RULEBOOK

6.24.26

MLS GO RULEBOOK

MLS GO is Major League Soccer's recreational youth soccer program with the mission of creating an inclusive and elevated experience for all participants. Fun and affordability are at the heart of MLS GO with a program that has been designed to increase participation and enable more kids to play soccer.

MLS GO is offered to all children ages 4-14. Whether destined for the professional ranks or looking to get their initial experience in the sport, MLS GO is the first step in the pathway, where all can learn fundamental soccer skills and develop a lasting love of the game.

By offering local communities a structured introductory soccer program with connections to a developmental pathway, we're enabling greater access to the sport – seeking to remove barriers that prevent kids from playing the game.

Let's GO play!

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PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

a. Player Registration

Registration should open at least 10 weeks in advance of the first league game via digital platform. Registration must include waivers, acknowledgment of data sharing, and at least one (1) option for a payment plan. Registration must also indicate the next steps for how to opt-in to the payment plan.

Players must be registered individually. There is no team registration, however, parents can make "teammate(s) and/or coach requests" for their child. Operators shall make best efforts to accommodate "teammate(s) and/or coach requests," while also communicating to parents that "teammate requests" are not guaranteed to result in participants being assigned to the same team.

Registration should inquire if the parents are interested in volunteering to coach and/or referee. The League Operator must seek volunteers to help coach as needed.

b. Player Verification

If a parent, player, or coach is found to have forged a document or falsified an authentic document or used a forged or falsified document to deceive, MLS GO may disapprove, deny registration to, and/or dismiss that individual from the league.

If a parent, player, or coach is found to have manipulated or attempted to manipulate identification or other verification documents, MLS GO reserves the right to dismiss that player from the league.

c. Roster

i. Team Roster Size

- Teams will be required to roster a minimum of plus one (1) player from the required playing format by age and no more than: seven (7) players for 3v3 format; nine (9) players for 4v4 format; twelve (12) players for 7v7 format; sixteen (16) players for 9v9 format; and eighteen (18) players for 11v11 format.

- As part of best practice recommendations and to allow increased playing time for each player participating, MLS GO recommends a roster size of five (5) players for 3v3 format, six (6) players for 4v4 format, ten (10) players for 7v7 format, twelve (12) players for 9v9 format, and sixteen (16) players for 11v11 format.

Roster Size Chart:

Ages	Minimum # of Team Members	Maximum # of Team Members	Recommended # of Team Members	Recommended Game Format
4-6 years old	4 players	7 players	5 players	3v3
7-8 years old	5 players	9 players	6 players	4v4
9-10 years old	8 players	12 players	10 players	7v7
11-12 years old	8 players	12 players	10 players	7v7
*13-14 years old	10 players	16 players	12 players	9v9
*If playing	12 players	18 players	16 players	11v11

ii. 50% Playing Time

- The rostered number of players should align with providing each player at least 50% of game playing time.
- MLS GO has a "no cut" policy. Every player that registers will have a roster spot.

d. Age Group Guidelines

i. Birth Year Model

- MLS GO, in accordance with U.S. Soccer, has adopted a Birth Year model designed to help ensure player safety, consistency and competitive fairness, and balance of youth soccer players. The Birth Year segmentation model utilizes the year of birth of players—rather than their grade—to ensure a developmentally appropriate playing experience.
- Birth year segmentation is a player-centered development approach that allows parents and coaches to have increased awareness of each player's birth month relative to his or her peer group and moves the focus away from "bigger, faster, stronger." Birth year segmentation also creates uniformity across the country and aligns with international standards of youth development.
- School grade divisions may be permitted at the discretion of the league operator (where precedent has already been set) and RCX Sports.

ii. Eligibility

- MLS GO leagues may use an age group formation based on Aug. 1-July 31 **-OR-** Jan. 1-Dec. 31, **beginning with the 2026-27 registration season.**

- All players shall meet the applicable age requirements for the 2026-2027 playing period:

Age Group	Born Between
U5	8/1/21-7/31/22
U6	8/1/20-7/31/21
U7	8/1/19-7/31/20
U8	8/1/18-7/31/19
U9	8/1/17-7/31/18
U10	8/1/16-7/31/17

Age Group	Born Between
U11	8/1/15-7/31/16
U12	8/1/14-7/31/15
U13	8/1/13-7/31/14
U14	8/1/12-7/31/13
U15	8/1/11-7/31/12

