



Saint Paul Blackhawks held interactive, “town hall” meetings in January and February 2016 to communicate significant rule changes affecting all of the competitive soccer associations, leagues, tournaments and clubs nationwide.

This handout is adapted from the slides used in those meetings, augmented with answers to many of the questions raised by members. We hope this is useful for families that could not attend, or as a reminder for those who attended.

Near the end you will find resources for further reading, and who to ask if you have questions.

What to Expect

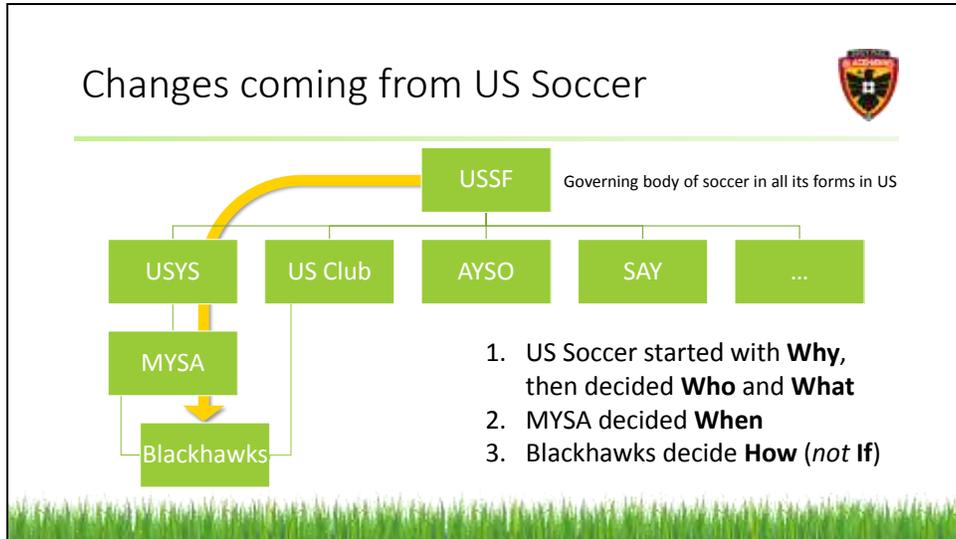


- As “the beautiful game” grows and evolves in the U.S., our governing bodies are adapting and sending changes our way
 - Changes mandated for all member organizations: Blackhawks must abide
 - Major changes require patience, time to work through
 - Our club retains commitment to mission, developmental interest of player
- Today’s goals:
 - Communicate the mandated rule changes to players and families
 - Clarify the impact and implications of those changes
 - Answer questions *from* Blackhawks families *for* Blackhawks families
 - Provide resources to learn more



Soccer in the US is growing and evolving. To adapt to the changing landscape and other forces, our governing bodies are changing the rules. This year—more than any year in memory—the sheer number and nature of rule changes will be disruptive. We feel our Blackhawks community will benefit by understanding what is coming and how the changes will impact us.

The rule changes are coming are the result of several initiatives, as well as a legal settlement. As a competitive club in the US, we must abide by the changes. However, each club will adapt differently. We will present the mandated rule changes, and what to expect as a Saint Paul Blackhawks family. Other clubs may adapt differently, and information coming from other sources may not apply directly in our case.



The United States Soccer Federation—or US Soccer—is the governing body for soccer in all its forms in the USA (professional, youth, futsal, beach soccer, etc.). Although it’s not directly relevant to today’s discussion, US Soccer exists as a member association under the governance of FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*).

US Soccer has, in turn, several member organizations. The two that are relevant to Saint Paul Blackhawks are US Youth Soccer and US Club Soccer. Our state association, MYSA, is a USYS member organization. Saint Paul Blackhawks is affiliated with both MYSA (primarily) and US Club Soccer.

When any of the organizations “above” us change rules, we must abide. It is not a question of whether, but how.

