

Using ODP as a Link To a College Education

Bob Collins, Editor, *Student Athlete Magazine*

A common question asked on all soccer fields across the country is "Are you going to try out for ODP?" Unfortunately, an equally common question is, "What is ODP?"

ODP stands for Olympic Development Program. The ODP is the United States' program for selecting and developing possible players for the Olympic and US National teams.

You say, "Olympics ... National teams ... whoa, I'm good, but not that good." Did you know that 100,000 players of all skill levels participate every year?

Why should you do it? ODP is one of the easiest ways to be noticed by a college soccer coach. Participation in ODP adds the most weight to your soccer resume when applying for a scholarship.

There are three levels in ODP: state, regional and national. The higher you go, the better your chances for playing college soccer.

At the state level, every spring you try out to be considered one of the top 18-20 in your age group. States like Ohio, Texas and California have North and South state teams. So each year, there are 55 "states" selecting their best players by age group -- from 14 to 19 years old. Tryouts, usually lasting two days, precede the first and second cuts and produce the state team.

Let's say you just made the Under-16 Ohio South State team. Your next step would be to go to the regional camp, a five-day session where your state team will train with and compete against the teams from the other 14 states in your region. The U.S. is made up of four ODP regions -- East (I), North (II), South (III) and West (IV).

At the conclusion of the regional camp, a regional team of some 18 players and a pool of around six alternates are selected. Regional teams attend a national camp in early summer, usually in the Midwest. Interregional games, over Thanksgiving vacation, are held in sunny places like Boca Raton, FL., and Cocoa Beach, FL.

Your first impression at regional camp is that there are so many very good players there. At this camp, you will be trained by regional coaches who are usually college coaches. You will train with your state team and play the other

state teams in your region. Now, from this group of some 14 state teams, the staff will pick the regional team and the regional pool. These are the top 20 or so players in your age group from your part of the country. For those 20 players, it's on to the national level.

At national camp, the coaching staff consists of the national and regional staff coaches. The four regions meet to train and be seen by the national coaching staff. Obviously, the place is packed with college coaches, but they can only watch and are not involved in any way because of NCAA rules.

During games between the four regions, the national coaching staff produces a Top 30 listing of the best players from the four regions. That is the national pool. And from this group comes our national team. If you make the National Team Pool, you are in a group of players that could represent our country in international tournaments.

Since, in our example, you are at the U-16 level, your progress will be carefully noticed to see how you improve. Someday, you could help our country in the Olympics or the World Cup.

Obviously, being named to any of these teams is an honor, and it certainly does not go unnoticed by college coaches. If you make the state team, college coaches believe you are one of the top 20 players in your state. That looks pretty good on your resume. If a coach can bring in 1-2 regional players a year, he is a very happy coach. College coaches today generally agree that ODP regional team players are virtually guaranteed a scholarship at a Division I institution.

Bob Collins is the editor of *Student Athlete Magazine*, the only publication written by college coaches, specifically to help players get to college and on the team ... many with full scholarships. For information you can contact him at: 1-800-506-7257 or e-mail theinstep@aol.com www.Student-Athlete.Net