MIT athletic recruitment limited

By Robert E. Malchman

MIT does not offer athletic scholarships. As an NCAA Division III school, it has severe limitations imposed on recruitment procedures.

"We can't contact them," said Fran O'Brien, head coach of the men's basketball and baseball teams. "We have to wait for them to contact us.

"We don't have recruited athletes," echoed Director of Admissions Peter H. Richardson '48. "For one thing, there's no budget for it. Some [Division I] schools have athletic department budgets as large as their admissions departments."

"It's all student initiated," said O'Brien. "There's a card included in the application which asks the student to identify which sports he's interested in."

O'Brien outlined four basic steps necessary before an athlete runs out onto a field in an MIT uniform:

1) Getting the person to apply. "Our biggest task is to let people know we have a good program," said Richardson. "Our policy is one of information because generally people just don't know about MIT."

The policy is affected through the booklet MIT Today sent to prospective applicants, and the athletic card in the application. Once the card is seen, then the coaches can begin to contact the applicant. The contact usually takes the form of letters to the student and his high school coach.

2) The second step is admission. "When the athletic card comes in," said Richardson, "we send it off to the coach of that sport and ask, 'So tell us, who's good?'"

"We do try to communicate with the admissions office," said O'Brien. "It looks for more than just a good athlete. MIT is sensitive to well-roundedness. We want people who will be leaders, outstanding among the ones already here."

The commitment and dedication itself is important, agreed Richardson. "It's important into the picture of the individual. MIT will nut, however, admit anyone who is not completely qualified academically, a point which O'Brien stresses in his contacts with applicants.

3) Once accepted, getting the student to attend. Gregory Abwold is a senior and a basketball and track star from Farmington Hills, Michigan. He was offered a place in the class of '86. "Coach O'Brien's letter introduced me to the school. He said that the concentration there is on academics."

Eric Fleming '83 is the manager of the men's basketball team. His home is near Abwold's, and he visited the prospective Engineer.

"It was very informal," said Fleming. "He asked questions about basketball and classes. I talked to his coach also. He wondered how we had time to make a commitment to both sports and academics. I told him it could be done; that many people did it."

"Eric talked about Coach O'Brien's philosophy," said Abwold. "He said there were no cuts, and that while MIT is Division III and usually an underdog, that they have a good program and a good time. Abwold was impressed by MIT's program. From as much as he saw of it, he said he'd have to wait until he visited to be sure.

"We try to give the personal touch," said John Benedick, coach of the swimming and water polo teams. "We telephone and write like crazy once they are admitted. We try to give them a place to stay with a team member, arrange interviews if they're interested in a particular department. Even if they don't attend, we want them to come away thinking good things about the program." Division I schools are permitted to fly students twice to their campuses. MIT may not participate in recruitment other than room and board, which binds someone who lives across the country.

Mike Diechtry '85 plays basketball and baseball. "When I visited last year, I talked with Mr. O'Brien," he said. "He told me that sports here strives for respectability, but that you come to the Institute for academics."

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