

Good Traits and Red Flags: What Every Collegiate Recruit Needs to Know

Triangle director Mike Schall sent a Facebook request to his college coaching friends yesterday, asking, "What one trait do you most want your incoming freshmen to possess upon arrival in August (or earlier)?" With his permission, we asked this of every college program in our database and added a second question: "What bad habit or trait sends up the biggest red flag for success at the collegiate level?" We received a robust response. The answers appear below. You will see a lot of similar responses from the 60 (!) programs that weighed in since we proposed the questions about 20 hours ago.

Akron

GOOD TRAIT: I think the having the ability to manage individual emotions associated with being in a high-stress environment and situations is the most important trait. The players are in a new environment with new teammates and coaches and being asked to execute at their highest ability. If they cannot manage their emotions, they create their own mental blocks that will inhibit their individual development and their role in team cohesion.

RED FLAG: The biggest red flag are demonstrations that the players are not interested, capable or willing to contributing towards something bigger than themselves. Team sports require members to contribute to the greater good while being able to push oneself for the greater good.

American University

GOOD TRAIT: Ability to problem solve/think on their feet.

RED FLAG: Lack of court awareness/Get caught watching.

Angelo State

GOOD TRAIT: My answer is probably a little different as a D-II coach than it might be coming from a major D-I University. I look for high volleyball IQ and experience. Athleticism is certainly important, but because many of the D-II 's out there do not have the resources to develop a high flying "project" type player, I tend to lean on the kid that is just a flat out "baller." The kid that makes everyone else better. They might be a little smaller, or touch a little lower, but they can flat out play the game. We became a strong D-II program when we started recruiting better volleyball players, versus better athletes. Those kids tend to teach behind the scenes just as much as an assistant coach would.

RED FLAG: A major red flag for me is how a kid treats their parents and the people around them between matches. If they demand that mom gets her water, or speak disrespectfully to their folks, I usually head to another court. Something I learned as an assistant at Florida Southern under head coach Jill Stephens is that when a ball rolls off the court and you pick it up to hand back to that player you've been watching for an hour, do they say "Thank you" or do they just take the ball and head back as if it was your duty and privilege to hand them the ball back. There have been many times where I have shagged a ball from a court and silently in my head have prayed that the kid approaching me says thank you. It tells you a lot about what kind of person that kid is, where they come from, how they were raised and what you can expect if they come to your program. I think it's a good indicator because it usually happens in the heat of the moment during a match when a player isn't likely to be thinking about their manners. Any kid would say thank you if they were on a visit and were on their "best behavior" trying to impress you. It tells you who they are when nobody's looking.

Arkansas

GOOD TRAIT: The most important trait for our freshman is to have is great work ethic. If they are willing to consistently work they usually end up contributing immediately in some capacity.

RED FLAG: An athlete who is a poor teammate is the biggest red flag for us. They usually are so consumed with themselves and often struggle incorporating themselves to the team.

Arkansas Tech

GOOD TRAIT: Independence (not needing parental oversight, adjusting to college, adapting to new environment)

RED FLAG: Opposite of that (lack of maturity, not able to make a decision on their own, unable to let go of "home")

Baylor

GOOD TRAIT: Fearless competitive nature.

RED FLAG: Any sign of a lack of commitment to teammates Or lack of arm strength.

Butler

GOOD TRAIT: The one trait I would most like our incoming freshman to have is an eagerness and willingness to learn. A lot of them come in thinking they already know everything and that the way their club coach does it is the best/only way to train. These players take much longer to integrate into your system and can be un-coachable at times.

RED FLAG: The worst trait is a blatant lack of work ethic (Lazy). Rarely does it get them to peak performance and they become resource draining on our staff. Having to constantly push them to work at a level to get better and improve is daunting when they have never been pushed outside of their comfort zone and don't have the internal drive to push themselves. They become problems with their teammates who don't respect them and they often take more than they produce.

