



## LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

Box 360 Bryn Mawr, PA 19010  
www.lmsc.net soccer@lmsc.net

### YOUTH SOCCER CHANGES BEGINNING IN THE 2016-2017 SEASON

Biff Sturla  
President, Lower Merion Soccer Club  
January 19, 2016

U.S. Soccer will be mandating many changes for youth soccer. Some of these changes will take effect this fall while other changes will not take effect until the fall of 2017. These changes will affect many of our programs and affect many of our younger players. This document will give everyone a brief overview of the changes they will be mandating.

#### **NO HEADING FOR PLAYERS AGES 10 AND UNDER**

Players ages 10 and under will not be allowed to head a ball in games or practices. U.S. Soccer has not yet determined exactly which travel team age groups this will affect. This will be announced at a later date. Also, the penalty for a player heading a ball in a game has not yet been announced.

For players ages 11-13, U.S. Soccer will mandate that there be only a "limited" amount of heading in practices. Heading in games will be allowed. Sometime in the future, U.S. Soccer will define how much heading will be allowed in practices.

These changes will most likely go into effect during the fall 2016 season.

The changes were made as a result of a law suit incurred by U.S. Soccer. The lawsuit will be dropped if they agree to make these changes. The thinking behind these rules is that some people believe that repetitive heading of a ball has a harmful effect on young children. Studies however have NOT concluded this to be true. The subject is debated by almost everyone in the soccer world and is considered to be very controversial.

My opinion: I have been involved in soccer for 50 years and have not seen negative effects from heading soccer balls. I have seen concussions resulting from two players banging heads with each other, players falling to the ground head first and from players being kicked in the head by an opponent. I honestly have not seen a concussion resulting from heading a soccer ball. I think this rule is not going to do anything positive for anyone. But, that's just my opinion and LMSC will adhere to all mandates made. If someone is looking to deal with a health problem, they should look at high school football which averages over 12 deaths a year in the United States.

#### **SMALL SIDED GAMES**

LMSC has been way ahead on this issue for the past 20 years. U.S. Soccer will mandate smaller sided games for players 12 and under. Games for travel teams who are U-9 and U-10 will play 7 vs. 7 (6 field players and a goalie). Games for travel teams who are U-11 and U-12 will play 9 vs. 9 (8 field players and a goalie). Our travel teams have been playing 8 vs. 8 for the past 20+ years so this is not much of a change. Games for U-13 and up will continue to be full sided 11v11.

At LMSC, our younger age intramural age groups have been playing small sided games for over 20 years. We currently play 4 vs. 4 for our 4-6 year old age groups and 5 vs. 5 for our 7 year old age groups. We will observe games this spring and fall and determine if any changes should be made, but our intramural programs have been pretty much using the new U.S. Soccer initiatives for over 20 years.

## **NO GOALIE PUNTING FOR PLAYERS AGES 10 AND UNDER**

This rule will likely be going into effect in the fall. Its purpose is to encourage teams to not simply blast the ball down the field. Instead, it is hoped that teams will try to work the ball down the field, under control, via passing and dribbling. This will hopefully develop more skillful players. This rule will work in tandem with the next rule change ...

## **GAMES FOR 10 AND UNDER AGES WILL HAVE A "BUILD OUT LINE"**

This rule is being implemented to encourage teams to work the ball out of their defensive part of the field, rather than simply blasting the ball down the field (while the parents erroneously yell "way to kick it, Johnny"). The position of the Build Out Line has not been defined yet. There might be one Build Out Line at midfield. There might instead be two Build Out Lines, positioned similar to the blue lines used in ice hockey games.

The purpose of the Build Out Line(s) will be as follows: When a goalie gets possession of the ball with his / her hands or when there is a goal kick (how play resumes after the ball has gone over the end line when last touched by the attacking team), the other team will have to immediately retreat behind the Build Out Line. The team in possession will then have more time to work the ball out of their defensive area, under control, via passing and dribbling. The opposing team may not cross back over the Build Out Line until the ball has been put back into play (note: the rule MIGHT state that the opposing team may not cross back over the line until the ball has been touched a second time). Teams will now have more time to try and work the ball out of their defensive area, under control.

