



Player Development Initiatives

Small Sided Standards & Birth Year Registration

Frequently Asked Questions

General

Please review the [Player Development Initiatives](#) and see below for more information.

Why are these changes being made?

The current landscape is inconsistent and not as successful as it could be when it comes to player development. Through these initiatives, U.S. Soccer aims to develop players with more individual skill, intelligence, creativity and confidence. These changes also provide a consistent approach across the country while challenging the status quo of our soccer landscape by focusing on the development of the individual versus the success of a team. Parents can also have a better understanding of exactly what they should expect from a soccer program for their children.

Are these changes aligned with the U.S. Soccer Development Academy?

Yes. These initiatives align the entire youth player development environment with the proven approach and success of the Development Academy program. Clubs, coaches and parents who are in programs external to the Development Academy are encouraged to incorporate these philosophies of player development. These initiatives fully support the existing technical framework of the Development Academy, which serves as the model for development across the country.

How do these changes affect the current soccer landscape?

U.S. Soccer recommends putting these initiatives into place as a best practice beginning in August of 2016, as they will be mandated in August of 2017. This provides organizations two full years from the announcement in August 2015 to plan on how to best implement the initiatives in the future. Please contact your local soccer leaders for more information on how they plan on implementing these changes.

Who is required to follow these initiatives?

All of U.S. Soccer's membership is required to put these initiatives into place no later than August of 2017. This includes, but is not limited to, all youth members and their respective competitions: State Associations, US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer, AYSO, SAY, etc.

Small Sided Standards

Are the goal and field sizes the exact sizes required?

No. The goal and field sizes listed are the maximum sizes for each age group. U.S. Soccer understands that facilities don't change overnight so members should to their best to adhere to the sizes provided, acknowledging that it may take time to fully comply.

Is the goalkeeper included in the number of players for 4v4, 7v7 and 9v9?

The 4v4 game model does not include goalkeepers. The 7v7 model is 6 field players and 1 goalkeeper per team and the 9v9 model is 8 field players and 1 goalkeeper per team.

What is the purpose of including quarters and thirds at certain age groups instead of halves?

The transition from 4 periods (quarters) to 3 periods to 2 periods provides a gradual evolution to the full game from the physical and cognitive development perspectives of the player. The multiple intervals also provide increased opportunities for a coach to manage substitutions and explain changes to the players in a more controlled environment during the break in play. This should also reduce over-coaching during the periods of play.

Are the build out lines mandatory for 7v7 play?

Yes. The build out lines are required for 7v7 play at the U9 and U10 age groups. The build out line is used to promote playing the ball out of the back in an unpressured setting.

Are the formations listed required for 7v7 and 9v9 play?

The formations shown in the presentation are recommended, but not mandated. For the 7v7 game model, the recommended formations are 1-2-3-1 or 1-3-2-1. For the 9v9 game model, the recommended formations are 1-3-2-3 or 1-3-3-2.

When does offside come into effect?

Playing with offside begins at the U9 age group, along with the 7v7 game model.

Are there mandates or standards at age groups U14 and older?

Not yet. U.S. Soccer is examining the Zone 2 environment and many of these potential changes would reflect the standards already established by the Development Academy. Additional Zone 1 player development initiatives are also being considered. More information on these changes will be communicated with members when available. For specific details regarding how U14-U19 is going to be managed with the birth year registration initiative, please contact your local State Association or league administrator.

Birth Year Registration

Why is birth year registration going into effect for all levels of play and all age groups?

Having players train and play according to their age and developmental stage supports the objectives of the small sided standards by focusing on the physiological and developmental needs of the player. This change is meant to better safeguard the development of youth players at all ages and levels.

Why can't there be different standards for recreational and competitive teams?

There is no universal definition of what separates recreational from competitive soccer. In addition to supporting the overall objectives of player development, U.S. Soccer believes that having separate registration systems based on undefined levels of play would create unnecessary confusion, and this would not provide a consistent approach across the soccer landscape. Players should also be provided the opportunity to develop to best of their abilities regardless of the level of play they are participating in.

Is my son or daughter still going to be able to play with his or her friends and classmates?

