

Player Development Initiatives--Birth Year Registration

Frequently Asked Questions

General

Please review the US Soccer's [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, the aim is 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.

How do these changes affect the current soccer landscape?

We recommend 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..USYS and US Club Soccer have announced that they will follow the new birth year registration for all of their competitions for the 2016/17 season.

Are there mandates or standards at age groups U13 and older?

Not yet. More information on these changes will be communicated with members when available. For specific details regarding how U13-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, we believe 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. Also, as in previous years, there will always be that situation where a team will have players entering 8th grade and others who will be entering 9th grade (who can now play high school sports)-these players can use the club pass as a way to continue playing until the entire team is back together following post high school play.

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

We all recognize 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. In the event that your team is planning to participate in a league that will permit enough players to play up to allow your current team to remain together, the only impact will be that your team be referred to by the birth year for oldest player(s) on your roster. Please understand that this will create the possibility of your team playing against teams that are solely comprised of players born in the year of your oldest player(s) and could result in competitions where there is nearly a two year age difference between players. In the event that your team is planning to participate in a league that will not permit enough players to play up to allow your current team to remain together, then your team will need to either find a new league in which to participate or your team will need to break into new teams.

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.

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.