

**U.S. SOCCER FEDERATION
POSITION STATEMENTS & BEST PRACTICES
For
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations that will help shape the future direction of youth soccer in the United States. There is no question that the long-term growth and enjoyment of each individual player should be our primary objective. By promoting age/ability appropriate training activities nationwide our goal is to accelerate the development process of individual players at an earlier age, and to strike the proper balance between development and winning at every age level.

This document has been written by U.S. Soccer Director of Youth Development John Ellinger and US Soccer's National Staff Coaches. It is a compilation of work created by the four Regional ODP Coaching Staffs and the State Youth Association Directors of Coaching. In addition, U.S. Soccer would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts and support of the USYS Regional Directors in helping this document become a reality.

**Bruce Arena
Men's National Team
Coach and Technical
Director**

**April Heinrichs
Women's National Team
Coach and Technical
Director**

**John Ellinger
U 17 National Team
Coach and Director
of Youth Development**

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RECOMMENDED GAME FORMATS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- To promote the implementation of small-sided games as the vehicle for match play for players under the age of twelve throughout the United States.
- To promote and encourage an appropriate developmental environment for players that is based on both age and ability characteristics.

Recommendations:

U-6

- Game Form-----4 v 4 (3 v 3 is an option)
- Game Duration-4 X 8 minutes
- Substitution-----Free
- GK Status-----None Required
- Field Size-----4 v 4 (40 yards x 25 yards)—3 v 3 (30 yards x 20 yards)
- Ball Size-----3

U-8

- Game Form-----5 v 5 (4 v 4 is an option)
- Game Duration-2 X 20 minutes
- Substitution-----Free
- GK Status-----Use last defender as GK in 5 v 5 (no GK in 4 v 4)
- Field Size-----5 v 5 (45 yards x 30 yards)---4 v 4 (40 yards x 25 yards)
- Ball Size-----3

U-10

- Game Form-----7 v 7 (6vs is an option)
- Game Duration-2 X 25 minutes
- Substitution-----Free
- GK Status-----Players rotate as GK in game
- Field Size-----60 yards x 40 yards
- Ball Size-----4

U12

- Game Form-----9 v 9 (8v8 is an option)
- Game Duration-2 X 30

- Substitution-----Free
- GK Status-----GK share time in order of priority
- Field Size-----100 yards x 50 yards
- Ball Size-----4

U-14

- Game Form-----11 v 11
- Game Duration-2 X 35
- Substitution-----No re-entry in half
- GK Status-----GK chosen based on ability
- Field Size-----110 yards x 60 yards (minimum)
- Ball Size-----5

U-16/U-18

- Game Form-----11 v 11
- Game Duration-2 X 40/2 X 45
- Substitution-----No re-entry
- GK Status-----GK chosen based on ability
- Field Size-----115 yards x 70 yards/120 yards x 70 yards (minimum)
- Ball Size-----5

Note: The remaining USYS modified laws for all age appropriate competition should apply (i.e. goal size, referees, off-sides, throw-ins, etc.)

DEVELOPMENT OF GOALKEEPERS

- The implementation of goalkeepers within youth soccer is an issue that creates considerable discussion among coaches . Requiring a player to be only a goalkeeper at too early of an age may have a negative effect and eliminate them from future participation in soccer
- Children grow at different rates and times. It is impossible to predict who will be the best goalkeeper at age twenty when they are ten. Early selection as a goalkeeper may not be in the player's best long-term interest.
- Development of a goalkeeper must be carefully monitored and conducted. The progressive teaching of technical skills is important given the concerns for safety within the position.

Recommendations:

- U-6---No GK required for 3 v 3 games. No GK required for 4 v 4 games.
- U-8---No GK required for 4 v 4 games. Use last defender for 5 v 5 games.
- U-10---GK is included within team-rotate players as GK.

- U-12---GK's identified within team-GK's share time but in order of priority, which is determined by the coach.
- U-14---GK chosen on ability and contribution to the team.

