

What Does It Take To Play College Soccer?

Are you committed and disciplined enough?

- ✓ 12-15 credit hours a semester full-time student (120-130 hrs to graduate)
- ✓ 30-40 hours in class each week
- ✓ 20-30 hours studying each week
- ✓ 12-20 hours training and weight lifting
- ✓ 2-6 hours travel time to matches
- ✓ Playing college soccer is a full-time job

To compete as a college soccer player, a student-athlete must be focused, dedicated and opportunistic. However, to play college athletics you don't have to do it at the Division I level. NCAA Division I is the most recognized level of college sports. There is also Division II, Division III, and NAIA. These hours (12-20 per week, depending on the team) are in addition to classes, individual study and social activities. The time commitment of a college soccer player is likened to a full-time job which thousands of player's line up for every year.

Speed is the primary component that distinguishes a Division I player from Division II, Division III and NAIA. Another primary component is psychological.

- The **technical speed** of a player is the ability to take control of the ball and do it in as few touches as possible and this is what separates the top Division I player from all others. As you go from one level to the next technically, you are required to be able to do things so much faster- under pressure, do things without time and space more efficiently.
- The **tactical speed** of a player is the ability to read what is happening on the field and being able to make a decision that will help your team the most by hurting the other team. So your tactical requirements are having the awareness as to what is going on in the game by seeing it, then having the decision-making process to sort out what's best. And what is best is going to be determined by a lot of different factors- the field you are on, your match-up, time and space, etc..
- The **physical speed** of a player is the most obvious-quickness, speed, agility and strength. This is the ability of the player to get from one area of the field to another faster than his/her opponent. A lot of speed is inherited, but some can be developed by a player who is intelligent and has a consistent work rate to improve all the physical qualities.
- **Psychological** is the capacity to be able to deal with all kinds of adversity. Anson Dorrance the head coach of University of North Carolina women's soccer program explains: "It is also the capacity to be so hard that in your duels with opposing players, you are not intimidated. In great duels, there are defining moments. There is the moment when you get a sense of the other person's hardness. It may be a physical risk issue or a fitness issue.

When a player is competing, you measure your capacity to take physical risks, your capacity to push through pain threshold, and your capacity to not back down

psychologically from someone. Those defining moments are constant in contact sports. If two players are running for the same destination, the one with the weaker psychological dimension is going to time is so he/she gets to the defined point late. In other words, he/she is going to time is so he/she misses the confrontation with the other player. That's the defining moment of that duel-who is going to slow down and who isn't."

Depending on your relative speed in all of three of these areas: technical, tactical and physical, plus your psychological make up, you should look for an appropriate level of play where you can compete with success.

"College coaches receive letters and phone calls every week from high school players, coaches, and parents claiming that they have a player that can play at that school. The college coach's first question is always, **"Have you ever seen my team play?"** and **"Do you know what our level of play is like?"** Too often they don't. They have only seen youth and high school games and are not aware of the speed of play at the college level. The same could be said of college of college coaches pushing their players to the pro or international level; they don't always get a chance to truly see that game and naturally think that their most talented players can excel at that level without truly understanding what that level demands." G. Guerrieri (Head Soccer Coach- Texas A&M University)

A quality college soccer player typically has a clear repertoire of attributes to bring to a college team. Here are examples of the capabilities of a typical Division I player (Information for this section from www.thesportsource.com, 1-800-862-3092).

FORWARDS

- Possess the physical speed necessary to break away from strong tenacious markers
- Able to hold and shield the ball with the head up while teammates move into supporting roles
- Show confidence and talent to take on 1, 2, 3 players en route to goal
- Comfortable and successful with both feet while under pressure
- Have superior physical fitness

MIDFIELDERS

- Have superior physical fitness level
- Physically strong and quick to avoid injury due to collision and physical play
- Possess the tactical ability to read and play within the tempo of the game
- Show the technical ability to play a controlled 1 and 2 touch game
- Able to play the ball from side to side as well as back to front of the team
- Can and will defend anytime the ball is lost
- Have the personality to play under pressure

DEFENDERS

- Possess the physical speed and strength to keep up with the nation's top strikers
- Have the grit and determination to play within a team's defensive system
- Show the technical ability to accurately play 40 yard passes to teammates and to control long passes from opponents
- Display the ability to win 50/50 challenges consistently
- Have the composure to play and create (not just destroy)

GOALKEEPERS

- Have the stature and physique that brings confidence to their teammates
- Have the strength and ability to win 50/50 balls and avoid injury
- Display the technical ability to make 100% of the saves in the middle two-thirds of goal and many of the bigger saves in the corner
- Possess the leadership and social skills to get along with players and lead his/hers defense
- Ability to distribute the ball safely in their own half of the field and penetrate the other team's half with long punts, throws, or drop kicks
- Willingness to work hard in training as he/she does in games
- Display the tactical ability to play within the flow of the game

What does it take to play college soccer? The answer is "What do you want from your college experience?" If you have the technical, tactical, and the physical tools to play at the Division I level, do you have the time and dedication? If you would sit the bench for a Division I team, wouldn't you be happier playing for a Division II, III, or a NAIA program?