

The Columbus Dispatch

Student-athletes get boost from talent service Company signed to promote teens from Westerville North to colleges

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Student-athletes at Westerville North High School will have some help selling their talents to college recruiters this year.

Hoping to land scholarships for some of the school's 750-some athletes, the athletic department and the Westerville North Athletic Booster Club paid \$2,000 apiece to a company that markets promising athletes to universities.

"That's the goal of the boosters, to promote the students the best we can," said Bert Cousins, president of the boosters' Touchdown Club.

Columbus-based Athletic Scholarship Corp. uses tools such as online profiles and professionally produced highlight reels to pitch students to college coaches nationwide. The athletic boosters signed the year-long contract, which runs until June 2011 and will offer services to students in all sports.

Besides Athletic Scholarship, dozens of websites allow students to upload their athletic resumes, academic information and game footage to be sent to coaches.

"I literally probably have 10 of these types of companies e-mail me every day," said Joe Loth, head football coach at Otterbein University.

Loth said he has never recruited a football player because of those e-mails. But he added that Otterbein pulls almost all of its football players from within the state, and these companies send information all over the country.

"I don't want to dismiss it," he said. "We're just not using that resource to get our kids."

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Athletic Scholarship has more than 100 clients, and all have renewed their contracts after the first year, said CEO A.J. Hodel. Westerville North is the company's first central Ohio school.

Athletes from Nardon High School in Macedonia, Ohio, have gone to out-of-state colleges that might not have noticed them without the service, Athletic Director Rob Eckenrode said. This year is Nardon's third with the company, and Eckenrode plans to sign on for a fourth.

For a school the size of Westerville North, which has about 1,500 students, Athletic Scholarship will likely promote 50 to 75 athletes, Hodel said. Coaches can select their top athletes, or the athletes can come forward themselves.

The service typically costs about \$12,000 for a one-year contract, but often a corporate sponsor covers most of that cost, Hodel said. The company is working to land a sponsor for the Westerville North contract.

The athletic department's half of the \$4,000 cost came from ticket revenue, not taxes. Westerville North Athletic Director Jeff Will said he talked to officials at other schools who worked with Athletic Scholarship before putting up the money.

"Everyone I've spoken with has said that everything they said they will do has been done," he said.

For students who show promise in sports, this service supplements help from guidance counselors assigned to every student, Westerville schools spokesman Greg Viebranz said.

For students with other talents, local support helps them find scholarships and choose the right college, Viebranz said. "We have numerous booster groups that do support students in music and the arts."

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