

DON EMERSON

GENERAL MANAGERS

LEAGUE COMPARISON

Opinion- August 2025

1. Governance & Club Voice

- **GA (Aspire):** Club-driven. Member clubs have significant influence over scheduling, events, and policies.
- **ECNL:** More top-down. Clubs follow league-wide decisions with less flexibility.
- **OYSA:** Governed by a Board of Directors and an Executive Director, with individual clubs having minimal influence over how the leagues are operated.

GA Takeaway: *GA gives clubs a true voice and partnership, ensuring programming matches the needs of players and families.*

2. Competition & Player Development

- **GA:** High-level competition across strong regional conferences, plus meaningful national events. The structure balances elite play with player wellness.
- **ECNL:** Competitive nationally, but some regions have wide gaps in depth and balance.
- **OYSA:** Lower level competition. With Clubs leaving every May, competition has diminished.

GA Takeaway: *GA offers elite competition with consistency, while also prioritizing environments that support long-term player development.*

3. High School Soccer Participation

- **GA:** Fully supports and encourages players who want to experience high school soccer alongside GA play.
- **ECNL:** Permits HS participation, but some clubs discourage it.
- **OYSA:** Allows HS participation.

GA Takeaway: *GA respects the whole player experience, allowing athletes to enjoy HS soccer without penalty.*

4. College Recruiting & Exposure

- **GA:** Rapidly growing showcase platform with strong college coach attendance, including D1 programs. As the newest national platform, the GA has quickly gained credibility and visibility. GA Aspire will continue to build this growth.
- **ECNL:** Historically strong recruiting network, but some showcases are oversaturated with clubs and players.
- **OYSA:** Zero participation in college recruitment assistance.

GA Takeaway: *GA is expanding faster each year, with focused events that maximize player exposure rather than dilute it. With the addition of GA Aspire, the GA is predicted to surpass the ECNL in college recruits in 2026 by a large margin.*

5. Professional Pathways

- **GA:** Intentional partnerships with NWSL and USL Super League clubs, providing a clear pathway for players aspiring to the professional game.
- **ECNL:** College-focused, with less direct emphasis on pro development.
- **OYSA:** Cut ties with Portland Timbers and Portland Thorns. No current relationships with professional clubs or colleges.

GA Takeaway: *GA is the league most committed to bridging youth, college, and professional women's soccer. Single gender, single focus- WOMEN IN THE GAME!*

6. Club Branding & Recruiting Power

- **GA:** Quickly becoming a recognized national brand, especially appealing in markets where ECNL is crowded or unavailable. GA status helps clubs stand out and attract ambitious players.
- **ECNL:** Well-known, but in many regions it's oversaturated with clubs, making it harder for individual programs to differentiate.
- **OYSA:** State organization and affiliate of USYS. Well established throughout the country.

GA Takeaway: *GA gives clubs a unique identity and competitive edge in player recruitment.*

7. Culture & Philosophy

- **GA:** Player-centered, family-focused, and flexible, with wellness and balance built into its mission. Single gender focus. Supports women in sports, coaching, administrative positions, referees, and leadership.
- **ECNL:** More rigid and system-driven, with less emphasis on family balance.

- **OYSA:** Great culture. Well balanced. Lower competition. Many layers.

Takeaway: *GA provides a healthy, sustainable environment where players can thrive on and off the field. We have enjoyed our partnership with OYSA and will continue to partner with them with our Select and Comp teams on the girls side.*

8. Events and Travel

- **GA:** Layered Regional and National Events for both Aspire and Div 1. Bend FC could possibly host in the future. Events are regionalized. Showcases. Oregon based league. Washington/Oregon based region for Aspire league. Regional events in CA, UT, NC in 2025/26.
- **ECNL:** Low chance of hosting a regional event. Majority of clubs in Washington and Idaho. Possibly a North Cal and South Oregon league. Lots of out of state travel. No Oregon League. Required tournament and regional out of state events.
- **OYSA:** State Cup in state only. Localized to Oregon and Southern Washington. Regional events rotate every year. National events. Low college turnout even at National events. In state leagues.

GA Takeaway: *GA Aspire provides an Oregon based league with some Washington crossover. Teams will only be required to travel out of our region once throughout the year in Aspire. OYSA is adopting a platform league or cup event for Oregon based platform clubs. ECNL travel would be an extreme transition.*

Summary

The Girls Academy (GA) via Aspire is the best fit for Bend FC's girls' programs, at this time, because it provides everything our players and families need to thrive at the highest level. Unlike other Platform Leagues, which we have applied to but have not been accepted into due to our geographical location, the GA and GA Aspire offers Bend FC a national platform where our players can grow, compete, and be recognized.

The GA gives clubs a strong voice in shaping the league, ensuring that Bend FC has input into how the environment is built and maintained. The league delivers elite competition in a supportive, balanced structure, so our athletes can push themselves against the best while still maintaining balance in their lives. Importantly, the GA fully supports high school soccer participation, giving our players the opportunity to enjoy both the community of their school teams and the challenges of a national platform.

For families focused on college opportunities, GA showcases and events provide recruiting opportunities with less oversaturation, helping our players stand out to coaches at every level. Beyond college, the GA is directly connected to the growth of women's professional soccer, offering a clear pathway to the NWSL and USL Super League. The GA and GA Aspire has regional events and local leagues saving families money in travel each year.

The Bend FC Technical team's opinion is that the GA sets itself apart because of its progressive, player-first culture that values families. It aligns with Bend FC's mission of creating a positive, balanced, and challenging environment for every athlete.

As of today, the GA via GA Aspire is the right option for Bend FC's girls program because it provides the highest level of competition, recruiting, and player support, while also respecting the balance that keeps players engaged and thriving. With GA Aspire hosting an Oregon based league in 2025, hands down the GA Aspire is the right fit for Bend FC families in 25/26.