

## **A Player's Guide to Social Media**

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By Mark Burns - Special to USAHockey.com

In today's world, teenagers constantly hear cautionary tales of social media mishaps and the responsibility that comes with being on various social platforms. Whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat, social media can play a valuable role in elevating a player's online presence, and it also provides the benefit of connecting athletes to other players, teams and coaches. But it can also harm their image and opportunities for future success if mishandled.

Below are a few tips on embracing the positives of social media from Nate Ewell, deputy executive director of College Hockey Inc., and Kevin DeShazo, social media consultant, educator and founder of Oklahoma-based Fieldhouse Media.

### **1) Authentically Selling Yourself**

For teenage players, especially those being recruited by junior and college teams, it's imperative to maintain a clean social media presence. While being cautious, players can still provide greater insight into their personality, character and work ethic through social media.

Posting photos or text about their hockey workouts, team-related news or what they're currently focusing on gives coaches and scouts insight into their priorities.

"You want to highlight the positive elements of your character while being recruited, things like being a coachable player," said Ewell, who coordinates College Hockey, Inc.'s digital media, media relations and communications efforts. "You can reflect those same values in social media. To me, as much as you want to avoid the negative perceptions, you can also give yourself a positive reflection on there as well."

### **2) Connecting with Coaches**

According to Ewell, if you're past the contact date of January 1 of your sophomore year of high school, NCAA rules allow a college coach and a prospective student-athlete to send each other direct messages on social media.

That additional line of communication can be beneficial as recruits plan the next stages of their hockey career.

"Some individuals are more comfortable on social media than on the phone in a lot of cases," Ewell said. "It doesn't replace the phone call or the chance to meet face-to-face, but it can certainly complement that."

### **3) Research**

Similarly to communicating with coaches, players can also follow different schools' social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram in order learn more about a program.

As Ewell explained, public relations or media staffers – someone who can offer a glimpse into the daily happenings of the hockey program – typically run social channels. Additionally, following current players can provide a unique perspective into the team environment. By adding various coaches to your list of followed accounts, you can get a snapshot of their coaching style and team expectations, too.

“You get a sense of the program from a different perspective versus watching the team’s games,” Ewell added. “You get more of an authentic look at what things are like and what kinds of coaches they have.”

### **4) The Golden Rule**

Arguably the most important rule of social media is do not post something that you wouldn't want your parents to see – that also applies to recruiting.

“If you wouldn't want your parents to see a post, you certainly wouldn't want a prospective coach to see it,” Ewell continued. “Parents can keep an eye on what's out there, and when it's appropriate, let kids know that what they're posting isn't appropriate.”

DeShazo added that kids have to remember that the internet is much bigger than some people think, with all posts being subjected to review as players navigate the recruiting trail.

“If players are talented, that increases the amount of exposure that people want from them and the people trying to get access,” DeShazo said. “The words that you use, the language that you use, that needs to reflect that your audience is bigger than just your friends.”

It's also important to remember that social media posts can live forever. Even if an athlete deletes a post, it was visible at a moment in time, and in that moment, anyone could have taken a screen capture. Unsavory as it is, these seemingly deleted posts can resurface to haunt, taunt or otherwise damage the athlete's image, and the repercussions of questionable posts can be severe.

## **5) Beware of Your Surroundings**

And it's not just what *you* post on social media. What your friends, teammates, classmates, etc., post can have serious consequences. Remember that your actions and words in today's age are always subject to being captured and broadcasted instantly via social media, whether it's through your accounts or a bystander's.

Even if *you* wouldn't post a photo, video or message, that doesn't mean someone else won't. Always be conscientious of your social surroundings.