Age Group	Born Between
U5	1/1/22-12/31/22
U6	1/1/21-12/31/21
U7	1/1/20-12/31/20
U8	1/1/19-12/31/19
U9	1/1/18-12/31/18
U10	1/1/17-12/31/17

Age Group	Born Between
U11	1/1/16-12/31/16
U12	1/1/15-12/31/15
U13	1/1/14-12/31/14
U14	1/1/13-12/31/13
U15	1/1/12-12/31/12

iii. Younger Players Playing Up

- Players are allowed to “play up” an age group if the League Operator allows

e. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

i. Major League Soccer is dedicated to supporting participating communities and providing an environment in which our staff, players, coaches, officials, partners, and fans are treated with dignity and respect. MLS GO is an anti-racist, non-discriminatory program that supports diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the game. We know firsthand that the benefits of sport extend far beyond the field, and we are committed to providing an environment where people of all backgrounds can contribute and play in a safe, healthy, and respectful setting. MLS GO will not tolerate discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or any other social identity category and/or defining characteristic.

MLS GO players are able to participate in the program in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity. To support and promote inclusion of all LGBTQ+ youth players, all representatives including coaches, game officials, and program operators must abide by the following principals:

- Respect all players' gender identities, gender expressions, and use their preferred names and pronouns
- Anticipate and address any uniform problems or access issues
- Respect all players' rights to privacy, and not disclose any player's personal information without express consent (including, but not limited to, whether any player identifies as transgender or non-binary)
- Address discriminatory behavior based on any perceived or actual gender identity or gender expression of a player

f. Mixed Gender Participation

i. MLS GO encourages mixed gender leagues.

- Separate gender divisions may be permitted at the discretion of the league operator (where precedent has already been set) and RCX Sports. Every child should participate in the gender category with which they feel the most comfortable.

SEASON FORMAT

MLS GO Leagues are authorized to operate between August through the following July for each year. The season period (e.g., fall, spring) can be determined by each league operator based on geographical region and/or seasonal weather.

There must be a minimum of six (6) games and no more than twelve (12) games within league play. League play cannot run for more than ten (10) weeks in total. There can never be more than two (2) games per week during regular season league play.

a. Trainings/ Practices

i. There must be at least one (1) team training prior to a team's first game. Every training must allow the team to have at least forty-five (45) minutes with access to at least half the space of a 7v7 field (25-35 yards long by 15-20 yards wide).

ii. MLS GO recommends a minimum of one (1) training session, and a maximum of three (3) training sessions per week.

b. Staffing

i. There must be a league or facility staff member available in person or on call for every game. The staff member on site must have all updated health and safety certifications as outlined in the MLS GO handbook section. The minimum age for any staff member should follow applicable local laws. All staff should be clearly identified.

ii. The league operator must supply at least one (1) referee per game, based on the age group. Referees must wear uniforms that clearly identify them from the rest of the staff, coaches, and players.

c. Game Results

i. Operators must post physical and/or digital schedules.

ii. MLS GO does not recommend that results and standings be recorded and posted for ages 12 and under.

d. Team Formation

i. MLS GO has a no cut policy. Every player that tries out will have a roster spot.

ii. Team selection is at the discretion of the League Operator; however, League Operators should prioritize ensuring healthy and balanced competition (i.e., preventing "stacked" teams). Keeping in mind the following:

- Upon registration, players will have the opportunity to list "teammate(s) and/or coach requests." League operators shall make best efforts to accommodate "teammate(s) and/or coach requests," while also communicating to parents that "teammate requests" are not guaranteed to result in participants being assigned to the same team.

- Once team selection is complete, there will be no changes to rosters. Movement of teammates between teams must be approved by the league operator.

e. Team Names

i. Team names will include the name of the club that the team has received as their uniform with the option of adding 1-2 words. For example, a team name may include the club plus the coach's name, such as "Columbus Crew – Beckham," or more original names, such as "Columbus Crew Falcons."

ii. Team names may not include any derogatory terms or be associated with religion, race, ethnicity, or nationality.

GAME RULES & STANDARDS

MLS GO follows age-and-stage appropriate rules and standards as set out by U.S. Soccer Player Development Initiatives and/or MLS. These guidelines help young players appropriately learn the fundamentals of the game, achieve, and maintain early success, create a fun playing experience, and provide enhanced long-term development.

