Bedford Athletic Club (BAC)

Age Group Formation Policy

Effective: Fall 2026 | Approved: February 18, 2026

1. Purpose and Scope

Beginning Fall 2026, the New Hampshire Soccer Association (NHSA) / New Hampshire Soccer League (NHSL) will adopt the United States Youth Soccer (USYS) age-group formation cycle, grouping players by seasonal year (August 1 to July 31) instead of calendar year (January 1 to December 31). National youth soccer bodies, USYS, AYSO (American Youth Soccer Organization), and US Club Soccer, are aligning to this cycle to better match school-year cohorts. NHSA confirmed this change at its January 31, 2026 Annual General Meeting.

This policy establishes BAC's rules for the transition. The official USYS/NHSA age chart is BAC's source of truth for all age band placements. Families can look up their child's age group at usclubsoccer.org/registration-player-age-groups/. Spring 2026 is completely unchanged; new age bands take effect starting with Fall 2026 tryouts.

2. Player Placement Principles

Core principle: Age-appropriate placement first; team continuity second; no guarantees. All players are placed into their correct NHSL age group before any continuity considerations. No one is being "moved", the cutoff date changed, which means some players will have a different age-group label. Most age groups now include two birth years. This is a labeling change, not a developmental or skill judgment.

- **U12 and below:** Strict adherence to age-appropriate placement. No exceptions for continuity.
- **U13 and above:** Age-group placement first. Greater flexibility may be considered depending on player numbers and coaching capacity.

3. Play-Up, Exceptions, and Play-Down

School-Grade Alignment Exception: A player whose school grade placement is higher than typical for their birthday may request to try out in the age group that matches their school grade. This can occur, for example, for August or September birthdays in Bedford (school cutoff), as well as cases of early kindergarten entry or a grade skip. This exception is about school placement, not soccer ability. Requests must be submitted before tryouts with documentation (report card summary, school portal screenshot, or school letter). All exceptions require Board approval; coaches cannot approve play-up requests at any level.

Special-Case Play-Up: Rare and require Board pre-approval. Once approved, the player attends the older pod's evaluation and may be placed on any tier based on the same standards.

Play-Down: Not allowed for NHSL travel per league rules. BAC will support players through appropriate tiering, coaching, or recreational options.

No Younger Division Available: When NHSL does not offer a younger division (for example, at the youngest ages), those players register and are evaluated within the next available pod and may be placed on any tier, including Tier 1, based on evaluation. This is standard tier placement, not a play-up exception. BAC uses a guideline cap of 2 to 3 younger-than-age-band players on Tier 1 as a roster-balance measure; the Travel Co-Directors have discretion to exceed this for roster viability.

4. Team Formation and Tryouts

- **Pod model:** One pool tryout per age group; players evaluated on technical skills, coachability, effort, and placed into tiered teams.
- **Roster placement:** Coaches run sessions and provide input; final placements made by designated BAC volunteer coaches. A Pod Lead/Head Coach is assigned for each pod with multiple teams.
- **Roster targets:** Set prior to tryouts with an acceptable range per team.
- **Coach conduct:** No promises and no pre-determined rosters.

5. Team Naming

- **U10 and below (developmental):** Red (Tier 1), White (Tier 2), Black (Tier 3). Messaging emphasizes development and appropriate challenge.
- **U11 and older (competitive):** Elite (Tier 1), Premier (Tier 2), Select (Tier 3), aligned with league formats including State Cup, which begins at U11.

Note, added November 2026: Tiers are about meeting players where they are. What changes from tier to tier is the NHSL division a team plays in. Every team gets the same trainer-led practice and coaching support, and teams are formed fresh each year from that year's tryouts.

6. Season Roster Rules

- **Roster stability:** Placements are one-way for the season. Exceptions limited to injury, safety, or administrative reasons only.
- **Guest play / dual rostering:** Coach-managed with parent notification and Travel Co-Director visibility. Must comply with all NHSL/NHSA rules.
- **Uniforms:** Players retain current jersey numbers through the existing 2-year cycle. Duplicates permitted for all teams through Spring 2027. New uniform cycle begins Fall 2027.

7. Appeals

A one-time appeal may be submitted within 72 hours of the placement offer, only with new, relevant information (e.g., administrative error, missed documentation). Appeals based on evaluation judgment, player comparisons, or convenience are not accepted. The Board's decision is final.

8. Timeline

February 18: Board aligned on all policy decisions. Early March: Coach info session. March to April: Family communications including heads-up email, FAQ page on bedfordac.com. May: Tryouts under new age bands using the pod model. May to June: Roster placements and offer letters. August 2026: Fall season begins under Aug 1 to Jul 31 age groups.

9. Communication and Support

BAC will publish and maintain a centralized FAQ on bedfordac.com, updated as needed. A pre-tryout parent Q&A session will be held. Coaches will help answer general questions and redirect families to the FAQ. For questions not covered, contact TravelProgram@BedfordAC.com.

Approved by the BAC Board of Directors, February 18, 2026

Administrative update, November 14, 2026: draft label removed, Travel Director updated to Travel Co-Directors, a note on tiers added under Team Naming and minor wording cleaned up. No change to the policy itself.