As the basketball season comes to a close, so does the slow march to the end of the school year. The end of the school year means the beginning of your adult life if you are a high school senior. Knowing how absolutely un-adult that most sensible human beings are, and should be, at the age of 18, colleges and universities just might be the greatest invention in the history of mankind. The next greatest invention was collegiate sports for dummies like me to get the last remnants of "I'm going to be a professional football player" out of my system.

Fortunately I saw more people in college who wanted to be nuclear scientists, lawyers, and teachers rather than professional athletes. Many times it takes the college environment to help convert the average jock into a person who can comprehend the math and reality that says making it in professional sports is about as likely as giving birth to octuplets. Fortunately at the same time that you get kicked in the teeth with that reality, you also get to transform into your adult body and enjoy the high intensity competition of collegiate sports.

Participating in high school sports was a blast, but collegiate sports introduces you to the notion that sports, and "make-you-wanna-cry" hard work actually go together. For the little prima-donna track star that I was, it was a great wake-up call to have my teammates laugh at me because of how out of shape I was. Between that and taking classes which actually seemed to make me smarter (high school classes do, but like most kids I didn't pay attention), college put me on a much faster track to success…not to mention simply making me a better person.

I mention all of this because this area of the country strikes me as a goldmine for kids who are halfway good at sports, wanna keep playing sports for a few more years, and don't want to be 18 with a 40 hour per week job. College isn't for everyone, but I'm glad I had a five-year break between high school graduation and a real job. That script worked out real well.

The college scene in Southern California was about as confusing, competitive, and impersonal as 5 o'clock traffic in downtown Minneapolis. Thus, the good-natured communications I had with schools in the Midwest made me want to seek these more inviting pastures.

There seems to be as many colleges in Minnesota as there are lakes. For young athletes there are so many talented sports programs, and genuinely helpful athletic departments at those schools, that the path to college in Minnesota can be about as smooth as it comes.

Minnesota has a history of being a place where higher education is celebrated and highly encouraged. For that reason it is pretty much unacceptable for a young person in Minnesota to not take advantage of the many gold mines that sit before them. For young athletes it is even more unacceptable because the minute that you contact a college coach and tell them you are a decent athlete and are interested in their school, is the same minute that you will have someone at that school who will find some scholarships, grants, waivers, loans, or rich uncles to pay for you to play at their school. Can't find a school in Minnesota?

The same wealth of genuinely cool schools is available in every state that Minnesota touches, and that is perfect for kids who want to leave home, but be close enough to come home and eat when you get sick of dorm food. Considering the general lack of interest, for most people, at

the thought of living in places like Iowa or South Dakota, you can guess how many strings they will pull to get a child of color to step foot on their college campuses.

With President Obama in office, there should be a renaissance in our communities that stresses higher education like never before. The process seems scary to some, but for those kids with a little wiggle to their dribble on the court, or shake to their bake on the field, you have a special leg up in getting there. Look up the school, look up the coach, pick up the phone. It's as simple as that.

From now until the end of the school year this column will focus heavily on stories about young athletes going to college. We will speak with athletes and coaches from both the high school side, as well as the collegiate side. Please make sure to pass the articles on to all ages of youth…even just in passing on our neighborhood street corners.