The rules and standards address four key areas:

1. Equipment & Field Specifications (e.g., size of the ball, proper goal size, field dimensions and lines).
2. Game Format & Structure (e.g., small-sided-games, game length, substitutions, scoring, breaks).
3. Development Standards (e.g., concussion initiative, build out line)
4. Laws of the Game (Modified)

a. Rules & Standards Chart (2024-25 Season)

The playing rules and standards are to serve as guidelines and recommendations for league operators. We understand that organizations and facilities may not always be able to accommodate all recommendations and that modifications will need to be made in certain instances due to practical limitations (e.g., field size, goal size).

Age	Division	Birth Year	Game Format	Ball Size	Game Time (Minutes)	Field Size Ranges (yards)	Maximum Goal Size (feet)
Age 4	U5	2020	3v3 No GK	3	4x10	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Height 4 Width 6
Age 5	U6	2019	3v3 No GK	3	4x10	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Height 4 Width 6
Age 6	U7	2018	3v3 No GK	3	4x10	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Height 4 Width 6
Age 7	U8	2017	4v4 No GK	3	4x10	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Height 4 Width 6
Age 8	U9	2016	4v4 No GK	3	4x10	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Height 4 Width 6
Ages 9	U10	2015	7v7 GK	4	2x25	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Height 6.5 Width 18.5
*Age 10	U11	2014	7v7 GK	4	2x25	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Height 6.5 Width 18.5
*Ages 11	U12	2013	7v7 GK	4	2x25	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Height 6.5 Width 18.5
*†Age 12	U13	2012	7v7 GK	4	2x25	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Height 6.5 Width 18.5
† Age 13	U14	2011	9v9 GK	4 or 5	2x30	Length 70-80 Width 45-55	Height 7 Width 21
† Age 14	U15	2010	9v9 GK	4 or 5	2x30	Length 70-80 Width 45-55	Height 7 Width 21

*9v9 game format is permitted but not recommended. †11v11 game format is permitted but is not recommended.

b. Equipment & Field Specifications by Division

i. <u>3v3 game format (Ages 4-6)</u>
- Size of Ball: Size 3
- 25-35 yards (length)
- 15-25 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 4 feet (height) x 6 feet (width)
- Corner flags are not needed, cones can be used

ii. <u>4v4 game format (Ages 7-8):</u>
- Size of Ball: Size 3
- 25-35 yards (length)
- 15-25 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 4 feet (height) x 6 feet (width)
- Corner flags are not needed, cones can be used

iii. <u>7v7 game format (Ages 9-12):</u>
- Size of Ball: Size 4
- 55-65 yards (length)
- 35-45 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 6.5 feet (height) x 18.5 feet (width)
- A 6.5 feet (height) x 12 feet (width) goal is recommended based on the age and ability of the players

iv. <u>9v9 game format (Ages 13-14):</u>
- Size of Ball: Size 4 recommended, size 5 optional
- 70-80 yards (length)
- 45-55 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 7 feet (height) x 21 feet (width)
- A 6.5 feet (height) x 18.5 feet (width) goal is recommended based on the age and ability of the players

v. <u>11v11 game format:</u>
- Size of Ball: Size 4 recommended, size 5 optional
- 100-130 yards (length)
- 50-100 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 8 feet (height) x 24 feet (width)

c. Game Format & Structure

i. Small-Sided Games

- Small-sided games are part of U.S. Soccer Player Development Initiatives to provide an age-appropriate environment for players. Standards below are aligned with physiological needs of players based on year of birth.

ii. Game Format by Age Group

- League operators shall offer the following game formats per age:

Age Group	Recommended Game Format	Players on the Field
4-6 Years Old	3 vs 3	3 field players, no goalkeeper
7-8 Years Old	4 vs 4	4 field players, no goalkeeper
9-10 Years Old	7 vs 7	6 field players and 1 goalkeeper
11-12 Years Old	7 vs 7 (9v9 permitted)	6 field players and 1 goalkeeper
13-14 Years Old	9 vs 9 (11v11 permitted)	8 field players and 1 goalkeeper

iii. Game Length

Age Group	Time Periods	Period Length	Breaks	Added Time
Ages 4-6 (3v3 Format)	4 quarters	No more than 10-minute quarters	5-minute breaks between quarters	No added time
Ages 7-8 (4v4 Format)	4 quarters	No more than 10-minute quarters	5-minute breaks between quarters	No added time
Ages 9-12 (7v7 Format)	2 halves	25-minute halves	10-minute halftime	No added time
Ages 13-14 (9v9 Format)	2 halves	30-minute halves	10-minute halftime	No added time
(11v11 Format)	2 halves	35-minute halves	10-minute halftime	Stoppage time added

d. Substitutions

- Substitutions are unlimited and can occur at any stoppage of the game.