Starting with “Why”



- US Soccer, through its affiliated organizations and clubs, is mandating changes to promote “best practices” in player development
 - **Aim:** to develop players with more individual skill, intelligence, creativity and confidence
 - **Issue:** inconsistent practices nationwide result in poorer player development
 - **Focus:** development of the individual versus the success of a team
 - Enable parents to better understand exactly what they should expect from a soccer program for their children
 - Some of the mandated changes address problems we don’t experience
 - Blackhawks already use these or very similar practices – less change needed



Most of the changes presented here are due to US Soccer’s “Player Development Initiatives” (PDI). US Soccer’s intent is to achieve better outcomes from the varied youth development programs under its governance. While we in Minnesota generally use the best practices, there is wide variation elsewhere. In some areas for example, clubs tout 11v11 leagues as early as eight years old! This results in early burn-out, frustration, and many other side effects. But it doesn’t reliably produce skilled, confident players who go on to love their beautiful sport.

US Soccer also seeks to inform families: this is what a high quality youth soccer program should look like.

Some of the rule changes presented here will have little effect on Blackhawks players—and MYSA more generally—because our club and our state already use very similar practices.

Scope of Changes

- New standards for Small Sided Games (up to U12)
- Age groups shift to calendar year rather than Aug – Jul
- MYSA delays promotion and relegation
- Also, new concussion safety recommendations and associated rule changes

Immediately	2016–2017	2017–2018	Beyond...
Concussion recommendations	Age Groups	Small Sided Games, Fields	Goals



The changes we present here were announces and take effect in similar timeframes, though they are not all from the Player Development Initiatives.

The new standards around Small Sided Games and the age group shift came from the PDI.

Along the same line, MYSA affiliate clubs voted to delay promotion and relegation of teams at its Annual General Meeting in November 2015.

Finally, changes to improve concussion safety were borne of US Soccer’s “Recognize to Recover” program. The rollout timing, and perhaps some compromises, may be due to litigation in which US Soccer, US Club Soccer, American Youth Soccer, and a few others were defendants.

What's not changing



- Blackhawks focus on each player's developmental interests
 - Ensure growth in gameplay and lifelong love of the game
- Blackhawks commitment to best practices in player development
 - Changes coming nationwide implement practices we've embraced for years
- Age group labels for leagues, tournaments, programs, e.g. "U14"
- Soccer year calendar

Jul	Aug – Oct	– April	May – Jul
Player evals/tryouts/ID	Fall Season	Winter/spring training	Summer season

Because Saint Paul Blackhawks, and MYSA, long ago aligned with best practices, there is a great deal that won't change.

Blackhawks remain committed to our mission and player development.

And notably, the soccer calendar is not affected by the mandated rule changes.

Small Sided Games (up to U12)



- Blackhawks (and MYSA) long onboard with SSGs – less change for us
- Incremental change to team sizes
 - U9 – U10: 7v7 (currently 6v6)
 - U11 – U12: 9v9 (currently 8v8)
- Offside rule in effect from U9 (currently from U11)
- Promote unpressured play out of the back for U9 – U10
 - New “build-out” lines (field markings)
 - Goalkeeper can pass, throw or roll ball to teammate; punting not allowed
- New goals (6.5 x 18.5 ft) for 7v7/9v9 competitions to be phased in



Blackhawks’ Coaching and Developmental Directors welcome the format changes to 7v7 (U9 – U10) and 9v9 (U11 – U12). These formats allow us to teach more appropriate team formations on the pitch.

The offside rule, previously only in effect for U11+, will present challenges. The rule and its interpretation are complex (think young players). We currently break-in referees in the U9–U10 age groups (think young referees).

“Build out” lines help teach teams to play out of the back by relieving the pressure.

Build out lines are physical markings on the pitch, parallel to and 14 yards from each goal line. When the keeper has the ball, either during play or for a goal kick, the opposing team retreats behind the build out line. Then the goalkeeper can pass, throw, or roll the ball to a teammate (no punting). After the goalkeeper puts the ball into play, play resumes as normal.

Finally, we will adopt a single size goal for both 7v7 and 9v9 competitions, different than either size we currently use. Because they will be phased in over time, teams may play with “old” style goals at one field, and the new goals at another.

