



# U.S. Soccer Federation

Player Development in the United States

# CHANGE

\chānj\ *vb* changed; chang-ing [ME, fr. AF *changer*, fr. L *cambiare* to exchange, (13c) 1a: to make different in some particular : ALTER; 1b: to make radically different : TRANSFORM; 1c: to give a different position, course, or direction to

- The Problem

- Our players are not good enough at the highest levels – we need to get better

# The Landscape Challenge

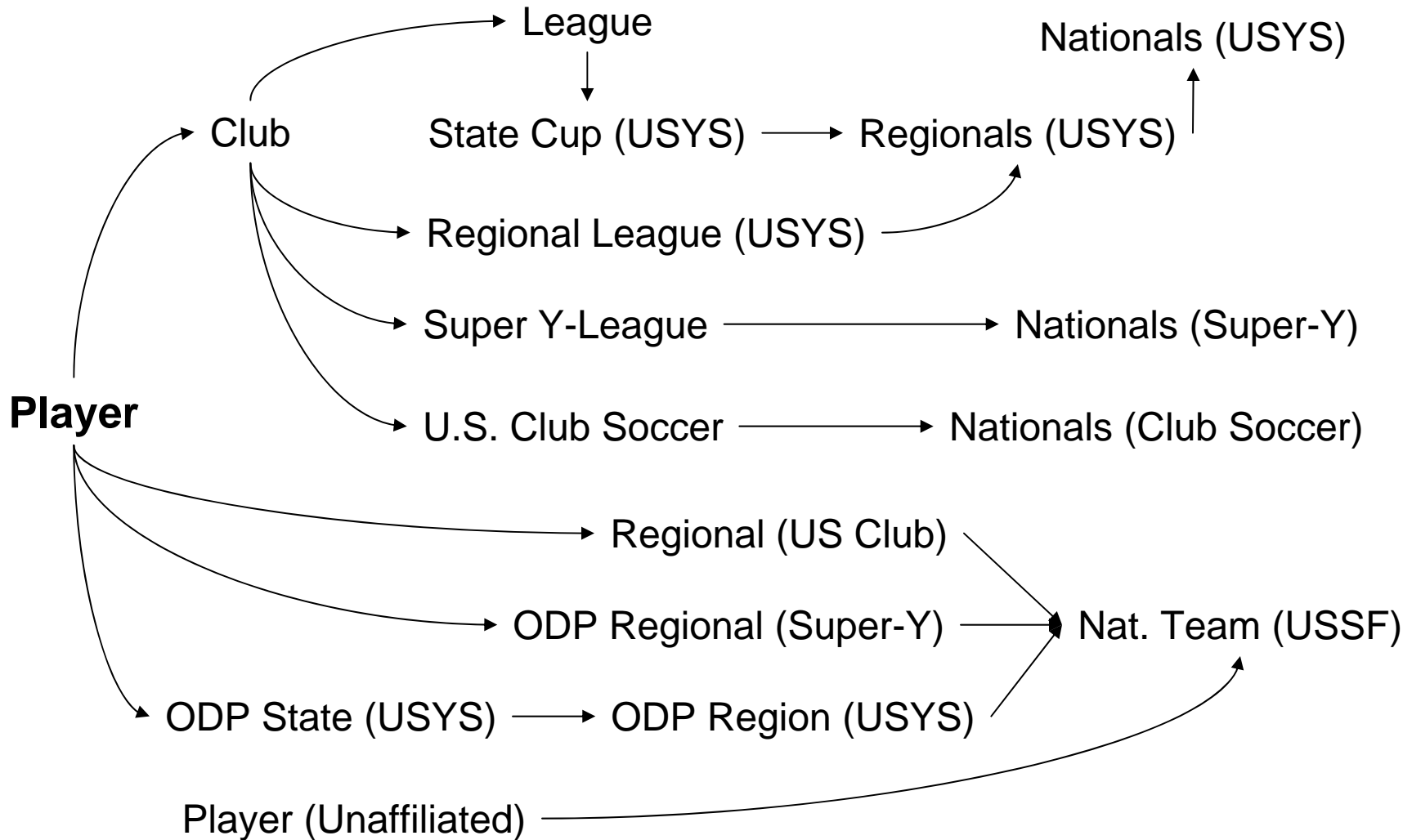
- We are faced with a number of substantial challenges to player development in the U.S.
  - Geography
  - Climate
  - Lack of Professional Infrastructure
  - Focus on winning at an early age
  - Composition of Playing Population (Majority are under the age of 10 and are recreation level players)
  - Economic Incentives vs. Other Sports
  - Education as a Priority
  - Wide-range of opportunities in other areas (music, video games, etc.)
- These challenges as a whole are unique to the U.S.
  - Other countries also face their own challenges
- We need to tackle these challenges to create momentum in the largest sense possible

