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LEAGUE COMPARISON

Opinion – May 2026

League Comparison: EA vs ECNL-RL vs OYSA

Governance & Club Voice

- **EA:** Club-driven model within the Elite Academy structure. Clubs have meaningful input and collaboration opportunities.
- **ECNL-RL:** More centralized. Decisions are league-driven with less flexibility at the club level.
- **OYSA:** Governed by a Board and Executive Director, with limited direct club influence.

EA Takeaway: EA creates a partnership model where clubs help shape the environment, not just participate in it.

Competition & Player Development

- **EA:** Strong regional competition with a clear connection and pathway to MLS Next. Balanced and purposeful.
- **ECNL-RL:** Competitive in certain markets, but often inconsistent across regions with noticeable gaps.
- **OYSA:** Broad participation model. Competitive depth has decreased as top clubs migrate to platform leagues.

EA Takeaway: EA provides a higher, more consistent level of competition while maintaining a development-first approach.

High School Soccer Participation

- **EA:** Supports and allows high school participation.

- **ECNL-RL:** Allowed, but philosophy varies by club and can be discouraged.
- **OYSA:** Fully supports high school participation.

EA Takeaway: E2 supports the full player experience without restriction.

College Recruiting & Exposure

- **EA:** Growing exposure through EA events and connections to MLS NEXT ecosystems. Focused, less saturated environments.
- **ECNL-RL:** Established but secondary to ECNL; recruiting visibility varies widely.
- **OYSA:** Limited recruiting structure and minimal exposure opportunities.

EA Takeaway: EA is emerging as a strong pathway for exposure, especially for players targeting the next level.

Professional Pathways

- **EA:** Direct alignment with and proximity to MLS NEXT pathways. Clear progression for top performers.
- **ECNL-RL:** Primarily college-focused with limited professional integration.
- **OYSA:** No direct professional pathway connections.

EA Takeaway: EA offers a clearer bridge toward the professional game compared to regional/state leagues.

Club Branding & Recruiting Power

- **EA:** National platform recognition tied to MLS ecosystem. Strong recruiting tool for ambitious players.
- **ECNL-RL:** Recognizable brand but often overshadowed by ECNL first teams.
- **OYSA:** Well-established state structure but not a differentiator in recruiting at higher levels.

EA Takeaway: EA elevates club visibility and strengthens player recruitment opportunities.

Culture & Philosophy

- **EA:** Development-focused, competitive, and aligned with long-term player growth.
- **ECNL-RL:** More system-driven, often focused on results and league structure.
- **OYSA:** Positive and community-based, but layered with varying levels of competition.

Takeaway: EA strikes a balance between competitive standards and meaningful player development.

Events and Travel

- **EA:** Regionalized league play with selective, purposeful events. Travel is controlled and intentional.
- **ECNL-RL:** More travel-heavy depending on conference structure.
- **OYSA:** Primarily local with limited high-exposure events.

EA Takeaway: EA provides a strong competitive environment without excessive travel demands.

Summary

EA represents the right step forward for Bend FC's boys program at this time. It provides a clear and intentional pathway that bridges local development with national opportunity.

Unlike traditional state-run leagues, EA aligns Bend FC with a national platform that emphasizes both development and exposure. Compared to ECNL-RL, EA offers stronger alignment with professional pathways and a more connected long-term structure for top players.

EA allows Bend FC to:

- Compete at a higher and more consistent level
- Provide clearer development pathways
- Maintain balance for families while increasing opportunity

For our players, this means a better environment to grow, compete, and be seen—without losing sight of what matters most: long-term development and love for the game.

EA2 is the Pathway to MLS NEXT (Not EA1).