Central Florida

GOOD TRAIT: Ironically the greatest quality we try to measure in our recruits has nothing to do with a tape measure or stop watch. We spend a great deal of time trying to evaluate 'Character' throughout the recruiting process. Skills and athleticism can be developed but qualities like work ethic, determination, and perseverance aren't easily altered. I have passed on athletes who were regarded as top prospects in the nation because I had serious questions about their character.

RED FLAG: A major red flag for me is someone who has both slow feet AND inefficient movement. Someone with slow feet can still be successful if they are incredibly efficient, but inefficient movement and slow feet together are enough to make me pass on a recruit quickly.

Clarion University

GOOD TRAIT: Fearlessness

RED FLAG: Parents who are more involved in the recruiting process than the athlete.

Colorado State

GOOD TRAIT: Innate competitiveness. This does not simply mean that they “hate to lose.” It means they enjoy competing in tough situations and they get better in difficult situations. This is very rare but it is the trait that I most want them to have.

RED FLAG: Slow arm speed in attackers or lack of hip flexibility in non-attackers

Creighton

GOOD TRAIT: Excitement to get better and willingness to take feedback in a productive way

RED FLAG: Not being able to take feedback

Fresno Pacific

GOOD TRAIT: A commitment to team-building relationships. I say this because these kind of people will most likely also have a great work ethic and already have solid physical tools and skills to play the game at a pretty high level.

RED FLAG: Lack of conditioning and excuses as training camp approaches.

Fresno State

GOOD TRAIT: A strong freshman would possess confidence in the self-satisfaction that she's done everything she knew how to prepare herself for a higher-level of play. She'd possess humility, understanding that though she may have been the best on her club team or her peers or family told her she was the best, she may not be the best any more. That's a positive thing! She will become better if she understands this and can use our feedback to become a far better student and player.

RED FLAG: The trait that is a big red flag for us is someone who lacks accountability. If she can't take a good look at how her actions or lack of actions can affect her relationships, education, playing career or life in general, she's going to have a bumpy transition into college and high-level competition.

Gannon University

GOOD TRAIT: I would like our incoming freshman ready to work like they've never worked before. I want them to be fearless in their training. If they make a mistake we will correct it, but they have to be ready to go all out, and fail a little bit. If they aren't willing to risk failure, then their effort is for naught, and they won't grow as players or people.

RED FLAG: Complacency is one of those traits that have always gotten under my skin as a coach. There are only six spots on the court seven if you count the libero. Not everybody is going to start but everyone has a role to play. You should be willing to compete for a starting spot or a larger role. If you have earned a starting spot then you better work hard to keep it. Confidence in your spot is one thing, but that shouldn't become arrogant. Everybody is going to have a different learning curve but it should trend upward every season.

Georgia

GOOD TRAIT: The willingness to learn, listen, and work hard every day.

RED FLAG: The player who has an excuse for everything. They also tend to be consistent complainers.

Hawaii Pacific

GOOD TRAIT: Confidence that they are truly competing for a spot the minute they step foot on the court. Don't want players that are just happy to be there.

RED FLAG: Unwilling to try new things that will make them better at the higher level.

Howard University

GOOD TRAIT: Enthusiasm for the game

RED FLAG: Bad attitude and/or body language

Indiana

GOOD TRAIT: Adaptable – They have never experienced anything of this caliber before. If they are adaptable, they are willing to overcome any obstacles or changes and be successful doing it.

RED FLAG: Stubbornness/Being Conditional – Players need to have things a certain way for them to feel successful, and as soon as there is adversity or they start feeling uncomfortable they become unsuccessful. Players should be fearless and embrace the challenge.

Iowa State

GOOD TRAIT: The ability to be comfortable being uncomfortable. They will have to be comfortable not being the best on the team. They will have to be comfortable fighting for playing time. They will have to be comfortable learning new and often different techniques and tactics. The more comfortable they can be in these challenging and uncomfortable settings the better!

RED FLAG: The inability to look bad in front of peers and or coaches, or the inability to accept failure as a learning tool. These are classic traits of a fixed mindset and they can be a career killer!

Irvine Valley College

GOOD TRAIT: Work ethic and putting the team first.

RED FLAG: Selfishness and laziness are #1 and #2 red flags for me.