# The Problem – Player and Coaches' View

- In speaking to our NT coaches and NT players, Club Coaches and having three U.S. Soccer's Technical Task Force meetings, a set of unanimous issues arose
  - Our players are entering the international arena behind their counter-parts around the world
    - Technically (comfort with the ball)
    - Physically (soccer specific characteristics)
    - Tactical knowledge and understanding
    - Less mentally prepared (discipline/commitment)
  - The environment of the elite player is not good enough
    - Youth players are stretched too thin
    - Too many games (up to 100 per year)
    - Not enough good games/competition (12-16 “good” games per year)
    - Limited/low number of training sessions

# The Problem – Player and Coaches View

- Looking at the typical elite players' world – we understand why they feel stretched too thin.



# Improvement

- What we know about player development:
  - Everyday Training Environment is most critical and the current daily environment is not satisfying the elite players' needs
  - National Team Training is Good but too Narrow
  - There is no magic bullet – this is a long-term process
  - Training vs. Talent – we can use a scientific approach to improve players and training
  - It's a Numbers Game – Developing more elite players helps the level of all players
- Therefore, we focused our thinking on solutions that:
  - Could/would impact multiple thousands of players, not hundreds (i.e. – extend National Team programming)
  - Influence the everyday environment of the elite player

# EXECUTION

\ek-si-kyut\ vb –cut•ed; -cuting [ME, fr. AF *executer*, fr. *execucion*] vt (14c) 1 : to carry out fully : to put completely into effect <~a command> 2 : to do what is provided or required by <~a decree>

- We have defined three areas/zones of development and the dynamics that are at play in each age grouping
  - Zone 1 – Base Level
    - Ages 6-12
  - Zone 2 – Growth Level
    - Ages 13-17
  - Zone 3 – Elite Level
    - Above the age of 17
- We then focused on solutions for Zone 2 as the pivotal age grouping

# Development of a player through the years

- Base Level (Ages 6-12)  
“The ball is your best friend”
  - Dynamics
    - Introduction to the game; huge participation numbers from age 6 to 10
    - Limited knowledge base from most coaches
    - Players who develop physically at an early age are typically the “stars”
    - Current environment places too much emphasis on winning v. developing a passion for the game and the fundamentals of the game
  - Assessment Summary
    - Need more free play, less structure – futsal, playground, etc.
    - Encourage passion and experimentation
    - Encourage technical training and the most basic building blocks of the game (1 v. 1, 2.v 1, 2 v. 2, etc.) vs. positional training
- Growth Level (Ages 13-17)  
“The developmental years”
  - Dynamics
    - Players start to take the game more seriously; participation numbers drop off
    - Still an emphasis on those who stand out physically
    - Over-emphasis on winning in this age group
    - For many, the end objective is college
  - Assessment Summary
    - Need to eliminate clutter in the environment – elite players are stretched too thin
    - Clubs drive this age group due to everyday interaction
    - Meaningful training is important
- Elite Level (Above the age of 17) “The lost years”
  - Dynamics
    - Players now “ending” their careers/numbers drop off even further
    - The most talented players are professionals (very small numbers)
    - Others go to college
    - Players are still not fully formed – physically and technically
  - Assessment Summary
    - Key time period to refine and advance skills for the elite level player
    - # of opportunities for elite players drops substantially
    - There is a gap between pro environment and college option

# Making an Impact

- Based on the assessments of the National Team coaches and the Technical Committee, there is an urgent need to improve and change in Zone 2, based on the following parameters:
  - *Impact multiple thousands of players, not hundreds*
  - *Improve everyday environment of elite players*
- We studied a number of areas to see what insights we could gain
  - Internally
    - U-17 Program in Bradenton and other National Team programming
    - Individual NT Coaches and Players
    - Clubs across the country (as previously discussed)
  - Externally outside of Soccer
    - Scientific research/Other areas of development (music, education)
  - Soccer world outside of the United States
    - Other Countries – Clubs and Federations

