pay for equipment or apparel not normally financed by the athletic department, like warm-up jackets. Cortney Barry, a scholarship swimmer at Delaware, cut short her Thanksgiving Day break at home last year because the swim team had agreed to clean the garbage from the football stadium bleachers to pay for some expenses.

For this and other reasons, college athletes often refer to students who are nonathletes as “normals” or “regulars.” When asked why, Stephanie Campbell answered, “Because we’re not normal.”

“Look, we are fortunate to be athletes and to get tuition money to do it,” Campbell added. “I have loved my time here. I’m going to get a prestigious degree, and I know there are a lot of people who would have wanted to trade places with me. But I’d still say Division I athletics is not meant for everybody. Nobody tells you that.”

Campbell, who was an All-Big East selection in her final season, has gone back to her hometown, Gibbsboro in South Jersey, to help coach the club team she played for as a youngster.

“I worry about the kids I see now, because they’re under so much stress to get something out of field hockey,” she said. “You can never lose sight of why you play. Yes, I got a scholarship, but in the end, I put up with the sore muscles, lost sleep and everything else because I loved playing that much.”

These days, she is trying to make up for lost time on the business networking front, attending vocational seminars and fairs aimed at easing college graduates into the workplace. It is a new game for Campbell.

“Well, I’m graduating in May,” she said. “I need a job.”