MAXIMUM COMPETITION PER DAY

- Multiple games being played on one day or one weekend and its effect on the quality of the experience and development of the individual player.
- Playing schedules that include so many tournaments and games that there is never an "off season" for players.

Recommendations:

- For tournament managers and schedulers:
 1. Players allowed to play a maximum of one full-length game plus overtime period per day per weekend (maximum two games per weekend).
 2. Where multiple games are a necessity—
 - a) Schedule full-length games with a day of rest between games
 - b) Play shortened halves for games played on back-to-back days
 - c) For players U-14—a maximum of 100 minutes of competition per day
 - d) For players U-15 and older a maximum of 120 minutes per day

NOTE: Kick-off times for games should allow players a reasonable opportunity to prepare properly for competition. This encompasses rest and recovery, nutrition and adequate time to warm-up.

- Coaches prioritizing events:
 1. Objectives are identified and a seasonal plan is developed that balances practice, competition, rest and recovery.
 2. The best interests of the player must be considered when scheduling competition. The quality and the choice of the events must be carefully considered when developing a seasonal plan.

ABILITY TO PLAY UP

- The majority of clubs, leagues and district, state or regional Olympic Development Programs in the United States allow talented, younger players to compete on teams with and against older players. This occurs as a natural part of the development process and is consistent throughout the world. Currently, there are isolated instances where rules or policies have been imposed that restrict the exceptional player from "playing up". These rules regarding this issue vary. Some absolutely will not allow it. Others establish team or age-group quotas while the most lenient review the issue on a case-by-case basis.

- Associations that create rules restricting an individual player's option to play at the appropriate competitive level are in effect impeding that player's opportunity for growth. For development to occur, all players must be exposed to levels of competition commensurate with their skills and must be challenged constantly in training and games in order to aspire to higher levels of play and thus maintain their interest and passion for the game.

Recommendation:

- When it is appropriate for soccer development, the opportunity for the exceptional player to play with older players must be available. If there is a concern regarding the individual situation, the decision must be carefully evaluated by coaches and administrators familiar with the particular player. When faced with making the decision whether the player ought to play up, adult leadership must be prepared with sound rationale to support their decision. Under no circumstance should coaches exploit the situation by holding players back in their quest for winning team championships, nor should parents push their child in an attempt to accelerate their ascension to the top of the soccer pyramid. In addition, playing up under the appropriate circumstances should not preclude a player from playing in his or her own age group when it is evaluated to be in the best interest of the player's development.

CLUB REGISTRATION vs. TEAM REGISTRATION

- Registering players to a club rather than team provides for fluid movement between teams and levels based upon the needs and abilities of the player.
- By registering players to a club rather than a team increases the opportunities for players to gain experience and playing time as determined by the Club's Director of Coaching.
- Club registration embraces the concept of "playing up" and positively influences the player by providing easy access to a increased level of competition.

Recommendation:

- Players should be allowed to register directly to a club. Club player passes rather than team player passes would be issued. Players would be restricted from playing down in competitions that are below their own age.
- Tournaments or cup competitions may freeze rosters prior to the start of the competition in order to prevent changes in the roster during the actual competition period.
- Players would be limited to playing only one game per day regardless of the age grouping.
- Club Director's of Coaching would oversee technical decisions relative to player development to ensure they are being made in the best long-term interest of the

player's growth and development. Team coaches would not be able to hold players back when it is in their best interest to play up.

FESTIVALS vs. TOURNAMENTS

- Teams are participating in a vast number of tournaments each season. The participation in these tournaments by youth teams often creates a “win-at-all cost” attitude and has a negative influence on player development.
- This high level of participation in tournaments effects the development of the player in the following way:
 - a) time is reduced for development, i.e. practice
 - b) excessive play at competitive tournaments can be detrimental to individual growth and development
 - c) winning becomes the main issue for the coach rather than the long term development of the player

Recommendation:

- For players below the age of ten a festival format should replace a tournament structure. Festivals feature a set number of games with no elimination or ultimate winner.

