



**Mebane Youth Soccer Association**

**Travel Soccer Program  
Goals and Guidelines**

## **Mission**

The Mebane Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) strives to provide a wide variety of soccer programs for area children in a fun and safe environment. Part of this mission is to ensure players are able to play at successively more competitive levels if they choose to, providing that they currently possess or have the potential to develop the necessary skills to compete at this higher level. As an affiliate of the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), the MYSA is one of thousands of local soccer leagues that form the grass roots development base for future national soccer players. So our goal as an organization should be to provide the best development environment we can for our players to learn the game of soccer and progress as far as they can and choose to.

## **Age Appropriate Programs**

Parents want the best for their children and for them to be the best that they can be. However, this well meaning desire can sometimes cause parents to push players ahead before they are ready. The MYSA feels that all of our programs should be structured in a way that ensures they best suit the developmental needs of players, which will require program modifications based on the age of the players participating. You see this in the use of small-sided rules at younger age levels while the game slowly progresses to 'adult soccer' as the players get older. A travel soccer program should also be designed to best fit players at each age level, even within the same 'type' (Academy, Challenge, Classic, etc.) We also believe that more often than not, younger players 'age up' when they shouldn't. An aspiring young player who ages up may find themselves playing much less than they would on a younger team, hurting their development opportunities or facing a higher level of opponent that makes it difficult for them to improve their skills. The league strongly discourages aging up, especially at the U9 through U12 levels, except in exceptional circumstances. Our goal is to be able to provide appropriate teams for players of all competitive skill levels to participate on within their age group.

## **Types of Travel Soccer**

As an affiliate of the North Carolina Youth Soccer Association (NCYSA), the MYSA has four soccer programs available to it: Recreation, U10 Academy, Challenge, and Classic. Three of these involve travel. The MYSA has decided not to offer an official Academy program though the NCYSA, and instead offers our own U9 Development program as part of US Club Soccer, based on many of the ideals put forth in the Academy program. So the MYSA offers the following levels of travel soccer:

- Classic (U11 through U18)
- Challenge (U10 through U18)
- Select (U9)

Recognizing the broad spectrum of players and abilities, our travel programs will vary based on the age of players and the level being played. We don't differentiate between Challenge and Classic beyond recognizing the different levels of competition they provide. We encourage our parents and coaches to view them the same way. In our view, Challenge is simply '3<sup>rd</sup> Division' Classic. The difference between Challenge and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic is often much less than people expect. Teams will be placed at a level the league feels will provide them with the appropriate amount of competition while allowing them to be successful against some opponents. We would rather see a team play at a lower level and gain the freedom to develop all players vs. play at a higher level and only be competitive if certain players see little playing time. However we also recognize that some teams will develop faster when facing stiffer competition, so teams may be put into strong levels where they may see less wins, but will likely develop more. Thus this document doesn't differentiate between Challenge and Classic – it's all 'Travel Soccer'.

## U9 Select Program (6v6)

The MYSA has found that many players who should be playing at a level higher than Recreation don't tryout because they believe they aren't good enough. This is especially true of girls on coed teams whose parents and even coaches struggle to accurately assess their abilities on a true peer (gender split) basis. Others are just scared of the unknown and need a chance to 'ease' into competitive travel soccer. From a developmental standpoint, the need for intensive core skills development often comes at the cost of winning during games.

In light of this, we have created the U9 Select program. This program is designed to give U8 and U9 age players a chance to develop into stronger soccer players, at a level beyond recreation, without the stress and intensity of a full on competitive travel program like U10 Challenge. Yet these are still travel soccer teams, with matches against area leagues like Guilford United, Burlington, Greensboro, Triangle United, and others. These teams may also participate in a tournament or festival each season, giving them a chance to experience larger events. The training program will be overseen by the MYSA Director of Coaching and will be run by the select coaches with assistance from other senior coaches from our Challenge and Classic divisions. Skills training is also provided once a week during periods of each season.

The main objective of this program is to provide an environment where players can:

- Work on skill development at a level beyond a Recreational team.
- Play and train with peers of similar skill.
- Get familiar with playing with a gender split team and light travel.
- Prepare themselves for competitive travel play in U10 Challenge.
- Receive comprehensive skills training from qualified coaches.

Understanding that these players are only 8 or 9 years old, the program is designed to provide as much playing time as possible, with moderate travel, and minimal pressure to win. Scores and standings are not kept. Instead we focus on providing each team with a variety of opponents to face to help them develop as players.