- Head Injury Substitution: All substitutions relating to head injury shall be handled in compliance with the Concussion Protocol outlined in the MLS GO handbook.

e. Developmental Standards

i. Concussion Initiative

- Heading of the ball is banned for all players 11 years old and younger.
- Consistent with U.S. Concussion Initiative, if a player is suspected to have a head injury the referee (coaches and parents in 3v3 and 4v4 game format) is instructed to stop play to allow for treatment/evaluation as needed.
- If the player leaves the field of play for additional evaluation, a substitution can be made in that moment.
- The player with the suspected head injury may not return to the game unless a Health Care Professional (HCP) or Certified Athletic Trainer (CAT) has cleared the player.
- Any coach or parent insisting on returning the player to the game without approved clearance will result in the referee ending the game.
- If a player heads the ball in a game, whether deliberately or accidentally, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense.
- If a header occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infringement occurred.
- In a controlled and individual environment (where heading is an isolated skill being taught away from any form of opposition or other aspects of the game), the use of lightweight balls (foam, balloon, etc.) would be acceptable for teaching heading technique.

ii. Build-Out Line

- The purpose of the build-out line is to allow players more time and space with the ball at their feet near their own goal (to build out of the back in a less pressured setting). MLS GO recommends a build-out line be used for 3v3, 4v4, and 7v7 game formats.

Ages 4-6 (3v3 Game Format) and Ages 7-8 (4v4 Game Format):

- The build-out line should be 5-7 yards from the goal line.
- Prior to a goal kick, the opposing team must move behind the build-out line.
- Once the opposing team is behind the build-out line, play can restart.
- After the ball is put into play, the opposing team can cross the build-out line and play resumes as normal.
- Quick restarts: Ideally, the player taking the goal kick will wait to put the ball into play once all opponents are past the build out line. However, the player can put the ball into play sooner, but he or she does so accepting the positioning of the opponents and the consequences of how play resumes.
- If a player from the opposing team crosses the build-out line before the ball is put into play, the goal kick is retaken.

Ages 9-12 (7v7 game format):

- The build-out lines should be equidistant between the penalty area line and halfway line.
- Prior to a goal kick or once the goalkeeper has the ball in his or her hands, the opposing team must move behind the build-out line until the ball is put into play.
- Quick restarts: Ideally, the goalkeeper will wait to put the ball into play once all opponents are past the build out line. However, the goalkeeper can put the ball into play sooner, but he or she does so accepting the positioning of the opponents and the consequences of how play resumes.
- If a player from the opposing team crosses the build-out line before the goalkeeper puts the ball into play and interferes with play, an indirect free kick is given to the goalkeeper's team.
- The build-out line will also be used to denote where offside offenses can be called.

f. Laws of the Game & Modified Rules

i. Laws of the Game

- Unless otherwise provided in the MLS GO Rulebook or Handbook, all games shall be played in accordance with the Laws of the Game enforced at the time of the MLS GO Competition and as promulgated by the International Football Association Board, which can be found here.

ii. Modified Laws of the Game

Ages 4-6 (3v3 Game Format):

- Kick-offs, free kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks, and corner kicks are used to start or restart play.
- Kick-ins and/or dribble-ins are recommended as restarts when the ball has gone out over the sidelines.
- If field markings are absent, goal kicks and corner kicks should be taken in the general vicinity of the respective goal or corner.
- If used, all free kicks are indirect.
- Opponents should be 10 feet away from the ball on all restarts.
- No penalty kicks.
- No offside

Ages 7-8 (4v4 Game Format):

- Kick-offs, free kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks and corner kicks are used to start or restart play.
- Kick-ins and/or dribble-ins are recommended as restarts when the ball has gone out over the sidelines.
- If field markings are absent, goal kicks and corner kicks should be taken in the general vicinity of the respective goal or corner.
- If used, all free kicks are indirect.
- Opponents should be 10 feet away from the ball on all restarts.
- No penalty kicks.
- No offsides.

