

“TRAPPED YEAR”

In the U.S. Youth Soccer, a “trapped year” (also called a “long year” or locked year) refers to a group of players who are ineligible to play high school soccer and simultaneously age out of certain youth soccer age groups, effectively being “trapped” between systems. This is a result of the U.S. Soccer birth-year registration system, which does not align with the school year calendar used by most high school sports.

What is the Trapped Year?

- Definition: A trapped year occurs primarily in the U14/U15 age group (players born in the second half of the calendar year).
- These players are typically in 8th grade, but their birth year aligns them with 9th graders in the soccer system.
- This leaves them ineligible for some youth competitions with their peers and not yet able to play high school soccer with their grade-level classmates.

Example: 2011 Birth Year (Trapped in 2025–2026)

- Players born in 2011 will be considered U15 for the 2025–2026 season.
- However, some of those players will still be in 8th grade, while many U15 players are starting 9th grade and playing high school soccer.
- This means 8th graders born in 2011 can’t play high school soccer yet, and their club teams may be missing many players who are in high school, leaving them without a full team or consistent competition.

Why It Happens

- In 2016, U.S. Soccer moved to calendar-year registration (Jan 1–Dec 31), shifting away from the school-year model (Aug 1–July 31).
- This aligned U.S. youth soccer with international standards but disrupted alignment with U.S. school and high school sports systems.
- The result: some kids play up or down a grade level in soccer, causing the trapped year phenomenon.

Impact on Players

- Reduced team options during the fall season.
- May need special programming, like High School Academy programs for “locked” players.
- Can experience fewer games, less development time, or disconnection from teammates.

Recent Developments

- US Youth Soccer has announced a return to school-year age groupings starting in 2026.
- This change is intended to eliminate the “trapped year” and better align with the U.S. education and high school sports systems.