# U-17 Residency Program

- Started in 1999, the U-17 Residency has been able to develop players for professional and National Team competition
  - Operates with high training/game ratios
  - Focus on providing a good everyday training environment
- Program has evolved from 18 players to 40 players in residency at a time
- 192 total players have participated in Residency
  - 5 players in 2006 World Cup were from Residency
    - Landon Donovan, DaMarcus Beasley, Oguchi Oneywu, Bobby Convey, Eddie Johnson
  - 48 players have become professionals in MLS and Europe
  - All other players whose chose to play soccer in college were offered a scholarship

# Areas outside of Soccer

- We also studied areas outside of soccer that face similar challenges in “development”
  - Other types of development (education in the inner-cities – Harlem Children’s Zone)
    - Educating one-student for college v. many students is similar to National Team training (one student) v. Local Clubs (many students)
  - Scientific research on Training v. Talent – Greatness is determined by amount of quality training as opposed to “natural” talent
    - Dr. Doug Fields – NIH Neuroscientist
    - Howe, Davidson, Sloboda – Focus on music talent development
    - Dr. Benjamin Bloom – Expertise development model (1970’s)
    - Dr. Carol Dweck – “Achievement Goal Theory”
    - Dr. Anders Ericsson – “Expertise and Expert Performance”

# Worldwide Development

- We reviewed countries with similar situations or success in developing world-class players
  - Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Spain
- Spoke to their Federation and Club officials to get perspectives on both sides of the process
- Looked at raw data on each country
  - Physical attributes (size of country)
  - Economic attributes (per capita income and poverty levels)
  - Population levels across age groups
  - Number of Clubs in each country
- A common theme in all developed nations is that clubs develop players
- How do we impact more players in their **everyday environment**?
  - **ANSWER = FOCUS ON CLUBS**

# Zone 2 Solutions

- We need to find a solution that enables the clubs to:
  - 1) **Increase** the quality and quantity of training for elite players
  - 2) **Increase** the number of quality games
  - 3) **Reduce** the overall amount of games
- ***Essentially – How do we replicate what we have in Bradenton across the country on an everyday basis?***
- ***Answer – U.S. Soccer Development Academy***





# The Concept

- Try to replicate Bradenton at a local level by designating 64 clubs across the country as U.S. Soccer Development Academies and removing these players from the current system
  - Bradenton program will continue to operate
  - Allow clubs to focus on proper training and high level competition by having teams/players only play in the Academy system
  - Players from ages 13 to 17 in two age groups (U-16 & U-18)
- U.S. Soccer to provide a core curriculum for training and calendar for Academy League games
- Academies will be scouted by NT coaches and scouts
- Apply key learning from the NT program
  - Bring coaches together once/twice per year for best practices discussions

# The New Model for Elite Players



- New model focuses on training and simplifies the life of the elite player
- Direct connection to National Team coaches/scouts



Players not in the Academy system will continue in the current model of Club and ODP with USYS, Super Y-League or U.S. Club Soccer

# Development Academy Highlights



- Academy teams will play each other in a 30 game Academy League schedule plus Nike Friendlies
  - Schedule will vary depending on high school season
- *U.S. National Teams in Residency will play in the Academy League*
- Clubs have open rosters with a minimum of 20 players
  - 18 can be on a game roster
  - Minimum number of starts required for each player to ensure focus on development
  - Players in the Academy program can play up, but not down
- Other teams within the club will remain in current system (USYS, Super-Y, Red Bull, etc.)
- Academy Finals held at Home Depot Center

