



Dear Presidents, Vice Presidents and Soccer Leaders in Massachusetts,

Since the US Soccer Player Development announcement was released a large amount of discussion has taken place regarding the first ever mandated introduction of national standards. It was not surprising that there was some strong reaction to the use of the word mandate. History shows that Bay Staters really don't appreciate mandates. As we looked into the content of the message we must sit back and think about the intent a bit more. It is rather substantial for our governing body, US Soccer, to decide to set a national standard for all youth soccer organizations. The most important aspect to this player development initiative is how we react to them.

On a larger view soccer folks across the country quickly asked, "how could US Soccer change the game for over 4 million children for the benefit of 400?" It was quite clear that the intent of the mandates are to try to nationalize the pathway for our ultra-elite players as we strive to build, from the ground up, a more competitive and formidable National team system. After careful review and listening to the gurus on top of the US Soccer mountain the focus is that we need to apply the international standard set by FIFA when it comes to youth player development.

I, like most of you, took a look at the details and was instantly befuddled. The age groups along with the new field dimension and goal size changes just didn't match up. So, US Soccer wants more players on a smaller field with a larger goal and move up to a larger field 6 months earlier than before. How could this be? After the dust settled action plans were set into motion. Several important soccer people had teams test this new formation out and quickly determined that the new scheme needed some retooling. For the first time ever the country's topmost technical coach thinkers representing all US Soccer youth council members met as a group and sent a counter recommendation back the US Soccer. The desire is that US Soccer, in collaboration with all Youth Council member organizations, will rethink and reconsider how we can implement the new standards with the same intent of creating an improved pathway to national success while making sure the needs of each level of soccer enjoyment (town recreational, state travel, regional and national competition) are met.

Your Mass Youth Soccer board and staff want to assure all of our members that we are fully aware of these new Player Development initiatives along with the newer US Soccer player safety announcements. We are steadfastly working on making sure we can help our state's 380 member organizations, 13 leagues and regional/national programs deliver the best, safest, healthiest, rewarding and successful soccer experience possible. This effort takes energy and passion. I can assure you that your board and staff have plenty of these two qualities.

MASS YOUTH SOCCER IMPLEMENTATION OF US SOCCER BIRTH YEAR MANDATES

The new age groups based on the calendar year will throw a wrinkle into how teams are comprised. First, for our Olympic Development Program play it will be business as usual as ODP is already calendar year based. For our healthy and vibrant clubs with internal training academies, developmental play at U9 and 10, and competitive play statewide, regionally and nationally some tweaking will be needed.

Starting later this year clubs competing in MAPLE, Region 1, National Championship Series, and National League play will need to enter their teams in the appropriate age group based on the age of the players on their roster. Teams will still be able to be kept intact, but will most likely be competing against teams that have been restructured to reflect an entire single birth year as compared to a team based on previous criteria. In essence the team based on previous birth date ranges may have a full 6 month player age disadvantage against a team that has been rebuilt to be comprised solely of the single calendar birth year. While larger clubs have already started this process of adjusting it will take smaller clubs time to morph.

The vast number town based recreational programs have been confronted with a challenge of their own. How can we keep our children playing together with peer classmates? When we first read the birth year mandates from US Soccer a dreadful feeling came over many. Then, after picking apart the details, it became apparent that we really didn't need to react as we did. Players can still play with classmates. What will take place with the upcoming 2016/17 soccer year is a simple relabeling of group play from Age to Grade. The Grade group eligibility parameters will still be based on birth date ranges and the US Soccer labels for each player will be appropriately used. The only time a team playing in a Mass Youth Soccer town based recreational (intown and travel) programs will need to swap out their Grade Group for the Age Group will be if they enter the team in a tournament sponsored by club that uses the Age Group labels. As provided in the US Youth Soccer statement letter: Clubs may continue to organize their teams for competition with players of any age younger than the age group cut-off. Our new Grade Group method complies.

After you read and digest you will see that we are well prepared to make sure Massachusetts Youth Soccer is in a great position with our various leagues.

MAPLE: The MAPLE League has decided to move forward with the calendar year age groups starting this fall and will be in full compliance with identifying teams based on their calendar year labeled "U" group.

For example the U14 age group in the 2016/17 Soccer year will be comprised of players born in 2003 and younger. This team would primarily be comprised of older 7th graders and younger 8th graders. Players are permitted to play up per state and league policies.

MTOC Travel League Play: Based on the recent Leagues Committee agreement, and strong desire to keep players together by school grade, all league play within the MTOC leagues will be in compliance with the new age group criteria commencing with the 2016/2017 season. The playing groups will be categorized as School Grades with a qualifying criteria of a date of birth range.

For example, for the 2016/17 soccer year, the new Grade 7/8 Group (formerly U14) will be comprised of players in 8th grade or below AND born on or after 1/1/2002. Under new US Soccer player calendar year age group labels, players in this Grade 7/8 Group will primarily be comprised of players labeled as older U13, all U14 and younger U15. The bulk of these players will be born between 8/1/2002 and 7/31/2004, virtually identical to the current birth date ranges in use today.

Recreational Intown Leagues: Similar to the recent Leagues Committee agreement, and strong desire to keep players together by school grade, all recreational intown league play will be in compliance with the new age group criteria commencing with the 2016/2017 season using the same criteria as the MTOC travel league play. The playing groups can be categorized as School Grades with a qualifying criteria of a date of birth range.

For example, for the 2016/17 soccer year, the new Grade 1 Group (formerly U7) will comprised of players in the 1st grade or below AND born on or after 1/1/2009. Under new US Soccer player calendar year age group labels, players in this Grade 1 Group will primarily be comprised of players labeled as older U7 and younger U8. The bulk of these players will be born between 8/1/2009 and 7/31/2010, virtually identical to the current birth date ranges in use today.

For our MTOC and Recreational Intown Leagues a more descriptive chart depicting the specific eligibility criteria for each playing Grade Group is attached.

FIELD DIMENSIONS AND GOAL SIZES

For the 2016/17 transitional soccer year, Mass Youth Soccer recommends that no changes be made to current field dimensions and goal sizes. More information on these subjects will be communicated towards the end of this year as we prepare for the 2017/18 soccer year when some changes may be necessary. As noted earlier, the ongoing discussions with US Soccer hope to influence some modifications to the initial announcement.

In closing I share with you another line from the attached US Youth Soccer statement letter:

The US Youth Soccer Board of Directors encourages US Youth Soccer State Associations to transition as they deem necessary to accommodate their soccer landscape at the local level.

You can rest assured that your state association is working hard to make sure the needs of our players, parents, coaches, teams, clubs, towns and leagues are met. The above methods are in full compliance with US Soccer mandates. Furthermore, we are using all measures possible to help US Soccer understand the importance of meeting the needs of the over 4 million youth players in our country.

Best,

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