

Are You Chasing the Right Level?

D1, D2, D3, JUCO — Real Talk for Athletes & Parents

When you scroll through social media, it feels like everybody is “D1 or nothing.”

Every kid is “slept on.” Every trainer knows a “secret plug.” Every page is promising more offers.

But here’s the truth: if you don’t know what level you really fit at, you can waste years chasing the wrong thing, getting frustrated, and missing schools that actually want you.

This isn’t about killing your dream. It’s about getting honest so you can go where you can actually play, grow, and graduate.

1. What coaches actually look at first

Most athletes think coaches only care about highlights, followers, and hype.

But coaches are quietly checking:

- Size and measurables for your position
- Speed and explosiveness (track times, verified numbers, how you move on tape)
- Production (stats and role on your team)
- Grades and test scores
- Film habits (effort, body language, toughness)

If your measurables and film don’t line up with typical D1 players at your position yet, that doesn’t mean you’re trash. It just means you might need a different path than the Instagram highlight kids.

2. D1, D2, D3, NAIA, JUCO — what’s the real difference?

Here’s a simple way to think about it:

D1 (FBS/FCS)

- Top-end size, speed, and competition level
- Depth charts full of dudes who were “that guy” in high school
- Scholarships more common at FBS, partial at some FCS
- The schedule feels like a job

D2

- Still very good athletes
- Many D2 kids were slightly undersized, late bloomers, or didn’t have D1 grades/exposure
- Mix of scholarships and partial aid

D3 / NAIA

- No athletic scholarships at D3, but academic and other aid can make it affordable
- A lot of ballers who love the game and want to play and get a degree

JUCO

- A reset button
- You go here because grades, film, or timing weren't there yet
- You get real reps and tape to prove who you are now

None of these levels are "less than" if it's the right fit. The problem is when a D3-level kid thinks he's D1-only and ignores all the schools that could actually change his life.

3. Questions you have to ask yourself (or your coach)

Instead of just saying "I'm D1," ask:

1) What do my verified numbers look like?

- 40 time, shuttle, vertical, height and weight
- Compare them to actual college players at your position

2) What does my full game film say?

- Do I play hard every snap?
- Do I look like "the guy" or just another guy?

3) What does my coach honestly think?

Ask your position coach or head coach:

"Coach, what level do you realistically see me playing at if I keep working?"

4) Am I open to a path, or only a logo?

- If a great D2 calls, would you listen?
- If a strong JUCO wants you, are you willing to grind there first?

You don't have to kill the D1 dream. But you do need to be open to the path that actually gets you on the field.

4. Signs you might be chasing the wrong level

You might be chasing the wrong level if:

- Only one level of school is on your list (D1 only, no matter what)
- Your inbox is quiet, but you refuse to reach out to D2/D3/NAIA schools
- You've had chances at smaller schools and ignored them waiting on "something bigger"
- Your film and measurables match more with D2/D3 players, but you refuse to consider it

That doesn't mean give up. It means adjust the game plan before the clock runs out.

5. How to build a smart target list

Instead of just saying "I want to go D1," build three columns:

- Reach schools – schools that might be a stretch, but you'd love
- Realistic schools – places where your size, film, and grades match their roster
- Safety schools – places you know you can get in, contribute, and grow

Include a mix of D1, D2, D3, NAIA, and JUCO if it fits. Look for schools where:

- Your major makes sense

- You can afford it
- You actually like the environment

Smart players go where they're wanted and where they can develop, not just where the logo looks good on Instagram.

6. It's not "D1 or nothing" — it's "opportunity or ego"

You won't care about the logo if you never play, flunk out, or end up miserable.

You will care if you:

- Get developed
- Get on the field
- Leave with a degree, a network, and options after ball

That's why I say D1Expectation is a mindset, not a level.

You can carry a D1 standard at JUCO, D2, D3, NAIA, or in the real world after the game.

If you want help figuring out what level really fits you — and how to build a smart target list and email coaches the right way — check out The Playbook at d1expectation.com or message D1Expectation about a live Recruiting Playbook session.

D1Expectation — Mindset. Legacy. Expectation.