

Age Group Mandate - Frequently Asked Questions

(based on FAQ's posted by Loudoun and Vienna Youth Soccer)

Q: What is the US Soccer Age Group Mandate?

A: US Soccer will return to calendar birth years for determining a player's age to once again align with international standards and Youth National Team programs. US Youth Soccer will implement the best practice of calendar year age grouping for player registration beginning with the 2016-2017 soccer year for US Youth Soccer programs and competitions. Using the school calendar for age groups has been practiced only in the United States and Canada, as all other FIFA members go by the calendar year. Age groups that have been determined based on players born between Aug. 1 and July 31 will change to calendar year age groups reflecting the calendar year, or January 1 to December 31. Players will continue to be allowed to "play up" (play in an older age group) but not to "play down".

Q: Why is US Soccer making this change?

A: From the US Soccer site: The current landscape is inconsistent and not as successful as it could be when it comes to player development. Through these initiatives, US 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.

Q: How does this impact my child?

A: BRYC Recreational Soccer plans to fully transition to the Birth Year model for all of its age groups. Again, this change is being mandated by US Soccer, US Youth Soccer and VYSA, and we must comply. This is not a decision that was made at the Club level.

Specifically, players born between January 1 and July 31 will move up one age group for the Fall 2016 season, exactly as under the current model (e.g. current U10 will move to U11). However, players born between August 1 and December 31 will be reclassified to a different age group (e.g. current U10 will move to U12). In short, some players will experience minimal change; some may move up or down a team level; where others may change age groups and team levels.

Q: What about my child's friends?

A: BRYC Recreational players will be able to continue playing with or against many of their school friends while also making new ones with schoolmates from a grade ahead or a grade behind them. Coaches will support the transition and help players settle into the team with teammates they may not have known previously.

Q: How did BRYC come to this decision?

A: A BRYC Recreational Soccer Executive Committee (EXCOM) Subcommittee consisting of our

Commissioner, Training Director, Age Group Deputy Commissioners, Registration Director, Referee Director, ODSL Commissioner, and Webmaster conducted diligent research into the mandate. We researched the original US Soccer statements, the US Youth Soccer and Virginia Youth Soccer directives based on those mandates, and the plans of other soccer clubs in the area. Given the US Youth Soccer and VYSA plans to require adherence according to “best practices” for the 2016-2017 season, there was frankly very little alternative other than to comply with the US Soccer mandate at this time.

Q: What are the benefits to this plan and why can't BRYC Recreational Soccer players just stay together and play up?

A: The US Soccer mandate was established to bring uniformity to the formats of US Youth Soccer. To keep current players and teams together, clubs could conform to the mandate and play players up in older age groups, but the mandate has a far greater impact than just keeping players together. From a soccer development perspective, it would not be in the best interest of individual children's developmental needs, taking into account physical, mental and social development which has a two-year swing. For example, a player could be playing up an age group against a number of players eighteen months older in birth age. Taking into account that players vary in their physical, mental, and social maturation by as much as two-years the difference could be even more significant. For child safety and welfare reasons, while allowing play-ups for exceptional players, either in terms of soccer talent or size, BRYC intends to follow the new age group mandate as closely as possible.

Q: My child wants to play with his/her friends. Can't we just keep our "school year" team together?

For the best interest of most if not all players – the answer is “No.” Maintaining our current school year grouping and ignoring the transition to Birth Year age groups – essentially having most of the roster “play up” an age group — would help preserve current relationships between players and families. However, it would result in our players and teams competing against players significantly older (as many as 18 months), which is likely harmful for both the player's skill development and enjoyment of the sport.

We recognize the importance of friendships made and the bonds formed as teammates; we also recognize that children are more resilient than we give them credit for, and the transition to this new model will permit players to forge new friendships and bonds, while still treasuring previous relationships. Preservation of existing social relationships is not reason enough to keep teams together.

Our objective regardless of age group definition is and always will be to place players onto teams that are appropriate for their development and competitive levels; following the Birth Year model will allow us to do that, as our leagues, tournaments and competitions will also follow that model.

Q: Can my child play up or play down?

Play up requests which have previously been granted in order to have children playing with their school year group, and play ups for purposes of carpools, for example, will become a very rare exception because the age span, size, and soccer skill levels of the older team will be too great. Play up requests will henceforth typically be granted only in situations where a child needs further challenge because the competitive level within their true age group does not provide challenges commensurate with the player's age. (e.g. their team is not competitive enough and/or the individual player dominates their competition); this will only be permitted in extreme cases.

Play down requests cannot be approved due to the rules of the leagues, tournaments and events our teams participate in throughout the year.

Q: Will the All Star tournament remain in current age groups for Spring and will it change to Birth Year in the Fall?

A: BRYC anticipates the Spring 2016 tournament will remain under current age groups and any changes would be implemented in Fall 2016 tournament after the mandate takes effect.

Q. My daughter has a December birthday. She was born in 2006 is currently playing U9. Since she'll be 10 in December, will she jump from U9 to U11 for the fall season?

A: Yes. In Fall 2016, the U11 (2006) Age Group will be for all players born in the year 2006. That will be the Age Group regardless of her birth-month. What this means is whereas your child may currently be one of the older players in their age group, she will be one of the younger players in their age group next year but she will not be losing a year of soccer, but a year of small-sided games while gaining a year of playing 11v11.

Q: If she has to play as a U11, that's a big jump from where she currently at U9. As a parent, I'm concerned whether she will fit into this team of players, many of them having already been playing together as U10s.

A: All players will be playing against players from the same year of birth, a 12-month range plus very limited play-ups from a later year. The first year of this transition to birth year mandate will, indeed, present some challenges as all children born between August and December will find themselves "skipping" a developmental year, i.e. moving to a larger field or playing with a goalie or with eleven players on the field for the first time. By the second year of the age mandate the playing field will have leveled. Some coaches will also find themselves moving up directly from U9 to U11, for example. But it will be the same for all teams in the age group and we believe that both players and coaches will adjust quickly.

Q: Senior Division age groups, already a blend of players from two or more school years, will now consist of players from three different school years, including teams with a mix of middle school and high school students. How will that affect teams?

A: BRYC will insure that those teams have a later practice time due to high school commitments.

Q: My son is currently a U18 team. What provision is there for him?

A: The US Soccer mandate requires that BRYC offer the following older age groups in Fall 2016: U16 (birth years 2001 and 2002) and U19 (birth years 1998, 1999, and 2000). Any players born in 1997 would not be eligible to play in any youth leagues but for the 2016-2017 season, an exception has been made for players born after August 1, 1997, i.e. for players who may have turned 20 years of age before the end of the spring season

Q: What are teams and Age Groups called now that the Age Group is moving to a Birth Year e.g. U9 or 2008?

A: Players, parents and coaches of all BRYC programs will need to be prepared to use both options in terms of terminology e.g. U9 and/or 2008. BRYC will retain the "U" system for Recreational Soccer but be it may become more common to also talk and communicate with year of birth in addition.