## U10 Travel Program (6v6)

U10 Challenge is a unique program in terms of competitive travel soccer (6v6, no offside, small field). Due to Classic not starting until U11, many U10 Challenge teams are actually composed of players who will likely move to Classic at U11. However, U10 is a critical development age. Rather than lump this group in with many common ideas behind 'travel soccer' (no assurances of playing time, players must be challenge 'ready', etc.), **we view U10 Challenge as primarily a development program** that still exposes players to a competitive environment. Teams will be formed so they are balanced, instead of forming 'A' and 'B' teams. The U10 Challenge Program will:

- Recognize during tryouts that players should be judged on their **potential** to be strong travel players. At this age, some players will stand out while others will show subtle signs they may break out at an older age. All of these players should be given the opportunity to play and develop at a higher level. Teams will be formed based on player skill level to ensure player train with peers that have skill levels near their own.
- Focus on development of ALL players on a team, even at the expense of winning
- Coaches must play ALL players at least **50%** of a match, knowing that sometimes players learn best and gain confidence in actual game play situations. Ideally players will play close to equal time. If players did not attend all practices in a previous week, they may be played less than 50% during that week's matches, but this will be an exception.

- Encourage coaches to rotate players through most positions, while still keeping a team competitive. This requires that coaches change tactics based on opponents, scores, etc.
- Provide players with one or two tournament, friendly, or festival opportunities per season. It is recommended the tournament be within driving distance to reduce travel costs. All teams should participate in the NCYSA State Festival if it is held within day driving distance.

U10 teams will be formed to maximize the availability of roster slots for challenge 'capable' players. While efforts will be made to form more teams with smaller rosters to ensure more playing time per player per match, if circumstances prevent this (coach availability, size of 'capable' player pool, etc), rosters will be maxed out (12) to ensure the the maximum number of players at that age are being developed. This will help ensure the player pool at the Challenge and Classic levels is deep enough to support the larger teams that come at U11 and U13, when roster sizes increase.

## U11/U12 Program (8v8)

As players move up to 8v8, ***the focus will still be on core skill and player development.*** However, we recognize that teams will be looking to compete and succeed within their division. The key will be striking the proper balance. At the U11/U12 level, the development experience will:

- Continue to focus on core skill development, with the gradual introduction of more advanced soccer skills and game tactics, in preparation for the move to 11v11 at the U13 age level.
- Require that players play a minimum of 25% of a match **with the goal being 50% of a match or more.** Coaches are encouraged to rotate players on the bench into the match together at regular intervals, playing fairly balanced lineups.
- Encourage coaches to rotate players into less comfortable positions at times, while also starting to allow players to refine their abilities at their stronger positions.
- Recognize many players will be looking to play for middle school teams in their U13 and U14 years, so coaches should try to prepare them for that mentally as well as physically.
- Provide players with a handful of tournament, friendly, and/or festival opportunities. Events requiring significant travel should be limited to once per season.

U11/U12 Challenge teams will be formed to maximize the availability of roster slots for travel 'capable' players. While efforts will be made to form more teams with smaller rosters to ensure more playing time per player, if circumstances prevent this (coach availability, size of 'capable' player pool, etc), rosters should be maxed out (14) to ensure the maximum number of players are being developed. This will help ensure the player pool at the Challenge and Classic levels is deep enough to support the larger teams that come at U13. Classic teams will be limited in size to maximize playing time of the players and also ensure a narrower span of player abilities, if the player pool allows. In cases where no Challenge teams exist below a Classic team at a given age, consideration should be made to expand the roster as needed to help as many players as possible to continue their development.

## U13/U14 Program (11v11)

These years are marked by players moving to the full size (11v11) game and increased demands on their time if they participate in middle school soccer programs. Players at this level have moved beyond the core skill development phase (though that is always worked on) and are focusing more on team interactions, tactical understanding, and adjusting to game play. Teams at this level will have a focus more attuned to results and will be formed of players who are 'ready'.

At the U13/U14 level, the travel experience will:

- Focus on bringing players to 'the next level' through intensive training and exposure to top level competition.

- Work to get players to utilize their core skills in a creative manner on the much larger field.
- Provide players with a handful of tournament, friendly, and/or festival opportunities. Events requiring significant travel should be limited to once or twice per season. All U13/U14 teams should participate in the NCYSA State Cup.

## **U15-U18 Program (11v11)**

While similar to the U13/U14 program, players at this level only play one season per year and often play for high school teams during the other season. Girls play Challenge/Classic in the Fall and at school in the Spring. The boys do the opposite. Coaches at this level should closely coordinate with the local school coaches and try to take both club and school obligations into account.

## **Promotion/Relegation**

A major concern of the MYSA is that teams are placed at a level where they belong. Place a team at too high of a level and they will get beaten often, lose confidence, and struggle to improve. Too low of a level will likely result in easy wins with top players bored and coaches struggling to contain the score. However, it can often be impossible to judge where a team should go or how well they will advance.