We do not know if this rule will be in effect for travel teams in the fall of 2016. It might not go into effect until the fall of 2017. LMSC will look into integrating this rule into some of our intramural divisions. This might not happen until after we have seen the rule being used in travel team games.

## **FIELD SIZES WILL CHANGE FOR SMALL SIDED GAMES**

For the past 20 years, all travel team games have played either 8v8 or 11v11. Starting this fall, travel teams will need fields for 7 vs. 7 games (Under 9 and Under 10), 9 vs. 9 games (Under 11 and Under 12) and 11 vs. 11 games (U-13 and older). U.S. Soccer is currently working to determine the minimum and maximum dimensions for each of the three field types. At the present time, this has not been finalized.

Our intramural fields will not be affected much since we have been using age appropriate game sizes and field sizes for the past 20+ years.

## **GAMES CHANGING FROM TWO HALVES TO THIRDS OR EVEN QUARTERS**

U.S. Soccer will be recommending that our youngest age groups switch from playing two halves to playing three periods (similar to ice hockey) or possibly quarters. The philosophy behind this is to allow for more rest breaks for the players. At the present time, U.S. Soccer has not determined what their recommendations will be, what age groups will be affected or when these changes will take place.

LMSC will possibly switch to playing thirds in one or more intramural age group this spring to see how this change will affect the games. Currently, our games are played with two halves, but allow for coaches to request additional water breaks or timeouts, as needed, based on the weather and the number of players each team has at the game.

## **GOAL SIZES**

Travel team games up through U-12 currently play 8v8 and use 7 x 21 foot goals. U.S. Soccer will be asking clubs to switch to slightly smaller 6 ½ x 18 foot goals. But, the change will not have to be made right away since this is such a huge economic issue. Teams will only be asked to make the switch when they next purchase goals. Clubs who are currently using 7 x 21 foot goals (including LMSC) may continue to use them. U.S. Soccer will just ask clubs to buy the slightly smaller size when new goals are needed. This policy will also affect applicable intramural age groups.

## **CHANGE TO CALENDAR YEAR REGISTRATION**

Our intramural teams are already being organized based on the players' **year** of birth. This will not change in the intramural program. Parents may also continue to register for an older age group or a younger age group if they feel a different age group is more appropriate for their child.

This change will greatly affect all travel teams throughout the United States. Since 1991, travel team eligibility has been determined using August 1<sup>st</sup> as the oldest birthdate allowed in each age group. Starting this fall (actually at travel team tryouts this spring), eligibility will be determined by using January 1<sup>st</sup> as the birthdate for the oldest player. Most travel teams will now have all their players born in the same year. Teams may however roster underage players, if approved by their club. LMSC will only allow underage players to play on travel teams that are high school age. All other teams will be formed in full compliance with the new birth year cutoff.

This change was made so that travel teams from the United States will be using the same age group classifications as almost every other country in the world. Currently, if a team plays in a tournament in Canada or Europe, they would be playing against teams with different age group eligibility. U.S. Soccer has always had their national youth teams formed based on a players' year of birth since competitions such as the Youth World Cups use the year of birth standard. By making this change, our travel teams will be in compliance with our state teams, regional teams and national teams.

### **Travel team age groups for the 2016 – 2017 season will be formed as follows (with tryouts held in April & May, 2016):**

2010 Births	Under 7	Developmental Academy Only
2009 Births	Under 8	One boys travel team, one girls travel team, plus Developmental Academy
2008 Births	Under 9	
2007 Births	Under 10	
2006 Births	Under 11	
2005 Births	Under 12	
2004 Births	Under 13	
2003 Births	Under 14	
2002 Births	Under 15	
2001 Births	Under 16	
2000 Births	Under 17	
1999 Births	Under 18	

A team's age group is calculated as the year the season ends minus the players' birth year. Thus, players born in 2005 would play in the Under 12 age group since the season ends (2017) minus their birth year (2005) makes 12.

If you have questions about the upcoming changes being implemented by U.S. Soccer or how they will affect your child, please feel free to e-mail me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Biff Sturla  
President, Lower Merion Soccer Club  
[soccer@lmsc.net](mailto:soccer@lmsc.net)