

Dear Bend FC Families,

Happy New Year!

Before we lace the boots up for the first time in 2026, we wanted to send an update on the US Soccer age grouping status.

U.S. Soccer has announced an important change to how youth soccer age groups will be formed beginning with the 2026–27 season (Fall 2026 registration year). We have had a lot of questions regarding how this will be handled by us as a club.

Currently, youth soccer teams are grouped using a birth-year system, meaning age groups are based on January 1 to December 31. For example, all players born in 2016 are placed in the same age group, regardless of school grade.

Starting with the 2026–27 season, most youth soccer organizations, including OYSA and GA, will move to a school-year system with an August 1 to July 31 cutoff. This change is designed to better align teams with school grades and peer groups.

How will this affect my player's Bend FC team?

Beginning in the 2026–27 season, Bend FC teams will likely align more closely with school grades. As a result:

- Players born January–July may move up an age group to play with older classmates.
- Players born August–December may often remain with or move to teams with younger classmates.

That said, no automatic or blanket changes will be made.

Our Bend FC Technical Team — Director of Coaching Greg Ryan, Director of Coaching Cole McCool, and Executive Director Donnie Emerson — has been working diligently to ensure the best possible outcome for all players. Each team and each player will be evaluated individually, with decisions made in the best interest of:

- The player's development
- The team environment
- Long-term enjoyment and success in the game

In short, we have no desire to make roster changes that are detrimental to players at the local, individual, or team level. Our priority remains creating positive, developmentally appropriate experiences for every Bend FC player.

We appreciate your trust and partnership as we navigate this transition together.

Bend FC Administration Staff will hold a community town hall meeting in February 2026. Bend FC's situation regarding these changes is more complicated than other clubs who strictly play within the Oregon Youth Soccer system. Additional details and guidance will be shared as we get closer to the 2026–27 season.

Below is some additional valuable information.

Thank you for being part of the Bend FC family.

Sincerely,

Bend FC Technical Team

Greg Ryan – Director of Coaching

Cole McCool – Director of Coaching

Donnie Emerson – Executive Director

What's Changing?

Right now:

Youth soccer teams are grouped using a birth-year system — meaning age groups are based on January 1 to December 31. For example, everyone born in 2016 is in the same age group regardless of their school grade.

Starting with the 2026-27 season (fall 2026 / registration year):

Most major youth soccer organizations (like US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer, and AYSO) are moving to a school-year (seasonal year) system with an August 1 → July 31 cutoff. That means age groups will align more closely with the school grade your child is in. [US Youth Soccer+1](#)

Why the Change?

The goal is to keep players playing with their school-grade peers, which can help with:

- **Social continuity** — playing with classmates and friends
- **Developmental alignment** — similar physical and emotional stages
- **Team retention and enjoyment** across seasons

This system is similar to how many U.S. school sports are organized and is why most clubs support the switch. [AYSO+1](#)

How It Works

Old system (Birth Year):

- Age groups ran from Jan. 1 → Dec. 31.

New system (School Year / Seasonal Year):

- Age groups will run from Aug. 1 → July 31.

- So, if a child is born between Aug. 1, 2016 and July 31, 2017, they'll be in the U10 age group for the 2026-27 season (example). [US Club Soccer Website](#)

This change mirrors most kids' school calendars, which start in August/September and end the following summer.

What This Means for Your Player

- ✓ More likely to be grouped with school classmates — so teams may feel more familiar socially. [AYSO](#)
- ✓ Some kids will "move up" earlier under the new cutoff — depending on birthdate and club decisions.
- ✓ The change doesn't affect the 2025-26 season, so age groups stay the same this year. [US Youth Soccer](#)
- ✓ Our State Association and/or league will communicate how they'll implement the change and manage our teams.

Important Notes

- The change goes into effect for the 2026-27 season/registration year — starting August 2026. [US Youth Soccer](#)
- Parents may use tools (like an age-group calculator) to help see where their child fits under the new system.
- [Girls Academy Release](#)
- [US SOCCER TOOL FOR AGE GROUPING](#)