Ages 9-12 (7v7 Game Format):

- Game may not start or continue if there are less than 5 players on a team.
- No punts or drop kicks are allowed by the goalkeeper.
- All other laws of the game should be followed.

Ages 13-14 (9v9 Game Format)

- Game may not start or continue if there are less than 6 players on a team.
- All other laws of the game should be followed.

g. Sideline Requirements

i. MLS GO recommends no more than two (2) to three (3) coaches are allowed on the bench. Coaches shall not enter the field of play unless requested by the referee.

ii. The top/left team on the schedule shall be the home team. The bottom/right team on the schedule shall be the visiting team. During games, teams will sit on the same sidelines opposite from parents and bystanders. If standing on the sideline and facing the field, the home team will sit on the left half sideline/bench and the visiting team will sit on the right.

iii. The bench area is reserved for Players and Coaches only. Any person in the bench area during an MLS GO game must be registered as a coach/volunteer and be in compliance with the documentation requirements under the MLS GO Handbook. At least one (1) person age eighteen (18) or older must be on the bench at all times.

h. Referees

i. Registered and certified referees are not needed for ages 4-8 (3v3 & 4v4 Game Formats). Coaches are expected to manage the game environment from the touchline using the standards of play outlined in this rulebook.

ii. For 7v7 game format (ages 9-12) one (1) center referee is required. For 9v9 game format one (1) center referee is required. Where possible, a two (2) man referee system is preferred. MLS GO recommends all referees have a U.S. Soccer Grassroots Referee license.

iii. Referees should officiate in accordance with the current version of the MLS GO Rulebook. Referees should facilitate a fair, fun, and safe game for the players by enforcing and applying the Laws of the Game. Referees shall officiate keeping player safety as the main priority.

iv. Referees should exemplify professional appearance. Referees should wear a distinguishable shirt, preferably a referee specific shirt.

i. Respect of Officials

i. Referee's Decisions: No Protests may be made about the referee's decisions regarding facts connected with play; such decisions are final.

j. Pre-game Rules

ii. A minimum of fifteen (15) minutes of warm-up time should be allowed on the playing field. If less than fifteen (15) minutes is permitted, there should be adequate warmup space outside of the playing field.

k. Post-game Rules

i. Coaches are expected to create and promote good sportsmanship. At the conclusion of each match, players and coaches will shake hands and thank the referee.

GENERAL EQUIPMENT

a. Uniforms

i. For game day, players are required to wear the MLS GO uniform provided by the league. This distinguishes them from the rest of the players on the field.

ii. The team listed as the home team will have the choice to select which color uniform they will wear. The away team is required to wear a contrasting color uniform from the home team.

iii. Players must wear shin guards that protect the shin area of the leg. Shin guards must be completely covered by players' socks.

iv. MLS GO recommends every player wear soccer-specific cleats. In the event a player does not have soccer-specific cleats, athletic toe-covered shoes (with or without cleats) are permissible during training and games, unless the referee deems the footwear unsafe.

v. Players shall not wear anything that is dangerous to either themselves or other players subject to the referee's approval.

b. Soccer Balls

i. MLS GO will provide a set number of soccer balls to each league operator. League operators will then evenly distribute the soccer balls between the teams in the league.

ii. MLS GO adidas soccer balls are to be used as the game balls for each game. The home team will provide the game ball. No game can be played without a properly inflated game ball. All age groups will play with the appropriate size game ball.

iii. For each team training and game, players are encouraged to bring their own soccer ball. Refer to the rules & standards chart above for size ball by age.

c. Ownership of Equipment

i. League operators will provide and be responsible for the game equipment (including but not limited to goals, cones, corner flags).

COACHING INFORMATION

a. Coach Attire

i. Coaches must wear the MLS GO provided t-shirt for each game. Coaches must be distinguishable from the rest of the players, parents, referees, and staff members. Coaches must dress in a manner that is appropriate and respectful to the youth environment.

b. Coach Training

i. The MLS GO PLAYBOOK provides coaches of all levels with the tools to learn the game, understand children, run a training session, and manage a soccer game.
ii. League operators should direct coaches to follow the MLS GO PLAYBOOK.

COMPLIANCE

Violations of the rules and policies within this document will not be tolerated. If any participant/team/coach/operator/staff are in violation of rules and policies, RCX and MLS GO reserve the right to dismiss them from operation of an MLS GO league and prohibit further participation or affiliation with the MLS GO program.