

# College Golf Landscape

By Rick Dowling

We might be a bit biased, but here at Junior Golf Hub, we think the opportunity to play golf in college is tremendously exciting! If you have your heart set on making it to the next level, the logical question becomes: What is the landscape of college golf programs? What types of programs are appropriate for me and my abilities? Where do I fit in? All great questions! Don't worry, your friends at Junior Golf Hub have got you covered. In this article, we'll cover the basics of college golf as a starting point for you to find a program that's right for you.

Let's start with some numbers. As of the '18 – '19 season there are over 2,200 college golf programs including 1,300+ men's golf programs and 900+ women's programs. To put it mildly, that's a lot of programs! There are truly golf programs of every shape, size, form, and scoring average from top NCAA D-I programs that are seemingly factories for PGA Tour players, all the way down to local junior college programs where the teams may not vie for an NCAA Championship but are having just as much fun.

Here is a more detailed breakdown of the programs in our database and some additional color on each division:

Program Type	NCAA D-I	NCAA D-II	NCAA D-III	NAIA	NJCAA
Men	303	229	300	178	170
Women	259	194	216	162	77

## Overview of Associations and Divisions

- **NCAA D-I:** Simply put, NCAA D-I programs are the pinnacle of competitive collegiate golf. The competition in D-I is fierce. According to scholarshipstats.com, the chances of a high school golfer playing D-I golf are a little more than 2%<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, even within D-I programs, there can be a wide variance in program types ranging all the way from the 'bellwether' programs that perennially vie for a national championship down to programs that are less competitive within a given division. Here at the Junior Golf Hub, we've made it easy to check in on a program's competitiveness by including the college's Division Ranking in our college page for the last completed calendar year. Check it out! Lastly, keep in mind that D-I programs have in general the most time commitment of all the divisions.
- **NCAA D-II:** NCAA D-II is a very competitive division. NCAA D-II is often thought of as a middle ground between D-I and D-III programs. The recruiting timeline at

D-II programs can begin a bit earlier than D-I. D-II programs also allow tryouts which are not allowed for other divisions.

- **NCAA D-III:** NCAA D-III programs are in general less competitive from a golf perspective than D-I or D-II. The time commitment is often less in D-III as students and coaches strive for a balanced mix of golf and academics. NCAA D-III houses many fine academic institutions with stringent admissions requirements, although this does vary considerably according to the institution. NCAA D-III programs do not offer athletic scholarships in comparison to D-I and D-II programs which do. Lastly, recruiting rules and regulations for D-III are less stringent than other NCAA divisions.
- **NAIA** (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics): The NAIA is a competitive division but separate from the NCAA with differing (and often far less strict!) recruiting and eligibility guidelines from the NCAA. Keep in mind the number of NAIA programs is more limited with about 300 programs overall versus close to 1,500 for the NCAA.
- **NJCAA** (National Junior College Athletic Association): Junior College golf programs are a good opportunity for those players who may not have the grades to attend a four-year institution and want an affordable education while also playing a sport competitively. Some players opt for a few years of junior college and then transfer into a bigger program over time, with Bubba Watson being a notable example.

### Scoring Breakdown

Okay, now onto the good stuff. What are the players shooting at each level? Again, the Hub's got you covered! Here are some scoring statistics for the best player on the team and the fifth player (the last starter) for the '17 – '18 season:

### **Men's Scoring Averages<sup>2</sup>**

'17 -'18 Ranking	NCAA D-I		NCAA D-II		NCAA D-III		NAIA <sup>3</sup>	
	<i>Low Player</i>	<i>5th Player</i>	<i>Low Player</i>	<i>5th Player</i>	<i>Low Player</i>	<i>5th Player</i>	<i>Low Player</i>	<i>5th Player</i>
1 – 50	70.9	73.3	72.5	72.2	75.3	73.9	73.4	77.3
51 – 100	71.8	74.4	73.7	76.7	75.5	79.6	75.6	80.1
100 – 200	72.8	75.7	75.5	79.8	77.4	82.9	74.6	82.2

## Women's Scoring Averages<sup>2</sup>

'17 -'18 Ranking	NCAA D-I		NCAA D-II		NCAA D-III		NAIA <sup>3</sup>	
	Low Player	5th Player	Low Player	5th Player	Low Player	5th Player	Low Player	5th Player
1 – 50	72.2	75.6	75.4	79.5	79.1	85.8	78.1	84.6
51 – 100	73.8	77.3	78.3	83.7	83.6	93.2	82.9	91.6
100 – 200	74.6	78.6	82.3	95.4	89.2	110.5	88.7	107.7

Got all that? Let's make some sense of this with a few conclusions from the data:

- *Top flight programs = top flight scores:* To crack a top 50 D-I program and play on the team (5th player) you'll need a scoring average below 73.3 for men and 75.6 for women. The best player on the team is a few strokes lower at 70.9 for men and 72.2 for women. Think you've got what it takes to play at this level? Great! But be careful with simple comparisons to the scoring average on your Hub profile. *Rule of thumb is that college golf is 3-4 strokes harder than junior golf as the courses are longer, you play 36 holes on the first day and often play in more inclement fall and spring weather versus summer weather.* Take that into account with your comparisons!
- *There is a good home for all different types of players:* Just looking through the table above you can see a wide dispersion in scoring averages between divisions and within divisions. There can be a home on a college golf team for male players who struggle to break 80 and female players struggling to break 90.

Don't think playing on a college golf team is right for you but still, want to play golf in college? Not a problem! Club golf is a great option for players that may not be ready for varsity golf (or don't want the time commitment!), but would still like to stay involved with golf in college. Club golf features larger, co-ed teams, competing in two to three tournaments per semester that are typically within driving distance of the college and held on weekends. No missing class! Club golf has grown rapidly and as of September 2018, there were 341 different colleges with club golf teams. Check them out [here](#). Club golf is an opportunity to stay involved with competitive golf in college, make new friends, and have a blast at the same time. What's not to like? Want to learn more? [Click this link](#) to learn more from our friends at Nextgengolf on finding the perfect club golf opportunity for you.

## Hub Advice and Recommendations

We'll leave you with a few pieces of advice and recommendations from your friends at the Hub:

1. *Be realistic.* Here at the Hub we are strong proponents of realism and being honest with yourself in terms of skill level. If you are a male senior in high school and have difficulty breaking 80 it may not be worth your time to call the top programs in the country and look for a spot on the team. And that's OK! Take a realistic appraisal of your skill level, use the scoring information above, and make an informed decision on where you might fit in.
2. *Use the Hub to your advantage.* We designed Junior Golf Hub to make life easier for you on your road to college golf. For example, let's say using the table above you find that you may be a good candidate for a D-II program. You can then search the D-II programs in your area, follow them, and then sort them by scoring average on your My Colleges page. The Hub does that work for you and helps you identify what program might be a good fit for you.

Happy golfing and best of luck on your college golf program search.

Enjoy your Journey!

## References

1. See <http://www.scholarshipstats.com/golf.htm>
2. Data includes only programs that included scoring average information or link to information for the low player and 5th player on team website
3. A limited number of NAIA schools publish scoring statistics for their Low Player and 5th Player. Due to this, JGH has provided scoring information with the data that is publicly available. Please advise that less data points were gathered for these compared to D-I, D-II, and D-III scoring information