

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the benefits to small-sided games for players?

With fewer players on the field and a smaller field on which to play the game the kids are more directly involved in the action of the game. That equates to more enjoyment in playing, more contact with the ball, more tactical experience and more physical movement.

What does Birth Year Mean?

Birth year means that players will play in the age group of the year of their birth. The Birth Year calendar dates run from January 1st to December 31st. For example, if you are born between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31 1999, you will play in the 1999 Birth Year age group. If you are born between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31 2002, you will play in 2002. Currently, a roster is made up of players born both in the fall, the winter, and the spring of that one year time frame between August 1st and July 31st. Now, players will all be born in that calendar year.

Why is Cleveland FC moving to Birth Year?

We are moving to Birth Year because the US Soccer Federation -- the governing body for all youth soccer in America -- is going to mandate Birth Year for all leagues sanctioned under the US Soccer. Also, the US Youth Soccer Association and Region 2, our immediate governing bodies, will be implementing these changes effective fall 2016. Since Cleveland FC is a member of OYSAN and under the umbrella of US Soccer, US Youth Soccer Association and Region 2, we must follow suit.

Why don't we wait until the US Soccer Federation mandates Birth Year?

The same anxiety teams, coaches, parents and players are feeling now will be far greater if we wait until the last minute. It will be better for everyone if we are proactive and do it now so that our families can get used to the change and prepare. We want all parents and players to be informed and experience a positive transition.

Why can't we phase in the Birth Year change?

Why does the change have to be all at once?

As a state league Club, we felt it was important to make the change as quickly as possible as this would cause less confusion moving forward and create uniformity across all of the age groups.

Why is US Soccer going to Birth Year?

US Soccer is going to Birth Year to align youth soccer with the rest of the world. Every country in the world plays Birth Year and all international youth soccer competitions are Birth Year, including all Youth National Team competitions and Youth World Cup competitions. US Soccer recognizes that the change will help our players develop faster. They hope it will benefit in the short term by producing better players and in the longer term by producing players who can compete on the world stage and win a World Cup. Currently, all ODP programs are birth year, as are the top Developmental Academy programs it runs under its umbrella.

Are there any benefits to playing Birth Year?

The main benefit for playing Birth Year is for developmental purposes. At the local level throughout our state, it will allow for better development because it will push individual players, raise the competitive standards, improve team competition and create more meaningful league games.

Are there any disadvantages to playing Birth Year?

There are no disadvantages, as our current rules do not allow players to play "down".

What is Calendar School Year (School Year August 1st-July 31st)?

Calendar Year is the current soccer calendar that is based on a School year calendar most leagues in the United States use to form teams. The current "Calendar Year" runs from August 1st to July 31st.

Can players play in an older age group?

Yes, as in the past, based on player ability and team need, a player may play up an age group. For example, a player born in 2000 can go and play in the 1999 Birth Year age group. "Playing up" will be assessed on per player and per team basis, with the greatest emphasis on maintaining/improving each player's opportunity to develop in the most competitive environment.

Can players play on a younger age group?

No, players CANNOT play down with younger players. For example, a player born in 1999 CANNOT go and play with the 2000 Birth Year age group.

Can I just keep my 2015-2016 team the same for the 2016-2017 season?

Cleveland FC will be adjusting all teams to Birth Year rosters considered developmental (U9-U13). Not doing this can potentially have players playing up against players who are potentially 19 months older than the youngest player on the team since they would need to play in the Birth Year of the oldest player on the team. This could present a challenge for your team and a developmental challenge for the younger players on your team.

Decisions regarding our older (Regional and National Level teams, U14/2002 and up) will be made on a per team basis with emphasis on limiting disruption of team utility and flow. However, player movement between teams with one team as 'primary' is to be expected.

Will other area Clubs be making these same changes?

Yes, all Clubs affiliated with US Youth Soccer are mandated to make these changes.

How will the mandated small sided game format help develop players at the grassroots level?

- a. Small-sided games (SSGs) are a stair step approach to the adult 11 v 11 game as they allow players to grow technically, tactically, physically and psycho-socially at a developmentally appropriate rate.
- b. The move to SSGs for preteen players is based on educational research on the way children learn. Just as with their academic education their soccer education is progressive. Empirical studies have been conducted into the improvements in the game environment for children in SSGs as opposed to the adult version.
- c. SSGs aid in player development. They allow players to have a higher percentage of contact with the soccer ball than in the 11 v 11 game, both offensively and defensively, which indirectly improves a player's soccer technique. SSG's also exposes players to an increased number of soccer situations (game phases), which helps improve their tactical knowledge and ability to make good decisions with and without the ball.
- d. Active participation, more playing time, less players on the field, more opportunities to defend & attack and simplified rules equals more fun and enjoyment, which directly impacts the player retention rate.

How does this model of play look for older players and how does it affect them?

The English FA did a case study on this format of play and developed a video that demonstrates the benefits of this mandate. To view the video, please click [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1Lb5pDTaCg) or visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1Lb5pDTaCg>.