REQUIRED LICENSING

- To create minimum educational and licensing requirements for coaches in the United States.
- To establish required levels of coaching licenses that are commensurate with the level of play and needs of the coach.

Recommendation:

- To implement the license requirements established and recommended by the Coaching Department of the United States Soccer Federation.
- Implementation to be achieved nation-wide by December 31, 2004.

Recommended Minimum Licensing Requirements:

- **'A' License:** Professional Coaches, National Team/Staff Coaches, Club Directors of Coaching/Technical Directors, Head Regional ODP Coaches, National Instructional Staff, Regional ODP Team Coaches, State Directors of Coaching, State ODP Head Coaches, Club Age Group Directors of Coaching
- **'B' License:** State Instructional Staff, State ODP Assistant Coaches, Club Team Head Coaches of Select/Elite level teams U-16 or older

- **‘C’ License:** State or regional ODP Coaches-in-Training, Head Coaches of Select/Elite level teams of U-14 or older
- **‘D’ License:** Head or Assistant Team Coaches of Select/Elite teams U-12 or older—course is the first licensing course offered under US-Soccer Federation auspices
- **‘E’ License:** Assistant Coaches of Select /Elite Teams U-12 or older---course provides basic instruction for coaches coaching teams playing eleven-a-side
- **‘Y’ License:** State Directors of Coaching, State Instructional Staff of Youth Modules, Club Directors of Coaching, Coaches of Grassroots/Select level teams
- **Youth Module-Level 3:** For Coaches working with players U-12—Grassroots
- **Youth Module-Level 2:** For Coaches working with players U-10—Grassroots
- **Youth Module-Level 1:** For Coaches working with players U-8---Grassroots

Note: Grassroots refers to the broad base entry level of soccer. This is the foundation of the talent pool.

AGE OF COMPETITIVE PLAY

- To promote a playing environment for preteen players that allows them to pursue playing opportunities that meet both their interest and ability level.
- To strongly discourage playing environments for where players under the age of twelve are forced to meet the same “competitive” demands as their older counterparts.

Recommendation:

- Players under the age of twelve should remain in developmental soccer programs where no league or match results are maintained.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL COMPETITION FOR U12’S

- To create a playing environment which is not detrimental to both players and adults; much of the negative behavior reported about parents occurs during preteen play.
- To eliminate any direct or indirect pressure exerted on coaches and pre-teen players to win at-all-costs. The emphasis at this age (and below) must be on player development. Coaches must understand that choosing an environment that

fosters long term development of the player must always take priority over winning.

Recommendations:

- In the absence of regional competition for U-9's and U10's, festivals or jamborees replace state cups.
- U-11 and U-12 regional and national competitions are not recommended for these age groups.

ACTIVE COACHING

- To foster growth and development of our top level coaches, particularly those in administrative positions, such as club and state directors and national staff coaches by remaining active practitioners.
- To create opportunities from active coaching experience for our top-level coaches holding administrative positions to obtain essential and current knowledge pertinent to their craft.

Recommendations:

- Regional, state, and/or club coaching activities should be a part of the director's yearly job description.
- By creating active coaching environments for our top-level coaches in administrative positions, coaching directors can be seen as individuals who practice what they preach.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- In order to provide a safe and healthy playing environment for players and parents, all youth clubs need to ensure that their coaches are properly screened and certified before beginning their coaching duties.

Recommendations:

- All coaches involved in youth soccer should be subject to background checks and that coaching licenses be required as part of the risk management process.
- Each coach should be issued a registration card, certifying that they have completed the risk management process and have attained the required coaching certification.

PARENT EDUCATION

- There is no question that one of the problems haunting youth sports today is the inappropriate behavior of the parents of the participating athletes. There is a need in youth soccer, not only to address this issue, but also, to increase the knowledge base regarding our sport to these same individuals.

Recommendations:

- All youth soccer parents should be required to sign and comply with a Code of Conduct.
- It should be the responsibility of all youth soccer clubs and leagues to be proactive and develop parent education programs