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## PALM BEACH HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

### Social media gives high school athletes a new playing field

#### YouTube, Twitter and Facebook change recruiting methods

By Steve Dorsey, Sun Sentinel

Technology has changed the landscape of high school football more dramatically than ever before. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube now provide coaches and players with tools they never before had. It's a brave new world.

Many coaches, players and parents believe today's social media avenues lead to positive destinations, but there are also some risks involved if a high school player is not careful about the manner in which he markets himself to recruiters.

"[College] coaches like Facebook so they can see what kind of person you are, what you're all about," said Dwyer senior quarterback/kicker Bobby Puyol, who has made a verbal commitment to Connecticut. "It can be damaging, especially if you're a big partier, you want to be careful what you say on Facebook. But there's a lot more positive stuff comes out of it than negative, I think."

Some benefits of using social media are wide exposure to college recruiters and giving younger players attention earlier in the recruiting process. And it saves money.

Jermiah Wilder, a senior lineman at Suncoast High in Riviera Beach, said that he has received more interest from Division I programs since recently putting online his YouTube video, which a former teammate helped him produce this summer.

"YouTube is nationwide, so it's easy to get your highlight film to every coach in the nation," Wilder said. "Before, it was a long process. This way, you just link it to [college coaches] and it's there. Once you put it all together, it's easy."

American Heritage-Delray coach Doug Socha, who recruited high school players when he coached at the University of Buffalo before coming to South Florida, said that social media tools have sped up the recruiting process.

"It used to be, 'Let's go out [on a recruiting trip] and look at the juniors and then follow them their senior year,'" Socha said. "Now, kids are getting looked at as sophomores and getting offered [a scholarship] as sophomores or juniors."

Glades Central senior cornerback Crevon LeBlanc, a Division I prospect, said he's on Facebook "all the time" and that along with YouTube have played a big part in helping with his recruiting process. "I get stuff in my mailbox every day," he said.

Andrea Cameron, whose son is highly touted Jupiter senior quarterback and South Florida commit Tyler Cameron, points out that YouTube and Facebook have been cost-effective.

"Back in the day, if you think about it, you had to buy all those DVDs and tapes, burn them all and then send them out, and pay postage on top of it," she said. "That's made a big difference [financially]. ...There's no need for college coaches to mail out questionnaire packets to players. Now just about every school has that online, so that's cost-effective, too."

#### Pros and cons

[Boca Raton](#) coach Keith Byars, who played at Ohio State and in the NFL, said he looks at his players' videos and does some editing if necessary before placing them on YouTube. He said he constantly monitors the Facebook page of his son, Keith Byars II, a starting running back and Division I prospect at [Boca Raton](#).

Byars said highlight films on a social media outlet can be beneficial if used wisely, but that there are drawbacks from a recruiting standpoint.

"Videos whet the appetite of college recruiters," Byars said. "It can pique their interest more. But it's the whole body of work that counts, not just one highlight. ... I don't want to get into naming names, but there was a certain player from a couple of years ago who was a YouTube sensation. But you see him on [game] tape, and I'm like, 'Uh, really?' I didn't see it, and after seeing him live, I really didn't see it."

Along with everything else they do, coaches now add to the list educating their players about the pitfalls of social media.

Byars tells his players that what they document on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube is a reflection of them. The way you dress, the language you use, the attitude you project all reflect your character to a college recruiter. He also warns his players to be careful about who they allow on their Facebook wall because some people might tag you and place something on there that is not yours but is construed as such.

"I think it's good in terms of it's very accessible," Socha said of Facebook. "But I think it can be, at times, a little bit negative because anybody can get on a blog or a forum and state an opinion. And if enough people read it, that opinion all of a sudden is what people perceive as fact about a kid, and it 100 percent could be false. So it's negative in that fashion."

Cameron said she encourages her son, Tyler, and other players she knows to ignore the message boards because there are too many people with cruel intentions



"If you're going to be good at what you want to do, there's always going to be people who take shots at you," Cameron said. "I told [Tyler] from the beginning, just do your best, turn it on every day but don't listen to the haters. And just be careful what you post."

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