

College Connection: Choosing a College Shooting Program

By Brad Donoho, CMP Program Manager

When we last met, I discussed how to become eligible to shoot for an NCAA rifle team by filing for the NCAA Clearinghouse. Now comes the hard part, choosing the school that is right for you. In the end, you want to find a school that offer you the academic, social and shooting sports opportunities that you want. Hopefully this step by step instruction can simplify the decision making process.

Step One:

Before you begin your search for rifle teams, you must first give some thought to your future. We are all faced with this question at one time or another; what do I want to be when I grow up? Let's face it; shooting probably will not pay the bills! You do not need to narrow this down to one career, but you should create a list of possibilities. If you are having trouble with this, broaden the search by choosing an academic field. It could be science, math, writing, or engineering, anything you might take an interest in.

Step Two:

Your next step is to search for universities with college rifle teams. A few lists have been compiled with this information, but none are more comprehensive than the NRA's collegiate directory. The directory allows you to narrow your search of collegiate shooting programs by state and discipline. You will find colleges and universities with everything from pistol teams to NCAA varsity rifle teams. The link to the NRA directory is, http://www.nrahq.org/compete/college_lookup.asp

Now the question is, how much time do you want to invest in shooting? Do you want to continue to shoot as a hobby, or do you want to be part of a varsity team that is training to win an NCAA Championship? This is going to determine how much time you will spend on the rifle range. If you decide you want to dedicate your time and compete for the national championship, then you should look at universities that have NCAA rifle teams. At these universities you may find yourself shooting 5-6 days per week for 20 or so hours per week. That hard work can sometimes payoff in the form of a scholarship. Division 1 schools are permitted to give their shooters scholarships. Each Division 1 team is allowed a total of 3.6 scholarships per year. The head coach decides how the 3.6 athletic scholarships are distributed among the team. The chances are, the harder you work, the better the scholarship. The NCAA also has Division 3 teams but they cannot offer scholarships.

Another scholarship and career opportunity is to consider an ROTC program. If you want to join an ROTC program and shoot for an NCAA program, that is a great way to get your school paid for, compete for an NCAA rifle team and prepare for an important future career. College rifle coaches usually do not have a problem with adding ROTC cadets to their roster.

If you decide that you only want to shoot a few hours a week, then you might want to consider looking at colleges with club programs. Club programs can vary from

teams that shoot for the fun of it, to organized conferences that compete for a championship. Some college rifle clubs will provide shooting equipment and team travel expenses.

Step Three:

Step three is going to require a little more research on your behalf. Now it is time to compare your list of possible career choices from step one with the schools with rifle programs that you found in step two. You want to make sure that the schools with shooting programs that interest you also offer an academic program in your field of interest. If you want to be a veterinarian and shoot at a school without a veterinary program, then it probably is not the best fit for you. Collegiate shooting is only going to last four years, but your career will last a lifetime.

Some secondary college characteristics that you may want to pay attention to are size, location and distance from home. You can find rifle teams at schools varying in size from a few thousand to 55,000 students and located in small towns as well as large cities.

Choosing a college can be one of the most difficult decisions a high school student can make. Picking a college with a rifle team adds an additional challenge and can make your choice that much more difficult. This is a decision where you will want to seek as much advice as you can get. Once you narrow your list down to a select few, you can begin the process of applying and enrolling. In the next installment of *College Connection*, I will discuss ways to get the attention of college coaches and how to contact them.

Brad Donoho is a graduate of the University of Kentucky where he was a member of the Wildcats Varsity Rifle Team for four years. He was a Team Captain his junior and senior years. Subsequent to his graduation, he also served as Assistant Rifle Team Coach at Kentucky