Kean University

GOOD TRAIT: The players that I most enjoy coaching are those who play the game because they want to be a part of something that is greater than themselves.

RED FLAG: On the flip side of that, there are a lot of players out there who want something great to be all about them, often to assuage their own insecurities.

I had a freshman who had some arm issues so early in the season so we weren't letting her serve until we got a better idea of how big a part of the offense she was going to be. She was going up against our All-Conference middle in every drill and getting frustrated. She had always been told how great her serving was and she wanted to show the team that she belonged. She came to us and said "I'd rather serve than do anything else" and we just had to explain that on a great team everyone has to sacrifice something. We have other players who can impact the game from the serving line, but we didn't have anyone who could impact the game at the net like she could and that is what the team needed from her. Fortunately, her heart was genuinely in the right place, she trusted us, and she played her roll very well. By mid-season it

was clear her arm would be ok, so we started to let her serve some and not only were her first four serves all aces, she ended up among the conference leaders in aces per set despite not serving for half the season. By putting the team first and letting things play out, she played in 39 matches, we went 28-11, and she proved herself both at the net and from the service line.

In another situation, different team I asked the players to write down five goals for the season. One player, the #1 goal listed was to start every match, goal #2 was to make all-conference, and #3 was for the team to win the conference championship. Basically saying that playing time was more important than the team's success. I just figured we had some teaching to do, but despite playing about half the time and winning that conference championship, she decided to transfer, and looking back that one piece of paper said it all.

Bottom line, in volleyball (and probably in life too) you need to be there for your team, before the team will be there for you.

Kutztown

GOOD TRAIT: The ability to accept and find value in the role they are given, even if it's not the role they want. I tell my players to never stop striving for the role they want and today's role may not necessarily be tomorrow's. But, they need to give their best TODAY wherever they are and they need to understand that everyone adds value to the team as long as they work hard, are positive and do everything they can to help the team succeed.

RED FLAG: To quote my retirement guy..."past performance does not guarantee future success." Players who come to campus thinking they are a finished product because they had great success in high school or club and don't need to make any changes to their game almost always struggle when faced with a higher level of competition. That attitude either temporarily hinders progress or, if unchanged, can result in a player with potential never performing at the level she could.

Loyola University Chicago

GOOD TRAIT: Commitment to growth is the one trait that I hope that all of our athletes possess. The athletes that I have seen be successful at the collegiate level show an incredible amount of passion for the game but more importantly possess a tremendous desire for improvement, which drives their ability to do hard work every day. That also requires that they are committed and open to learning new techniques and growing as a player and leader. Those traits, coupled with passion, athleticism, talent, and a competitive spirit for the game, enable players to graduate as both a great player and person.

RED FLAG: Lack of work ethic. All coaches evaluate potential student athletes based upon athleticism and talent. I am a firm believer that talent is not a fixed end goal but an evolving potential. Unfortunately, some players do not possess the work ethic for their talent to be realized.

Miami University

GOOD TRAIT: Self-Initiative, which includes energetic attention to details.

RED FLAG: Low energy level and poor eye contact.

Michigan State

GOOD TRAIT: Freshman can sometimes come in waiting to see where they fit in. It is important that they come in aggressively, giving their best so that the coaching staff can then evaluate how they fit in to the plan for the current year. If they are not ready that is one thing, if they simply fail to go for it then they are eliminating their opportunities. I want to pick my starting line-up based on everybody's best.

RED FLAG: The inability to make changes is one of the biggest red flags for success. I remember watching a piece on Curtis Granderson and his hitting coach on ESPN. He maintained that Curtis was the most coachable athlete he had ever worked with. He was not just agreeable, he was capable of making immediate changes. Most of the athletes we sign have been the best in their high school or club and they have simply been able to out-physical their opponents. Change in most cases has not been necessary. Once athletes face a full team that has not one, but six players as physical they are, they need to refine their craft. Some are more capable than others and then some get so frustrated that they distract themselves from improvements.

