



How U.S. Soccer's recent coaching initiatives affects upcoming US Club Soccer programming

Sept. 10, 2015

US Club Soccer members:

On Aug. 24, the U.S. Soccer Federation [announced significant changes](#) to the youth competition environment to be implemented in the coming years.

Fundamentally, these changes have been made in the interests of long term player development and can be placed into two major categories: (i) player age group cut-off dates; and (ii) small-sided game structures and sizes.

As a national member of U.S. Soccer, US Club Soccer is required to follow the rules, regulations and policies of U.S. Soccer – including these new mandates. As a developmentally focused organization, US Club Soccer also supports all attempts to create a better environment for youth players.

The recent U.S. Soccer mandates will have an impact on almost every facet of youth competition in this country. This memorandum is provided to help our clubs, teams, coaches and administrators understand and implement these changes as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Birth Year Registration – EFFECTIVE AUGUST 1, 2016

Effective Aug. 1, 2016, youth soccer teams at all age groups will be formed using a new age group cut-off date of January 1. This will result in significant changes in team composition for all youth teams and age groups in the future.

- The current age group cut-off of August 1 (*players born on or after August 1 are age eligible*) was designed to keep teams on a school-year basis – so that teams were created generally of players within the same academic grade. For this reason it was referred to as “school-based” registration.
- The new age group cut-off of January 1 (*players born on or after January 1 are age eligible*) is consistent with the dates used internationally in forming youth teams. This cut-off is referred to as “calendar-based” registration.

The change to calendar-based registration will create multiple changes in youth soccer:

- **Teams will generally consist of players in two different school years.** This is because, generally, players born from January 1 to July 31 will be a year older in school, than the players born from August 1 to December 31. This presents some unique challenges during the transition from middle school to high school, and during the transition from high school to college.
 - Eighth grade / high school freshman: In this age group, teams formed on calendar-based registration will have some players that are in eighth grade and some players that are freshmen in high school. Clubs will need to plan for this. This could be done in multiple ways based upon your club philosophy.

- For example, in Club A, players that remain in eighth grade, while some of their teammates are in high school, may train with a younger team during this 3-4 month period. Alternatively, in Club B, freshmen-aged players may choose not to play high school soccer during this season in order to stay with their club teams.
 - Senior year/ college freshman: Teams formed on calendar-based registration will also have a significant roster change as they become rising U-18s. This is because a percentage of the “rising U-18s” will actually be graduating from high school and likely will no longer be participating in youth soccer. Clubs will need to plan for this.
 - For example, in Club A, some rising U-17s may be brought “up” to play U-18 soccer. Alternatively, in Club B, the U-18s may play “up” with U-19 or older players in the community that are not playing college soccer.
- **Competition formats will be in transition this summer.** Because try-outs and selections for teams occur at different times in different parts of the country, for a few months this summer there may be teams based on different age group cut-offs across the country. This will result in some transitional issues to manage this summer as teams qualify for or enter postseason events.
 - **NPL Finals (boys)**: The NPL Finals for boys teams has always been organized on a calendar-based age group competition structure. As such, the mandate has no impact on the NPL Finals structure in 2016 or moving forward.
 - **NPL Finals (girls)**: The NPL Finals for girls teams is currently organized on a school year-based age group competition structure. This will remain the same for the 2016 NPL Finals. If your club forms new teams and begins competing with these new calendar-based teams prior to Aug. 1, 2016, your club will have a choice to make if they qualify for the NPL Finals:
 - Option 1: Conform the qualifying team roster to an August 1 age group for the NPL Finals (players born January 1 – July 31 will not be eligible to participate). US Club Soccer will allow a club that chooses this option the ability to replace each player that must be dropped for the NPL Finals with another age-appropriate player currently registered to the club (*all other NPL roster rules apply*).
 - Option 2: Play one year “up” with your new calendar-based roster intact.
 - **National Cup Finals – boys and girls teams**: The National Cup Finals for boys and girls teams is currently organized on a school year-based age group competition structure. The event will remain that way for the National Cup XV Finals in July 2016 with two exceptions:
 - National Cup XV Northwest and West Regionals: Because California and the Northwest typically transition to “next year’s” teams in April or May of each year, and these teams for the 2016-17 season will be calendar-based, the National Cup XV Northwest and West Regionals will be organized on a calendar year-based age group structure in the summer of 2016. This allows all of these teams to participate in this event in their appropriate age group. However, this means that the teams from these two National Cup XV Regionals that qualify for the National Cup XV Finals in 2016 must make a choice:
 - Option 1: Conform the team roster to an August 1 age group for the National Cup Finals (players born January 1 – July 31 will not be eligible to participate). US Club Soccer will allow a club that chooses to do this the ability to replace each player that must be dropped for the National Cup

Finals with another age-appropriate player currently registered to the club
(*All other National Cup roster rules apply*).

- Option 2: Play one year “up” with your new calendar-based roster intact.

After Aug. 1, 2016, all age group competitions sanctioned by US Club Soccer – including tournaments and leagues – will be mandated to be calendar year-based moving forward.

The new birth year changes will likely create many questions for parents, players, and administrators in your club. Please reach out to [your respective US Club Soccer Member Services Representative](#) if you have questions in this transition. These individuals will be able to help you through the challenges as efficiently as possible.

Small-Sided Games – STARTING AUGUST 1, 2017

U.S. Soccer has announced additional mandates regarding youth competition to begin on Aug. 1, 2017. These mandates involve the size of the playing field and the number of players on the field from U-6 through U-12 age groups.

These changes are designed to create a better development environment by providing players more touches on the ball, more involvement in the game, and more opportunities to make decisions. You can read more about the changes [here](#). Because these changes are nearly two years away, US Club Soccer will address planning for these changes at a later date.