



Kiley Allosso was our 2007 BFS High School Female Athlete of the Year. She carried a 3.933 GPA in high school and earned a field hockey scholarship at Boston University.

Scholarships for Women: *Come and Get 'Em!*

How young women athletes can earn money for school

BY **LAANNA CARRASCO, MA**

The dream of getting a college athletic scholarship can be a powerful incentive for gifted young female athletes. I was 12 years old when my YMCA basketball coach suggested that I might be able to get an athletic scholarship to college. For female athletes, the goal of having their college bills paid by playing the sport they love is a great motivator, and there are more opportunities for women to play a college sport than ever before.

Today there are 9,087 women's college sports teams, and more than 167,000 female varsity athletes compared to about 30,000 back in 1972 when the gender equity law Title IX was enacted. Title IX requires equal opportunities between the sexes in educational programs that are federally

funded and has produced numerous opportunities for girls to have part of their college education paid for by their sports participation.

And that's the catch. Only a small percentage of the most elite female athletes get a full scholarship to college – the vast majority of men and women who receive scholarship money have only a portion of their bills paid for by the athletic department. College coaches are skilled at stretching their budgets by giving partial scholarships to as many athletes as possible. Sometimes that means an athlete may get only an eighth of a full-ride scholarship or maybe just enough to cover the cost of their textbooks.

For instance, Janelle Avila was a highly recruited high school All

American field hockey player who chose to attend the University of Louisville in Kentucky on a partial scholarship. "After my freshman year they bumped my scholarship up to 75 percent," Avila says, explaining how her hard work paid off financially. It paid off athletically as well when Avila was named a collegiate All American and member of the U.S. Under 21 National Team.

Avila is one example of the many female athletes who benefit from working hard to establish a spot on a college sport team. The payoff is actually far greater than most parents or young athletes might imagine, and there are opportunities to get funding from areas other than the athletic department. Let's look at where the money is, the

best ways to go after it, and what a young female athlete might get out of pursuing her sport all the way to the college level.

Admittedly, the odds are very remote that a high school athlete will get an athletic scholarship to college. There are roughly 138,000 athletic scholarships available for Division I and II sports (men and women)¹. As one example, more than 600,000 girls compete in track and field in high school, and there are only about 4,500 college scholarships in this sport, which means only the very best sprinters, jumpers and throwers will receive a full scholarship. Less than 1 percent of girls playing high school basketball earn any athletic scholarship money to attend college, and the other sports are all within a percentage point of this number. For example, of female high school athletes, 0.7 percent of softball

players, 1.2 percent of swimmers and 1.6 percent of golfers will receive athletic scholarship money. But don't be discouraged!

The money is there, and besides partial athletic scholarships there are academic or merit-based scholarships and financial aid. Walking onto a team is another option that may get the dedicated female athlete a scholarship in later years.

Be aware that Division III schools and the Ivy League schools don't even offer athletic scholarships, but they provide valuable athletic and academic opportunities for committed athletes who are not at the elite Division I level. The Ivy Eight, which includes Harvard, Brown and Princeton, among others, and the Division III schools, such as Colorado College, Tufts and Johns Hopkins, support and recruit their athletes with academic grants.

They provide prestige, connections and a degree that can set student athletes on a path for a successful career after their competitive playing days are over.

Of note, the Ivy League and the most elite Division III schools have enhanced the financial aid for admitted students, making it much easier to recruit talented athletes. Due to rich endowments, these schools now provide large tuition grants for all admitted students from middle income families, and athletes can benefit from this as well. It's not that there's more money available to athletes, but there's more money available for *all* students, making these schools more accessible and an excellent choice for a top female student athlete.

The benefits of playing a sport are enormous, and there is evidence to support female participation. One survey of high school and college

Practical Steps to Earning Scholarships

If you're a young female athlete (or the parent or coach of a female athlete), here are some tips you can use for financing part or all of your tuition through sports participation:

1. Play the sport you love. You have to really love your sport to make it worth the time, commitment and sacrifices it takes to excel in college athletics. Don't make the mistake of playing a sport just because it has a lot of scholarship opportunities (basketball and volleyball) and give up on a sport with less funding (lacrosse or field hockey). Play the sport you love, study hard, and you'll create opportunities for yourself.