New Mexico

GOOD TRAIT: I think freshmen need to have the ability to work hard and learn. They are away from home for the first time and have lots of freedom, but they need to work hard to acclimate and to be successful in their new system. When they make it through that first year, which can be tough, they are usually good to go. If they struggle in their first year it can make future years more difficult.

RED FLAG: Missing things or arriving late! It is not only a bad habit, but can create all kinds of problems at the college level. Professors, administrators and coaches expect these young students to be timely and get things done. Coaches should look more at transcripts and make sure the recruits have good attendance at the high school level.

North Carolina

GOOD TRAIT: Ability to ADAPT to new situations. Competitive spirit and a quiet confidence.

RED FLAG: Inability to make changes quickly, EXCUSES as to why they cannot do something, as opposed to trying things. If young collegiate players are going to improve and grow they must understand that change is inevitable. The sooner they accept this, the quicker they improve and can make an impact in their program and on their team.

Ohio University

GOOD TRAIT: Communication, Commitment, and Competitiveness. Communication - Those players who possess the ability to communicate with both their coaches and teammates seem to naturally evolve into leaders and someone who everyone involved in the program can and want to trust. Commitment and Competitiveness - These two go hand in hand. Understanding the commitment you've made to the University your representing is very important. Being proud to represent and compete for your university day in and day out regardless of what your role in the program is at that very moment.

RED FLAG: In regards to bad habits or traits that send up red flags, I really just think not being good at the three things above can send up red flags. Not being a great communicator, not being committed, and not being competitive are all things that will make it hard to truly have a great collegiate volleyball experience.

Oregon

GOOD TRAIT: I want them to LOVE playing and competing.

RED FLAG: Three weeks before they get here, they ask: When do I get my swag!!!?

Pittsburgh at Greensburg

GOOD TRAIT: Competitiveness

RED FLAG: Lack of discipline

Rice

GOOD TRAIT: The ability to read well. Either defensively at the net or back row, I think this skill is not addressed enough before players get to college.

RED FLAG: The bad habit I see that causes trouble is lack of mental preparation before practice or competition. The demands at the college level are high from that standpoint and building those habits is rare at the high school age level. It would be more beneficial if more time was spent on mental preparation.

Shepherd University

GOOD TRAIT: Drive- I love when our incoming class has the drive to work hard every day, learn the new systems, and compete against their teammates. In our experience, if players have this drive they are committed to all aspects that help the team: workouts, film, taking care of academic needs.

RED FLAG: Selfishness is the biggest red flag. This can be displayed in an unwillingness to try a new skill, to not taking care of academic needs, to not taking care of themselves, to not getting or staying healthy.

South Carolina

GOOD TRAIT: I want my incoming freshman to be really attentive to directions and details so they can accelerate their learning curve.

RED FLAG: A red flag for us is when the athlete calls home to have their parents deal with their issues for them rather than being willing to have open communication with their coaches.

Southern Methodist University

GOOD TRAIT: Evident passion for the game

RED FLAG: Poor work ethic. Some of the most dynamic athletes have poor work ethic so they really never reach their potential as players. Great athletes with great work ethic (passion) become stars.

South Mountain CC

GOOD TRAIT: Competitiveness, maturity, self-reliance

RED FLAG: Lack of problem solving skills and haven't cut the cord yet

Stanford

GOOD TRAIT: I would answer "coachability" to both questions. If a player comes into college and has been ignored or not been coached a lot because she is the best player on her previous teams it is hard for her to process change or even the understanding of what she does on the court. This is a problem for her, the coach in figuring out how to get through to her and her teammates who see that this is tough for her. There are lots of college coaches that will change technique right away to fit what they want in that skill for their program and this seems to be one of the biggest challenges for the player who doesn't understand why or how she does what she does. The other issue in not being coachable is the player's ability to make changes in matches. There's lots of scouting done in college compared to most high school and club programs so the player's ability to make changes based on what the other team does or is doing throughout the match becomes extremely important. A big part of being coachable is having an open mind and not thinking you know everything or the way your high school or club coach did things is the only way to do them.

