

## JIYSC & LUSA



### Information on Birth Year Changes



As we continue our commitment to providing the best possible development environment for our players, we want to share more information regarding the upcoming changes to the age group registration that will take effect beginning with the 2026–2027 season. While change often brings questions, it also presents meaningful opportunities. At JIYSC/LUSA, our mission remains: To develop great people and enhance our community. Our purpose is to provide an opportunity for children of all ages to develop and enhance their soccer abilities while fostering a love for the game.. In the information that follows, we hope to provide clarity, context, and confidence as we move forward together.



# **BACKGROUND PRESENTED BY US CLUB SOCCER**

## **There are multiple reasons for this change.**

First, the Aug. 1 age group cut-off most effectively reduces the number of “trapped players” in youth soccer and reduces negative impacts on these players at multiple stages of their career. “Trapped” players are those who, due to soccer age group cut-offs, are in an older soccer age group than their school year. Trapped players have significantly reduced competition opportunities and disrupted training experiences in 8th grade (when most of their team is in high school) and are similarly negatively impacted four years later when players from the older soccer age group, but who are still in high school, are moved down into the same soccer age group.

Second, an Aug. 1 age group cut-off best aligns soccer age groups with school year ages, maximizing the number of players who participate in soccer programs with their school-year friends. This alignment has a positive correlation with increased numbers of youth players entering and staying in the sport.

This decision to move to the Aug. 1 cut-off reverts to the same age group cut-off used prior to 2017, when U.S. Soccer mandated a Jan. 1-Dec. 31 timeframe. U.S. Soccer removed this mandate in late 2024, empowering its Organization Members to make the most appropriate age group formation decision for their members. US Club Soccer, US Youth Soccer and AYSO – the three largest youth soccer organizations in the country – have remained in lockstep in making these decisions, recognizing the importance of consistency across the landscape.

## **Why is Aug. 1 a better age group cut-off than Sept. 1?**

Initially, US Club Soccer, US Youth Soccer and AYSO had determined to use a Sept. 1 age group cut-off instead of Aug. 1. After receiving significant feedback and identifying missing information in Department of Education school year cut-off lists, it has been determined that the Aug. 1 cut-off best reduces misalignment between age and school year. The Aug. 1 cut-off reduces not only the trapped player effect, but it also reduces the number of “force-ups,” a term referring to players in a younger soccer age group but older school year who must play up an age group in order to be with their school-year friends.

## OUR APPROACH

As we prepare for this transition, our focus remains where it has always been — on what is best for our players. We see this shift as an opportunity to be intentional about placing each child in an environment that appropriately challenges them, supports their long-term development, and builds a foundation for future success in the game.

Player development is not one-size-fits-all. It requires thoughtful evaluation, clear communication, and a commitment to growth over short-term outcomes. Our leadership team is approaching this process with a development-first mindset, ensuring that decisions are guided by what will most effectively help each player improve, gain confidence, and continue progressing in a positive direction.

At the same time, we recognize that soccer is about more than performance. The friendships, team bonds, and shared experiences our players build are meaningful and lasting. Any transition can bring a mix of excitement and uncertainty, particularly when it involves teammates and peer groups. We are committed to navigating this process with care, empathy, and respect for the social and emotional well-being of every child.

Communication will be a central part of our approach. Beginning in March, our Club Directors will start meeting with teams to discuss what this transition may look like at the team level and to answer questions directly. We believe these conversations will be an valuable step in ensuring that families feel informed, heard, and supported throughout the process.

Please note these meetings will occur in conjunction with regular practice sessions.

## HOW THIS AFFECTS TEAMS BY LEAGUE

JYISC/LUSA competes in a variety of leagues, and listed below is a breakdown of how the age group change will impact leagues and age groups for the 2026-2027 season and beyond:

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR PLAYER

- Players born August 1 – December 31 will generally "move down" an age group.
- Players born January 1 – July 31 will generally "move up" an age group.
- Teams will now span two calendar birth years (e.g., a U12 team might include players born August 1, 2014 – July 31, 2015, plus any approved play-up/play-down exceptions).