# Thoughts from our National Team Coaches

- *U.S. Men's National Team Head Coach, Bob Bradley*
  - "I'm very excited about the establishment of the U.S. Soccer Development Academy Program. It is very important for U.S. Soccer to work with our top clubs to ensure that our best young players are constantly being challenged in an environment that best promotes player development. With a tremendous amount of reach, this program will help focus training sessions and matches on the areas that are critical to elevating our young players' ability to compete at the elite levels of the sport."
- *U.S. Under-17 Men's National Team Head Coach, John Hackworth*
  - "It's a concept that youth soccer in this country desperately needs and our goal is to truly shift the focus towards increasing player development. I think it will create a day-to-day training environment that will allow players the opportunity to develop to the best of their ability. Right now we have only 40 players in that type of environment here in Bradenton, but this Academy will allow us to put thousands of kids in a similar environment, which will help us raise the entire level across the nation. We are also looking forward to our U-16 group playing in the Academy and to scouting the players in their natural environment."
- *U.S. Under-20 Men's National Team Head Coach, Thomas Rongen*
  - "Providing players with a better situation to develop at these crucial ages will be greatly beneficial to all of the national teams, from the U-20s to the U-23s and eventually the full team. The more players we can expose to the high-level of training and competition that will be provided in the Development Academy, the better for the entire development of the sport in the United States."
- *U.S. Soccer Director of Coaching Education & Youth Development and U-18 Men's National Team Head Coach, Bob Jenkins*
  - "The Academy is a comprehensive approach to help develop the top players across the nation, but it is also designed to be a working model for the grassroots level. All the clubs involved will be moving in the same direction giving us a similar approach to player development, and then these clubs will act almost like satellites out in the country helping to spread the message out to the clubs around them."
- *U.S. Soccer U-14 Development Program Head Coach, Manny Schellscheidt*
  - "At this level, we shouldn't be so concerned about the results, but rather the players' performance. We want kids to love the game, enjoy getting better and get more comfortable with the game. The Development Academy puts our emphasis on players' development not on trying to create the most winning team. It's all about the basics that we so often skip in favor of the quick result. Playing well is the key, and, eventually, if you know how to play the results will come."

# Exposure for Players



- Scouting
  - Academy will provide players with an opportunity to be seen on a regular basis against top competition
  - U.S. Soccer Youth National Team and National Staff Coaches will scout the Development Academy matches
  - Professional Clubs will scout the Development Academy matches
  - College coaches will use the Development Academy as a primary source of scouting