Texas A&M Corpus Christi

GOOD TRAIT: Above everything else, I want our incoming players to be coachable. Talent gets them on the roster but if they make their first impression as a coachable player intent on getting better every day, it puts them in good shape with their new teammates and gives them the best chance of contributing right away.

RED FLAG: My biggest red flag while recruiting a prospect is when I see them treat their parents poorly during their visit. I really believe kids who don't show respect to their family will treat their coaches and teammates the same way, and it's a major turn off. I've gotten to where I will not offer a player until I spend time with them and their parents together and if I get a bad vibe, we're probably going to pass on her.

University of Rochester

GOOD TRAIT: Taking responsibility for their actions/competitiveness.

RED FLAG: Making excuses. Too much parental involvement.

University of Texas at Dallas

GOOD TRAIT: We like our student-athletes to be characters with character! We look for the ability to speak to our staff with eye contact and confidence, yet able to joke around and be sarcastic with us. We want to have fun with our players.

RED FLAG: It's always interesting to us when players have quit something in the past, or speak poorly about previous coaches to our staff. Chances are if these things happened prior to coming to our college, they will happen once they arrive.

Utah State

GOOD TRAIT: I want the new kids to understand that that process of improving is continual. When they get on campus, it is just the beginning of the process, which is to get better each time we step on the court. I want them to develop the mindset of giving their best effort each day and the improvement will happen.

RED FLAG: I think the worst thing that can happen is that kids lose their passion for improvement. Sometimes that happens before they arrive and sometimes it happens after they get to campus. Another thing we look for as a staff is how they treat other people, how do they treat their parents, other players, support people. If they treat them poorly how are they going to treat my trainer and my assistants?

Villanova

GOOD TRAIT: Coachability-we will likely do things differently; either in techniques or systems than their club teams and high school teams. So, can our freshman come in to our program and adjust? Can our freshman make changes to their game? Confidence/humility- Can a freshman walk into a college program with both a respect for those that have been through what they have not; and have a confidence in their game that allows them to compete on the floor.

Washington State

GOOD TRAIT: The ability to listen. We want them to be a piece of clay. Listening opens the door to teach, which opens the door to learn, which opens the door to make adjustments, which opens the door to getting better, resulting in success.

RED FLAG: Lack of passion, no doubt about it. We need to see that someone cares. We want players whose heart beats for whatever they are doing. Specifically, if it's joining our family, they need to love what we as coaches stand for, love being around their teammates, love the school and community, and succeeding at the highest collegiate level there is – the Pac-12. For us, there's nothing short of 100 percent in this area. If someone isn't passionate as to where they are and who they are surrounded by, it will show in how they handle themselves and interact with others every day. We believe everyone has a gift and a talent that can help the world we live in. If it's not us or it's not volleyball, that's OK. Go find what makes you be on fire every day you wake up.

Westminster College

GOOD TRAIT: Great attitude, competitive, disciplined drive and quality teammate.

RED FLAG: Entitled (Lazy, Selfish)

Wingate

GOOD TRAIT: Perceptiveness. The ability to accurately read and respond to situations on and off the court, and respond accordingly. An empathetic person with a high volleyball IQ.

RED FLAG: Selfishness. Putting ones owns needs and desires ahead of the needs and desires of teammates and the team.

Wisconsin-Oshkosh

GOOD TRAIT: A strong work ethic and the willingness to compete day to day for playing time. Come into preseason knowing that it will be hard, but also know that we are looking to field the strongest starting seven.

RED FLAG: Non-competitiveness. With so many women playing volleyball right now sometimes it is hard to find those that don't like to lose. I'm not saying that you should be a bad sport, but there is a reason why volleyball has a winner and a loser. Almost every time a coach talks about an elite athlete, or a great captain, their competitive nature usually is mentioned in some way.

Xavier

GOOD TRAIT: The biggest trait we prize is the ability to deal with adversity. College brings about many changes. Aside from moving away from home for the first time, incoming freshman can feel like they are drinking out of a fire hose with all that they must learn. By definition, the move to college involves change - and change is never easy. Those that can weather the storm and rise above are those that will make it at the next level