2. Start strength training and conditioning early. Work with a BFS-certified coach to get stronger, quicker, faster and more mobile. If you have strength training experience, you'll stand out to college coaches, and they will be attracted by that commitment and drive and will want you on their team.

3. Get appropriate mobility in your hips and ankles and be able to perform good technique in the squat. Again, you can do this by training in a BFS program or working with a BFS coach. You'll be a more attractive prospect if you can

move well on the court or field, and mobility is a critical component of athleticism. Ryan Faehnle, who was a strength coach at Miami University of Ohio, says, "I'd much rather have an athlete with very good mechanics who is very weak. It's easy to get an athlete strong if they have good technique. If they move wrong, then you have to work backwards to unlearn bad habits and then build them back up."

4. Contact coaches of schools you are interested in as early as your sophomore year. If there is a school you want to go to, contact the coach with an introductory email, send them a video of your skills, fill them in on your academics, and let them know when you'll be playing at camps or tournaments. Recruit *them*. This is a great way to create an opportunity for yourself, especially if you're interested in a DII or III school. You can work with the coach, financial aid office and admissions to fund your education through sports and academic scholarships when the time comes.

5. Put yourself on YouTube. To attract the attention of coaches, put together a video of eight minutes of your skills and put it on YouTube. Send this to coaches in an introductory email instead of a CD because CDs can easily get lost or set aside on a busy coach's desk.

Photo: University of Louisville



Photo: Matthew Epstein, www.iakethepicture.com



Photo: John Broz

Janelle Avila earned a partial scholarship for field hockey at the University of Louisville, and got that bumped up after her freshman year. Avila was also a member of the Team BFS Weightlifting Club.

female athletes analyzed body weight and activity levels over a 25-year period. Results showed that the women who had participated in sports in high school or college had lower rates of obesity and body mass index. Physical activity rates were higher as well.

Equally impressive, NCAA statistics show that 71 percent of female athletes who entered NCAA Division I programs on athletic scholarship in 1998 graduated within six years, compared to 63 percent of females overall.¹ Female athletes who play sports are

more likely to volunteer, be registered to vote and feel comfortable speaking in public than those who don't. Various studies have shown girls who play sports have better self-esteem, are less likely to use drugs or smoke, and are less than half as likely to get pregnant during their teens compared to nonathletes.

Playing sports benefits girls and women because it teaches them how to work hard, take criticism and achieve goals. Team players learn how to rely on each other and give and take constructive criticism. Playing basketball

helped me to practice and internalize the meaning of goal setting, hard work, determination and discipline. These traits helped me become a journalist and a fitness and basketball coach and enabled me to deal with setbacks and difficulties during life.

The idea of a scholarship can thrill a young female athlete as it did me. The experience of pursuing a college sports career taught me to love the game of basketball, but more than that, it taught me how to apply myself and push through physical pain to make myself

better, stronger and faster. I also studied hard because I grew up in an academically focused family and my father was a college professor. Although some young athletes may be tempted to ignore academics in the hope that their prowess on the court, field or track will get them a full ride in college, the best strategy is for young girls to give their all to both sports and academics, with academics taking the upper hand if time conflicts arise.

I speak from experience. My hard work throughout high school paid off in the form of a partial basketball

scholarship to Stetson University, a small Division I school in Florida. The other quarter of my tuition was paid by a grant from my father's university. Later, when I went to graduate school, I received a partial academic scholarship upon acceptance. The scholarship was only for the first semester, but I went ahead and asked my department to extend it each semester. They did, and I ended up having half of my graduate studies paid for as well. I mention this because getting a scholarship as an undergrad sensitized me to the fact the money is out there

and sometimes you have to ask for it!

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