

Soccer Age Level Change FAQs:

Suffield Soccer Club has received many questions from parents concerned about the new age-level changes recently adopted by the national youth soccer organizations and CJSA. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions:

Q: What is changing?

A: Starting in the fall of 2016 (registration for tryouts during the spring of 2016), all youth soccer player age levels will be determined by birth year instead of school year. For example, all players born during 2008 will be U9, players born in 2005 will be U12, 2002 will be U15. This changes the current age range that is based on a school-year calendar (August 1-July 31).

Q: Who does this age change really affect?

A: This age change affects those players with birthdays August 1- December 31 of any given year who are “older” in their respective grades. Currently these players are playing with their classmates that have a later birth year. Based on the new calendar year/birth year registration, they will now have to play in the next age division comprised mainly with players in the next grade.

Every age group, both girls and boys, within Suffield Soccer Club, has players in this situation. Alignment with the birth year mandate will likely result in these players playing with a new team. Teams will likely be losing a few existing players but would gain a few.

Q: Who made this change?

A: US Soccer and US Youth Soccer mandated this change. US Youth Soccer is the national governing body for youth soccer in the United States. Our state governing body for youth soccer, the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association (CJSA), is a member of US Youth Soccer and has mandated the required change for fall of 2016. Since Suffield Soccer Club is a member of CJSA, we must abide by this mandatory change.

Q: Why did US Soccer mandate this change?

A: Most of the world and the most highly competitive levels of US Youth soccer use the birth year system. The stated reason for the change is to improve player development. Here are several links to the reasons US Soccer thinks the change is good, including its own FAQ:

<http://www.ussoccer.com/stories/2015/08/24/18/07/150824-coaching-player-development-initiatives-rel>

<http://www.ussoccer.com/coaching-education/resources/2015-player-development-initiatives>

Q: When is the deadline?

A: US Soccer requires that all member teams, clubs, and organizations roster by birth year by fall 2017.

Q: If the deadline is fall 2017, why are we changing in 2016?

A: While 2017 is the drop-dead date, US Soccer encouraged all soccer associations to make the change in 2016. US Youth Soccer made the decision to implement this birth-year registration mandate starting August 1, 2016. As members of US Youth Soccer, CJSA and Suffield Soccer Club will have to adopt this birth-year registration this fall. Most clubs nationwide are targeting 2016. **Suffield Soccer Club did not have a choice -- it is a member of both CJSA and US Youth Soccer and has to abide with the governing decisions and rules.**

Q: Are there any “exceptional circumstances” where we would allow a team to stay together by moving up to play at next age level to accommodate a few older players?

A: Unclear at this time. This change is new to us, too. There has not been any guidance from US Soccer, US Youth Soccer nor CJSA, so we are looking at every possible scenario and outcome as well as surveying other clubs in our district.

Q: Our team has been together for years and we only need a waiver for one year (or two years, or three years) so we can end this together.

A: No waivers or exception noted by US Soccer or US Youth Soccer.

Q: What about players in eighth grade whose birthday would put them in a U15 age category?

A: This is the most contentious point of the new age-level standards. CJSA **has yet** to direct us toward a solution. One possibility is that these players will be allowed to join a U14 team during the fall season. CJSA currently has a U14/15 league during the fall season and it is expected that they will continue this practice come fall 2016. It is unclear if CJSA will create a U14/U15 Spring league to accommodate these 8th graders as U15, U16, U17, U18+ divisions are already established in the spring. The U15 8th graders already have option of playing with U15 or U15/U16 team. No one really knows yet.

Q: What are the biggest challenges?

A: The hardest change would be the first year for existing teams. By year two, the new teams would move on together. Players (and parents) will enlarge their circle of friends. New carpools are formed. We are confident that our players and parents will adapt.

Q: Is the change really a done deal?

A: US Soccer is the sanctioning body. It has flowed out the mandate and for the present time this is a done deal. We encourage you to let US Soccer know how you feel. Several petitions already exist:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/.../no-to-us-soccer.../>

<https://www.facebook.com/Stop-the-Birth-Year-Mandate-for.../>

Q: Where can I find more information?

A: US Soccer has information on its web site.

Please know that all of us on the Board at Suffield Soccer want what is best for our kids, youth soccer, the players and their families. We are parents and coaches and would not be part of the volunteer organization if we did not love the game. We know that this transition will be hard for some players, parents, and coaches. **This change is beyond our control.** While we don't necessarily agree with these decisions, our job is to implement the change as best we can. In time, the change-over year will be forgotten, kids will continue to play soccer and Suffield Soccer will continue to provide a great option for our kids and families. We hope to have your support in making this change as smooth as possible for our players, coaches, and parents.

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