

Online manners are as important as grades

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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In this Aug. 5, 2013, file photo, Duke coach David Cutcliffe chats with players as they stretch during an NCAA college football practice in Durham, North Carolina. A growing number of college coaches, including Cutcliffe, are watching the social media behavior of student athletes.

STATE COLLEGE, Pa.—College football coaches are beginning to pay attention to what high school players say on Twitter.

On the social media site, people can post short messages. Everyone online can read what they say. Sometimes people say things that are inappropriate. They might write something offensive or use bad language.

Some players are being punished for what they say on Twitter. Some even miss out on scholarship offers. Coaches will drop these players for bad online behavior.

At St. Paul's Episcopal School in Alabama, football players have a new tradition before their football season starts. They get the social media talk.

It's about more than being polite. St. Paul's coach, Steve Mask, warns players about what not to do. He tells them not to write about injuries. Players who get hurt might not be as good after they heal. Colleges looking for athletes want to make sure their players can win.

Think Before Posting

Promising to play for a college on Twitter is also a bad idea. High school athletes sometimes have big decisions to make. Sometimes many colleges want them to play at their school.

Coach Mask said promising to play for more than one school can come across badly. Colleges might think they are dishonest.

Mask takes how his players act online very seriously. He even has an assistant keep an eye on their social media accounts. Colleges are using these accounts more and more. They use them to decide whether they want a player to join their team. One wrong comment can cost a student a scholarship offer. They might not be able to afford college without a scholarship.

Not long ago, a student lost a scholarship to Penn State University. Herb Hand is one of the coaches. He went on Twitter to show how upset he was about the high school player. He said he dropped the player for how he behaved online.

College teams want “guys with strong character,” he said.

Hand said he can usually tell if a post should worry them.

He said that posting bad things about women or writing messages about drug use is a problem. Online bullying is bad, too.

Grades, Test Scores And Online Manners

David Cutcliffe coaches the football team at Duke University. He said he decided not to take on a high school player this year. The player had bad online behavior.

“It’s just insane what some of them think is OK,” he said.

College sports rules have made it tougher for coaches to contact high school players in recent years. Coaches cannot text players. There are fewer chances to meet face to face. Social media help coaches get more information during recruiting.

Bret Bielema coaches football at Arkansas. Social media are now a part of what he looks at with high school players. He ranks it up there with grades and test scores.

Bielema said he was interested in one player. Then he saw that the player had a nasty Twitter name. “So we backed out altogether.”

Hand said he tries to educate high school coaches. He also tells players how to avoid social media mistakes.

Clean It Up

Bruce Rollinson has been coaching at a top high school in California for 26 years. He started giving the social media talk to players three years ago.

You shouldn't bring up race, religion and physical conditions, Rollinson said.

Chris Lammons plays for the University of South Carolina. The freshman said he learned to clean up his online behavior in high school. It was part of becoming a man, Lammons said.

Quiz

1. Under new college sports rules, which of the following is now NOT allowed?
 - (a) abusing other players online
 - (b) posting comments on Twitter
 - (c) playing for more than one college
 - (d) coaches sending phone messages to players
2. Who is Chris Lammons?
 - (a) a football player who got in trouble for posting on Twitter
 - (b) a college coach who is frustrated with his players' Twitter posts
 - (c) a football player who learned what not to post on social media
 - (d) a high school coach who trains his players on what not to say on social media
3. What is the main idea of the article?
 - (a) Colleges have set up tougher sports rules.
 - (b) Colleges now monitor online activities of players.
 - (c) Players have become more aware of social media.
 - (d) Players have become careful about their online activities.
4. Select the paragraph from the first section of the article that describes what actions are taken against players for bad behavior on social media.

Answer Key

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