

Age Group Change: Club & Parent FAQ

General Questions & Answers

Q: What is changing and when?

A: Beginning with the 2026-27 seasonal year, all AYSA leagues (along with the majority of youth soccer in the United States) will utilize a “School Year” (August 1-July 31) registration cycle instead of the current “Birth Year” (January 1-December 31) cycle. The current soccer seasonal year (2025-26) remains unchanged, this new method of determining age groups will go into effect on August 1, 2026.

Q: Who made this decision?

A: Initially, the decision was made by the three largest youth soccer organizations: US Club Soccer, US Youth Soccer, and AYSO.

Q: Do AYSA clubs have an option to remain in the current birth year system?

A: No. All club members of AYSA and US Youth Soccer must follow the new registration cycle.

Q: Why the August 1 cutoff?

A: Initially, a preliminary announcement indicated that September 1 would be utilized. However, after feedback and data review, August 1 was selected as it better reduces misalignment with school grades and lowers the number of “trapped” players.

Q: Will there still be issues with “trapped” or “forced-up” players during the fall season?

A: No age group cut-off will eliminate all trapped players or force-ups. However, this change will significantly reduce the numbers in each of these categories. A trapped player is a player who is in a younger grade but is stuck in an older soccer age. A force-up player is a player who is in an older grade, needing to play up to stay with classmates.

Parent Questions & Answers

Q: Will my child “repeat” the same age group?

A: Some will, some won't.

- Born Aug–Dec: May stay in the same U-age in 2026–27 (a “repeat”).
- Born Jan–Jul: Must advance/age up to the next U-age as usual.

Q: What should families do right now?

A: Generally, nothing. Clubs will be communicating over the next several months their approach to navigating these changes.

Q: Will my child be able to “play up” to stay with teammates?

A: As always, players may play in any team older than the age group of the player. The approach to team formation may vary by club.

Why the “Age Group Change”?

History

In 2016, U.S. Soccer adjusted its team formation methodology to be that of “Birth Year”, meaning that **all organization members** of U.S. Soccer were **mandated** to form teams on a January-December basis. The purpose of the change at that time was to align with the FIFA (international governing body) standard. Consequently, players participating on their club teams would be participating in the same age groups as they would when participating on the Youth National Teams. The thought was to ensure a smooth transition between their club teams to that of a Youth National Team.

The reality, however, for the **vast majority of youth soccer players** in the United States, is that the change caused varying degrees of disruption, creating the desire to modify the registration cycle yet again.

Why Change Back?

Facing pressure from various leaders within the U.S. Soccer youth soccer ecosystem, U.S. Soccer reversed its mandate to provide autonomy for sanctioning organizations to determine the best path forward regarding player registration for their membership.

As such, three of the organizations representing the largest membership base collaborated on a path forward: US Club Soccer, US Youth Soccer (“USYS”), and the American Youth Soccer Organization (“AYSO”).

During that collaboration process, these organizations determined that a registration cycle most closely aligned with a school year cutoff would be best for their members. This will go into effect with the 2026-27 season.

Why Change at All?

US Youth Soccer and other youth soccer organizations have cited several reasons for the change, such as:

Playing with schoolmates - while especially relevant with a child's entry into soccer, the main reason why children enter the sport is to be with their friends. In the current model, a player born in December would not be on the same team as their schoolmate born in January.

"Trapped" Players - Like many states across the country, club soccer in Minnesota is impacted by the Minnesota State High School League ("MSHSL") season. MSHSL rules stipulate that players participating in the fall high school season may not also participate in club sport within that same season. Similarly, this has meant that players who are of a U15 birth year but not playing high school soccer were "trapped" with no playing options, as the Minnesota fall season is for U9-U14 teams. This change will drastically reduce the number of trapped players.

Under 19's - Similar to U15 trapped players, this also affects the U19 age group, where it's typical for a significant number of players to leave for college, leaving high school juniors without a team.

College Recruiting - In the current setup, players in college-recruitable age groups are made up of two different graduating classes. College coaches typically recruit based on a player's school grade. In theory, this can require college coaches to watch more soccer than necessary. Players may be missed. By having teams made up of - with small exceptions a possibility - players based on school grade, this will make the college recruiting process easier.