League	Sanctioning Body	Age Group Format 2026-2027	Notes
Girls Academy Aspire	Independent	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment
Development Premier League	USSSA	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment
MLS NEXT (Academy Division)	Independent	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment
National Academy League	US Youth Soccer	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment
South Carolina Youth Soccer Association	US Youth Soccer	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment
Coastal Premier League	US Youth Soccer	August 1 – July 31	Switching to seasonal-year alignment

## AGE GROUP CHART 2026/2027 SEASON

Age Group	Birth Date Range for the 2026-27 Season
U7	Aug 1, 2019 - Jul 31, 2020
U8	Aug 1, 2018 - Jul 31, 2019
U9	Aug 1, 2017 - Jul 31, 2018
U10	Aug 1, 2016 - Jul 31, 2017
U11	Aug 1, 2015 - Jul 31, 2016
U12	Aug 1, 2014 - Jul 31, 2015
U13	Aug 1, 2013 - Jul 31, 2014
U14	Aug 1, 2012 - Jul 31, 2013
U15	Aug 1, 2011 - Jul 31, 2012
U16	Aug 1, 2010 - Jul 31, 2011
U17	Aug 1, 2009 - Jul 31, 2010
U19	Aug 1, 2007 - Jul 31, 2009

## PLAYER BENEFITS

The new August cutoff creates age groups that are more closely aligned in physical, cognitive, and emotional development.

This means:

- More consistent, stable training environments throughout the year.
- Smoother transitions between middle school and high school.
- Players born later in the year will now compete with peers at similar developmental stages, allowing them to grow with greater confidence.
- Many players who were previously among the youngest in their age group will now have the opportunity to step forward, compete more evenly, and potentially become some of the strongest players in their new group, a benefit that will be especially noticed during college recruitment.

## OUR PRIORITIES

1. Place players where they will thrive individually.
2. Create training environments aligned with school grade when possible.
3. Balance physical, cognitive, and emotional development needs.
4. Maintain competitive team environments.
5. Communicate with clarity, honesty, and transparency.
6. Our staff will meet consistently to review player needs and placement.
7. Final decisions will prioritize long-term development, not short-term convenience.

# AGE GROUP FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is changing for the 2026/27 season:**
  - Beginning in the 2026/27 season, JIYSC/LUSA will follow the new U.S. Soccer Age Group model, which follows the August 1 to July 31 player registration.
- **Why is this change happening?**
  - U.S. Soccer is aligning youth soccer with the age-group structure used by most school systems. This helps keep more players with their classmates and creates a more consistent development pathway.
- **How will this affect my child's team placement?**
  - Your child may move to a different age group than previous seasons. Some teammates may shift up or down depending on birthdays.
  - **Important:** No player will be moved without thoughtful evaluation. Our focus is ensuring that each child is placed in the most appropriate environment for their development.
- **Will my child tryout again?**
  - All players will participate in standard annual evaluations/tryouts, just as they always have. The new cutoff date will simply determine which age group they attend.
- **Will my child be separated from his/her friends?**
  - We understand the importance of social connections. While teams must follow the new age-group rules, coaches will do everything possible to support players and families during the transition.
- **Does this affect playing time?**
  - No. Placement is based on ability, development needs, and readiness, not solely on the cutoff date. Some players may play up when appropriate.
- **How is this better for development?**
  - The age-group structure:
    - Creates a smoother alignment with school grade level.
    - Helps players grow physically, technically, and socially within a more consistent environment.

# AGE GROUP FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is JIYSC/LUSA doing to support players during the transition?**
  - Staff reviewed age group projections
  - Staff and parent education
  - Clear communication on placement timelines (more to follow)
  - Player evaluations that consider both ability and well-being
  - Opportunities for players to meet new teammates before the season starts
- **When exactly does this change take effect?**
  - The new August 1 – July 31 system starts with the 2026-2027 seasonal year (Fall 2026 tryouts and registration). The entire 2025-2026 season remains under the current birth year rules.
- **Can my child play up an age group?**
  - Players will be evaluated to play up on a case-by-case basis and will be determined on a development-based outlook.
- **Will this affect high school soccer eligibility?**
  - No. High school eligibility is determined by your state's athletic association and school grade/age rules, not club soccer age groups.
- **My child has a late birthday and has struggled with being the youngest – will this help?**
  - Yes! The seasonal-year alignment is designed to reduce the "relative age effect" and "trapped player" issues that have impacted many families under the birth year system.
- **If we move to a new team and there are duplicate jersey numbers, will I have to purchase a new jersey?**
  - Duplicate jersey number conflicts may happen as players transition to new age groups. We realize this may have a financial impact on families.

JYISC/LUSA is already working on the plans for the tryout and team placement process for the 2026-2027 season. Please be sure to review the age matrix chart to gain insight as to where your child will be placed.

We are excited about this return to a system that prioritizes player development, friendships, and long-term enjoyment of the game. Club directors are here to answer any questions – please reach out to the support email listed below.

- support@jiysc.org
- Additional resources from Soccer Parenting - [\*\*CLICK HERE\*\*](#)

Thank you for being part of our soccer family!

**Kind Regards,**

Clark Brisson

JYISC & Lowcountry United SA Executive Director



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