# Coaching and Refereeing

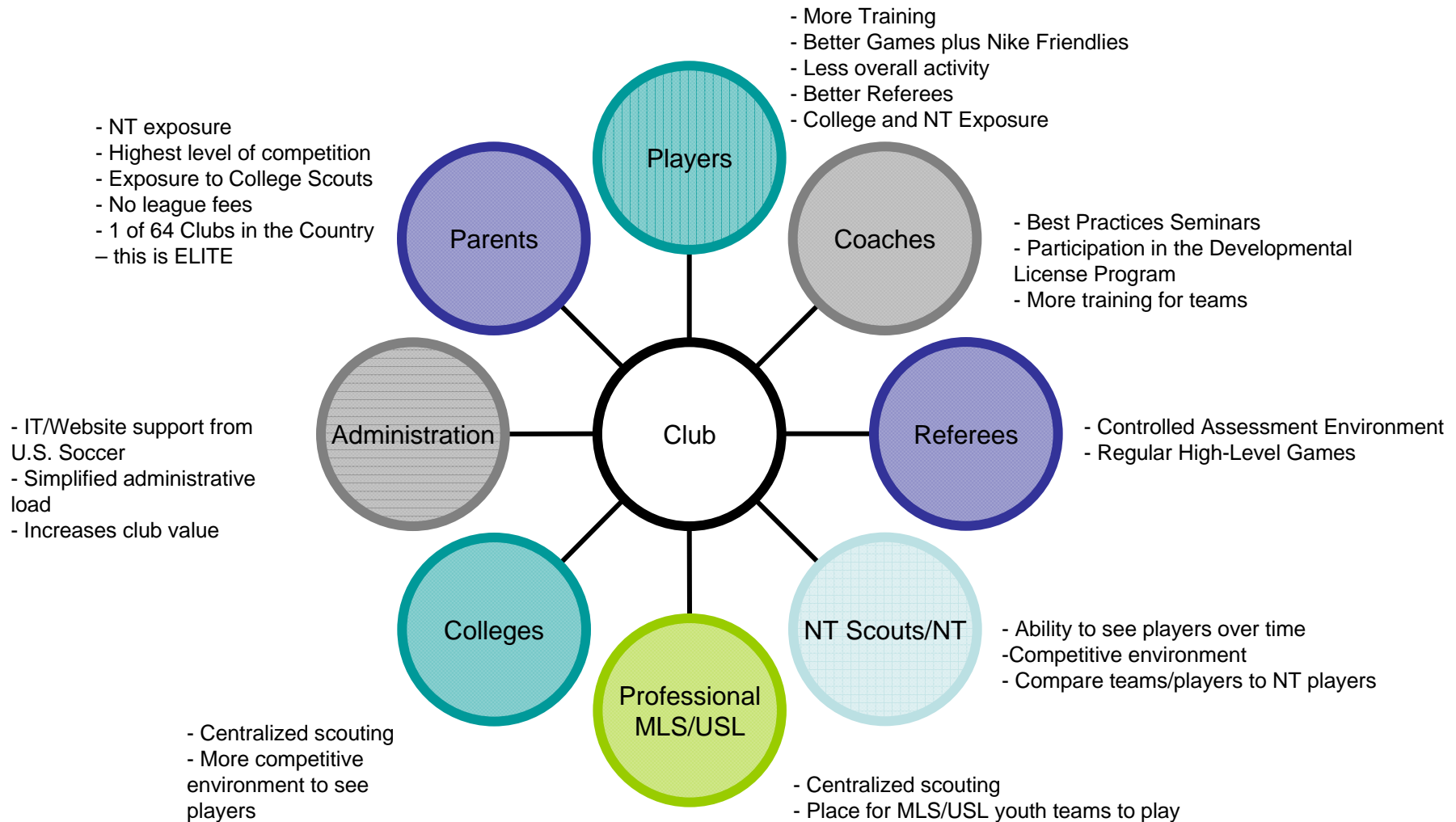


- Academy coaches will have the opportunity to improve their craft by working directly with U.S. Soccer
  - Best Practices Seminars (U.S. Soccer provides room and board)
  - Developmental License (in development)
    - Concept is a license specifically geared towards developing players
    - Five-year program that includes study abroad
  - Offered only to coaches in the Academy system
- Referees
  - Similar to the Nike Friendlies, U.S. Soccer will target the top up-and-coming officials for Development Academy matches
  - Provide assessments for these officials in higher level matches
  - Provide teams with higher quality officials



# Development Academy Benefits

- Participation offers benefits to all areas within the club and to the overall soccer landscape



# On the Field Details

Item	Academy Standard	Thought-Process
Age Brackets	U-18; U-16 Birthyear – U-18 = January 1, 1989 U-16 = January 1, 1991	There are three core dynamics with this issue 1) Ensuring that 17-year old players have a place to continue their development before college/pros. 2) Ensuring the proper physical match-ups to allow players to develop (15 year old players v. 17 year old players). 3) Remains consistent with our National Team programming at the youngest level and not burning out 13 year old players. Adopting an Academy-like schedule for younger players is an appropriate level of activity at the 12-13 age group.
Age Group Determination	January	January deadline aligns with international standards and makes a larger number of players eligible to participate in the Development Academy.
Roster Size	Minimum of 20 players; up to six “developmental” slots on a game roster; Initial roster submitted 21 days prior to first match	Clubs may have more players based on their individual judgment. Developmental players will be allowed to appear in up to 6 Academy games and will not be subject to minimum start requirements.
Roster Changes	Up to 4 changes from within the Club; Roster changes made on April 1 of the season; New roster players must be from within the Club.	Allows for Clubs to “promote” players and replace players who may want to leave the Academy system.
Minimum Playing Time	Each player must start a minimum of 30% of the games	This accomplishes two things: 1) Ensures coaches are looking at the development component of players; 2) Allows each player to gain meaningful experience and playing time
Substitutions	Maximum of 7; No-reentry	Allows the entire travel party to be eligible to participate; no re-entry ensures that the coach is looking at managing the entire game and not segments of the game through multiple re-entries in a single game.
Game Length	U-18 = 2 x 45 minutes U-16 = 2 x 40 minutes	This is consistent with U.S. Soccer’s Best Practices.
Training/Game Ratios	Minimum of 3 trainings and 1 day of rest per week	Ensures proper levels of activity for Academy players
Participation in outside activity	Permitted in designated windows with certain parameters – International travel or Events with a maximum of 1 game per day	Designated windows allow for meaningful competition, especially international events. Designated windows are Nike Friendlies, Christmas/New Years week; Easter and the end of the season to September 1.

# Academy Philosophy

- U.S. Soccer has established the following parameters regarding the philosophy of developing players for ages outside of those 14-17 years old:
  - The Academy program and Academy approach to player development begins at the younger ages (6-10, and 10-14) according to the principles outlined in the Best Practices - this approach and philosophy continues during the “competition” phase of the academy program (U-16 and U-18).
  - Academy clubs need to establish age appropriate developmental environments for the younger aged players in their club (6-10, 10-14).
  - Academy clubs have a responsibility to establish relationships with surrounding clubs at the grass roots level to ensure that the proper environment is created for the maximum number of players at the 6-10 and 10-14 year ages.

# U.S. Soccer Federation

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