



U.S. SOCCER NEWS RELEASE

NEW U.S. SOCCER COACHING INITIATIVES TARGET IMPROVEMENT IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

CHICAGO (Aug. 24, 2015) - In another step towards its commitment to long-term player development, [U.S. Soccer is phasing in new standards](#) related to small-sided games and birth-year registration.

U.S. Soccer will standardize small-sided game participation and field size based on player age groups, while also aligning birth-year registration calendars with the start of the calendar year and run from January to December.

The coaching initiatives, which will be mandated by August of 2017, are focused on advancing youth players' individual skill and intelligence, and providing players with the best opportunity to improve.

"Our number one goal is to improve our players down the road and these initiatives will help us do that," said U.S. Under-20 Men's National Team head coach and Youth Technical Director Tab Ramos. "With small-sided standards what we're trying to do is to help players develop by putting them in an environment where they are constantly involved in the play and our changes in birth-year registration will make age groups easier to understand, while aligning our calendar with the international calendar."

SMALL-SIDED STANDARDS

The small-sided standards are focused at players from the U-6 to U-12 age groups. The field size is based on age groups, providing a more age appropriate environment that will allow players with a better opportunity to develop heightened soccer intelligence and on-the-ball skills.

The field dimensions and number of players on the pitch will increase in size from 4v4 to 7v7 to 9v9 as players age, up until they reach the U-13 age group and begin to play full 11v11 matches.

"Now you're playing 4v4, 7v7, and 9v9 at a young age and chances are the players are involved a lot more in those types of games," said Ramos. "Over a period of 10 years, there are thousands of more times that you've been involved in certain plays and that will speed up the process of players getting more comfortable. The players, by being involved in the play constantly, will learn how to make important plays, and make plays individually that can break down teams."

For more detailed information on the new small-sided standards and to view field size progression by age group, [click here](#).

BIRTH-YEAR REGISTRATION

Birth-year registration calendars will now align with the start of the calendar year and run from January to December, rather than August to July as it had previously. For example, a U-15 player (players 15 years old or younger) would have a birth year of 2000 (Jan. 1 through Dec. 31) for the 2015 registration year. In 2016, U-15 players would be born in 2001 or earlier. Birth-year registration applies to all player age groups and not just players age 12 and younger.

The initiative will align registration with the international standard, while simultaneously providing clearer information on player birth dates to combat 'relative age effect'.

Relative age effect refers to the selection bias related to players that are more physically mature than their peers due to being born earlier in the year. U.S. Soccer seeks a balance of players that are born throughout the year so that all players, those born in the earlier months, and those born later have equal opportunity to grow and develop as soccer players.

"I think the birth registration changes make everything easier," Ramos said. "Over the years you go through coaching youth and people are confused about what age group they're in, if they're supposed to be u-15 versus U-14, because they're born in such-and-such year, but they're born in June. This new calendar makes things easier for everyone. If you're born in a certain year you belong in that certain age group. It also gets us on the same calendar with the rest of the world, so now it becomes easier to identify for U.S. National Teams and everything else when it comes to international soccer."

The birth-year registration initiative will not cause the dissolution of age-group based teams that already play together, but will rather give players the opportunity to 'play up' with older age-groups.

For more information on the new birth-year registration initiative, [click here](#).