As noted previously, the MYSA views Challenge as 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Classic and will recommend that teams be promoted and relegated between Challenge and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic just like teams are moved between divisions in Classic (2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Premier). Team placement will ultimately be up to the DOC, the appropriate travel division directors, and tryout evaluation committee. However, the following guidelines have been established to give parents, coaches, and players an idea how the MYSA will handle team placement each year. These guidelines assume a team has seen little player turnover or change in overall ability due to addition (or subtraction) of a few players. Otherwise a team will be placed based solely on the perceived ability of the new roster.

U10 teams will all play in Challenge in the Fall. If a team is absolutely dominating U10 play in the Fall (undefeated, large goal differentials, etc.) the team may be moved to U11 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic for the Spring. In this case the team should probably move to U11 1<sup>st</sup> Division the next Fall.

Beyond U10, teams should be moved between Challenge and Classic based on the following guidelines and the recommendations of the DOC, division directors, and coaches:

- Teams finishing in the bottom 25% of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic in the Spring should be moved to Challenge in the fall. Exceptions to this will be when the difference between the two levels is enough to warrant keeping a team up to play stronger competition.
- Teams in a single Challenge division that finish in the top 50% in the Fall and top 25% in the Spring should be considered for promotion to 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic.
- Teams in split Challenge divisions that are placed in the top Spring division and finish in the top 25% should be considered for 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic.
- U11-U13 allow for teams to be 'self-selected' into Classic divisions. Most U11 teams should start in 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the Fall, unless it is felt the team will be competitive in the Open Division. 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Classic teams which finish in the top 25% in the Fall should be considered for movement to the Open Division in the Spring.
- Knowing standings in a season can depend heavily on who a team plays, especially in single division age groups, the 'strength' of a team's schedule will also be taken into account when judging where a team should play in a future season. These guidelines also may be less applicable when teams move to U11 or U13, due to the sizable shift in team composition state wide as rosters increase in size.

## Mid Year Promotion/Relegation

U13 and above Classic teams are moved between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division after every season, depending on the previous season's results. Understanding that some teams make 'break out' in the Fall season, the MYSA should allow all travel teams to move between Challenge and Classic divisions between the Fall and Spring seasons. The same holds true for U11-U13 Classic, where self selection is in effect. The goal of the MYSA is to ensure teams are at an appropriate level each season that will maximize their development.

Players who accept roster slots on a travel team, **are accepting a team** slot, regardless of the level. If the league believes that team should move to another level of play before their Spring season, parents should be prepared for that. The logistical differences between Challenge and Classic are minimal. Decisions regarding mid season moves will be made by the DOC, the Challenge and Classic Directors, along with input from the coach.

## Mid Year Team Changes

Players make commitments to a travel team for a year. The MYSA does NOT allow players to change teams between the Fall and Spring seasons, except in the most extreme circumstances. Mid year tryouts will be held in late November/early December to fill any rosters spots that become available, but players on existing travel teams will generally **not** be eligible to participate. Exceptions to this require the approval of the MYSA Board of Directors, DOC, and appropriate division director.

## Attire/Uniforms

All MYSA Challenge and Classic teams will wear the same style uniform approved by the MYSA. Uniforms and soccer bags are provided to players **every two** years so please take care of the uniforms. Shinguard Velcro straps are the main cause of 'snags' – try to ensure the straps are always seated when guards are in the soccer bags. Players who outgrow their uniform in a year may have their uniform replaced at the league's discretion. Parents wishing to purchase a new uniform for their child before theirs is due to be replaced should contact the league. Teams may purchase warm-ups for their team, but the style must be one that has been approved by the league. All team banners should include the MYSA logo on them.

## Coach Coordination

The MYSA believes that travel team coaches need to stay 'connected' during a season to ensure teams are consistent in how they operate. To help foster this, the Challenge and Classic coordinators will organize regular meetings of the travel coaches to foster the sharing of ideas and support.

## Evaluations

The MYSA will provide parents with evaluation forms after each season to assess how coaches interacted with the parents and players and to see if parents are happy with a coaches performance (which is NOT the same as being happy with the team's performance measured by wins/losses) We strongly encourage parents to fill these evaluations out so the league can ensure our coaching staff remains the best it can be.

MYSA Coaches will also be expected to provide parents with a written player evaluation 1-2 times a year. These evaluations are meant to provide parents with feedback about their child's development and areas they need to work on. They are meant to be constructive, not critical, and very few players will get all top marks. They are honest and up front assessments of where a player is in their development and what they need to work on to improve.