



High School Baseball Q & A about College Baseball Showcases

WBP™ - Worldwide Baseball Prospects, wanted to get a perspective on high school baseball showcases and college baseball camps from someone who has been running these events for the past sixteen consecutive years. We went to Mr. Doug Henson, co-founder of the TOP 96 Inc., who runs college coaches baseball clinics for high school players, to ask him his thoughts on the high school baseball showcase and camp market to educate players and parents.

WBP: Why did you get into this field working and running high school/college baseball events?

TOP 96 DH: Back in the early to mid 90's my oldest son was looking for a college baseball program. At that time he thought he wanted to play down south, so during the summer after his sophomore season I took him to a number of showcases and college camps in Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. After that summer he decided he didn't want to play "down" south. There were no "showcases" for him to attend in New England so I approached his AAU coach with the idea to run an event in the Boston area for other players like my son who wanted to stay in the northeast.

WBP: What is the difference between a baseball showcase, a baseball camp/clinic and a baseball combine for high school baseball players?

TOP 96 DH: A "baseball combine" is another term for a pro tryout camp run by a local pro scout. Part of a pro scout's job is to run one or more of these events each year. They are open tryouts and players up to 25 can attend. Most scouts also send out invi-



tations to high school coaches and players. The pro scout's job is to see as many players as possible and these "combines" are a good way for him to eliminate players from his "follow list." Since few if any college coaches usually attend these events, they are not a very good way for a high school player to get college exposure.

A "showcase" typically includes a workout session like those run at a "combine" and at least one game and are designed for players who want exposure to college coaches.

A "college coaches baseball clinic" like the DeMarini TOP 96 (formerly the TPX TOP 96), combines the best features of a "showcase" and a camp run by a college. Players work out in front of

college coaches and get feedback from them on what they need to do to take their game to the next level. Players also take instruction sessions from college coaches who run them just like they do their own practices. During our games coaches are in the dugout, on the field and in the bullpen coaching and instructing.

WBP: Doug, we have seen a lot of baseball recruiting showcases increase over the last fifteen years, why do you think this is so?

TOP 96 DH: Over the years, college baseball programs have faced decreases in their budgets, cut backs on the number of coaches and limits on the number of coaches that can be on the road recruiting. Back in the day you'd see college coaches attend high school or legion games. Today only big time schools recruit their top players that way. Attending showcases, tournaments or clinics has become a good way for a college coach to see a large number of players at one time.

WBP: Can all types of players attend college baseball showcases and camps? Are there different levels of showcases and events that players attend?

TOP 96 DH: Some showcases restrict entrance to what they consider to be the better players but usually all that means is that you have to be able to pay. One of the better showcases is the Area Code Games where pro teams run tryouts to select the best players from their region to spend the first week in August playing in Southern California.

At DeMarini TOP 96 College Coaches Clinics all players are welcome to attend on a first come first served basis. Our instructors come from a variety of schools, NCAA DI, DII and DIII as well as NAIA and JC/CC and we usually get a cross section of players with different abilities.

WBP: Do College Coaches always attend showcases, camps and tournaments? Are there rules in place for when and where they can attend?

TOP 96 DH: Most college baseball programs send their coaches to showcases/tournaments and camps. The biggest problem in this business are organizers of an event who advertise the names of colleges who will be attending and promise they will attend without really having the commitment from the school that they will be there. There are also "dead periods" where coaches can't recruit so any showcase or tournament run during a "dead period" will not have any colleges attending.

Companies like the DeMarini TOP 96 which run camps and clinics have much greater success in guaranteeing college coaches will attend because they are hired as evaluators and instructors. In addition, clinics can be run during "dead periods" because NCAA rules allow a coach to work a clinic as long as the clinic organizers (like the DeMarini TOP 96) comply with NCAA guidelines.

WBP: A verified coaches list with contact information is so important for players who are targeting specific schools. Why doesn't every showcase and college recruiting camp offer this?

TOP 96 DH: Events that do not publish the name and contact information for the coaches that will be in attendance do not have a firm commitment from that school that they will be in attendance. Usually what happens is the showcase organizer sends an email to a college coach who responds "we'll try to be there," which then gets them on the attendance list.

At the DeMarini TOP 96, we list the name of the specific coach that will be attending along with his phone number and a link to his email. Sometimes, at the last minute, the school will change the coach who



is attending but rarely do they cancel entirely.

WBP: What do you suggest high school players should do before they attend a showcase or camp as far as communication with college coaches?

TOP 96 DH: Based on my personal experience with my two sons, I tell parents/players that before they register/pay for an event that they should contact the school/coach to let them know they will be participating, that they are interested in the going to that school and confirm that a coach will be in attendance. I also believe it is important for the player to have a reason for attending that college other than baseball and to tell the coach what that is..... 'I want to be an engineer and xxxxx University has a great engineering program.'

WBP: When college coaches and scouts are at an event, are they allowed to interact with prospective High School players?

TOP 96 DH: The NCAA has a number of rules regarding contact with players. The most important is that a college can't initiate contact with a player until July 1st of his junior year in high school. Therefore when you call a college coach and they don't answer the phone, please leave your graduation date on the voice mail or they will likely not call you back. If you are an underclassman they can't call you back even to let you know they will be attending an event so you'll have to keep calling until you get an answer.

While attending a showcase or tournament, college coaches can't talk with players until the event is over and then only if they are not an underclassman. DeMarini TOP 96 clinics comply with NCAA regulations allowing us to hire college coaches to work our events. This allows the coaches to be on the field and to interact with the players during the clinic.

WBP: What are some of the skills assessments that players can prepare for like the 60-yard dash? Do all showcases and recruiting events offer the same skills assessments?

TOP 96 DH: One of the most important non-baseball skills that our coaches try to teach players is attitude. The best players show hustle 100% of the time, show respect to the coaches and demonstrate the ability to learn. The ability to learn new things which will improve your game is probably the most important thing a player can take away from our clinics. Our coaches provide an evaluation of each player's current skill set and teach players the skills needed to get to the next level but if the player doesn't demonstrate "coachability" then his progress will be limited.



WBP: Why is it important to have a written 1-on-1 evaluation with a college coach?

TOP 96 DH: At a lot of showcases or tournaments players receive evaluations telling them whether they are a DI or DII players, etc. These ratings are usually prepared by former pro or college players, not a current college coach. Some of these events do a good job but too many provide players with a self serving evaluation so they can advertise on their website that they had xx number of DI players or pro-prospects.

We feel that these types of evaluations, although they make players and parents feel good, do not really help a player improve his game or help him get to the next level. At the DeMarini TOP 96, each player will receive a detailed written evaluation from a current college coach. This evaluation is an unbiased and realistic appraisal of the players' current skills along with a series of tips/suggestions on things the player can do to improve. Since NCAA regulations do not allow us to publish ratings or evaluations on our website, we have no incentive

to provide anything other than an honest evaluation.

WBP: Do all showcases and tournaments play games one at a time. What is the benefit to this?

TOP 96 DH: Many showcases and tournaments offer players the opportunity to play multiple games and do so by utilizing more than one field and playing more than one game at a time, forcing the coaches to make a decision which game they will watch. Parents and players should recognize that virtually no player

walks away from a showcase or tournament or clinic with a scholarship offer. The recruiting process is longer than any one event.

At DeMarini TOP 96 clinics we use only one field and play only one game at a time. This limits the maximum number of players we can accept but it allows us to put college coaches in the dugout, in the bullpen and on the field and to continue the coaching and instruction process during the games.

For more information about college baseball camps, showcases and clinics for prospective high school baseball players please visit us @ www.WorldwideBaseballProspects.com.