The answer to this depends on a variety of factors, and one major consideration is how your club is making teams. Playing on a team with all of your friends isn't always a reality in the current environment. This is similar to not having all of your friends in the same class or classes at school. Another factor is that the age cutoff used for school registration varies across the country. This means that there are already a variety of unique player age and grade combinations. Participation in scholastic sports can also impact the composition of some teams, so clubs should plan accordingly for players leaving club soccer for school sports. The placement of individual players on specific teams will remain a function of the local club and league to help find the players the best possible environment for their development.

Don't you realize that you're breaking up my existing team?

U.S. Soccer recognizes that making these changes can impact existing teams in the short-term. However, players joining and leaving teams is something that already happens regularly throughout country. There are a variety of factors that require teams to evolve and adapt including players maturity rates, moving away, focusing on new interests or their soccer abilities differentiating from their peers. Again, both small sided standards and birth year registration support the development of the individual player as a priority over a team success.

How can teams continue to be registered together?

Players still have the ability to “play up” with older teammates. In addition to being on a team with their peers, “playing up” can also allow players to compete in a more challenging environment, which can aid in their future development.

Will a player miss any time playing soccer due to the change to birth year registration?

No. Players will have the ability to play with their birth year team, or “play up” with teams in older birth years.

What is “playing up” and are players able to “play down”?

Players have the ability to “play up” with teammates at older age groups, based on birth year. Players are not permitted to “play down” with teammates at younger age groups, based on birth year.

What is “relative age effect”?

Relative age effect (RAE) refers to the selection bias towards players born earlier in the calendar year. Registering players according to birth year will help everyone understand and better identify the potential for bias. Birth year registration is not intended or expected to eliminate relative age effect.

How does this change fix “relative age effect”?

The player development initiatives do not claim to fix this issue. However, having players grouped by birth year does make it easier to understand for parents and coaches.

How do I determine the birth year used for a competition?

Birth year registration should be based on the year in which the season ends. For example, if a season begins in the fall of 2017 and ends in the summer of 2018 (ex: 2017-18 season), the players would be registered based on their age in the year 2018. Competitions that take place in a single year (ex: fall of 2018 only) should use that year to determine birth year. To simplify determining the age group, just subtract the birth year from the year the season ends.

Year Season Ends – Birth Year = Age Group:

- 2017-18 – 2003 = U15
- 2022-23 – 2016 = U7
- 2018 – 2012 = U6

Please refer to the Birth Year and Season Matrix for more detailed information.

What are some practical approaches to help manage the team environment?

Embrace the diminished role of the team concept at younger ages and have players participate as a pool of players. One method is to try using mixed age groups for teams based on the small sided standards. An example of this would be a U11/12 team instead of separate U11 and U12 teams. For younger ages, you could create teams based on the first and last 6 months of the year so that players are organized Jan. to June and July to Dec. Offering multiple teams per birth year can help diminish the effects of RAE and assist with managing scholastic sport participation.

Closing

What can I do to support the initiatives?

Support and the education of parents is key. Unless we do this together, we won't be successful. U.S. Soccer acknowledges that these changes are not as easy as flipping a switch, so that's why there is a 2 year implementation window. Change of this magnitude takes time and it can be uncomfortable. Because of this, U.S. Soccer asks that the entire soccer community please have patience as these changes are implemented, and trust that these and future initiatives will lead to long-term success in the area of player development.

Who can I talk to if I have more questions?

It's important to communicate with your local soccer leaders to avoid misinformation about these initiatives and their objectives. This includes speaking with your coach, club or league administrators, State Association or other U.S. Soccer youth member. If you have additional questions that are not covered in this FAQ document, please feel free to email U.S. Soccer at coaches@ussoccer.org.

Birth Year and Season Matrix

Again, when determining the age group for a season, the year the season ends should be used for determining the birth year. Also note that the format "U followed by age" really means that age and younger. For example, U8 should be read as 8 and younger. Since not all members will adopt the initiatives as a best practice in 2016, the matrix below begins with the 2017-18 season when the mandate goes into effect in August of 2017.

Season	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Birth Year								
2020								
2019								U6
2018							U6	U7
2017						U6	U7	U8
2016					U6	U7	U8	U9
2015				U6	U7	U8	U9	U10
2014			U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11
2013		U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12
2012	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13
2011	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14
2010	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15
2009	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16
2008	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17
2007	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18
2006	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19
2005	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	
2004	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19		
2003	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19			
2002	U16	U17	U18	U19				
2001	U17	U18	U19					
2000	U18	U19						
1999	U19							
1998								