Small Sided Change Summary



Change	U9 – U10	U11 – U12	U13...
Players	Now: 6v6 Fall 2017: 7v7	Now: 8v8 Fall 2017: 9v9	11v11
Max Field Size	Now: 60 x 45 yds Fall 2017: 47 x 30 yds	Now: 90 x 55 yds Fall 2017: 75 x 47 yds	Now: 130 x 100 yds Fall 2017: 112 x 75 yds
Goal Size	Now: 6 x 12 ft Future: 6.5 x 18.5 ft	Now: 7 x 21 ft Future: 6.5 x 18.5 ft	8 x 24 ft
Build out lines	Now: — Fall 2017: 14 yds from goal line	—	—
Offside rule in effect	Now: No Fall 2017: Yes	Yes	Yes



This chart summarizes the changes. For U13+, the only change is to maximum field dimensions. Since Blackhawks rents all of our 11v11 fields, we may encounter some difficulty with compliance. For example, the goals at McMurray are permanently installed, and may fall outside of the new maximum field length.

Align with International Age Groups

- Why
 - Of 208 countries, only US out-of-step with international standards
 - Current age groups run Aug 1 – Jul 31, put US players at disadvantage in international competition
- Effective Aug 1, 2016 – **after** summer league season
 - No change to soccer calendar
- New age groups based on calendar birth year (Jan – Dec)
- Age group labels for tournaments, leagues won't change (e.g., U14)
 - We'll refer to *players* in those age groups by birth year (e.g., 2002s, or '02s)
- Does not impact "[relative age effect](#)" caused by age grouping



Most of the interest in (concern with) the mandated rule changes revolves around shifting age groups. Even allowing for some exceptions through this transition process, there will be large-scale recombination of players within Blackhawks, Minnesota, and every club, league, and state across the US.

The current arrangement has some advantages, but puts US players at a competitive disadvantage in international competition.

This change will both simplify the age groups and cause some challenges.

Age group labels used to identify leagues, tournaments, camps, and other programs – U5, U19, etc., are here to stay. However, we will see more use of birth year to refer to the players in an age group or program. For instance, in fall 2016, the players in the U9 age group will be the 2007 – or '07 – cohort.

Several families have asked if the age group shift will help with "[relative age effect](#)", a bias caused by eligibility cutoff dates. Since we will continue to have eligibility cutoff dates, we will continue to see a bias.

Age Groups		Current	Birth Month	Birth Year	Fall '16	Summer '17	
U18	Aug – Dec	1997	—	U20–Senior			 ★ BHK places U10, U12 fall teams in next summer's age group to prepare for larger game format
	Jan – Jul	1998	—	U19			
U17	Aug – Dec	1999	—	U18			
	Jan – Jul		—	U17			
U16	Aug – Dec	2000	—	U16			
	Jan – Jul		—	U15			
U15	Aug – Dec	2001	—	U14	U15		
	Jan – Jul		—	U13	U14		
U14	Aug – Dec	2002	U14	U13	U14		
	Jan – Jul		—	U12★	U13	11 v 11	
U13	Aug – Dec	2003	U13	U12	U13		
	Jan – Jul		—	U11	U12		
U12	Aug – Dec	2004	U12★	U11	U12		
	Jan – Jul		—	U10★	U11	9 v 9	
U11	Aug – Dec	2005	U11	U10	U11		
	Jan – Jul		—	U9	U10	7 v 7	
U10	Aug – Dec	2006	U10★	U9	U10		
	Jan – Jul		—	U9	U10		
U9	Aug – Dec	2007	U9	U9	U10		
	Jan – Jul		—	U9	U10		

This chart has quite a bit of information, and it's worth a closer look at some examples. First, two notes. MYSA does not run fall leagues past U14 due to a conflict with high school sports. Also U20, shown in grey, is currently a senior league, outside of the realm of youth soccer.

Along with the birth year shift, US Soccer introduced another change: the age group is based on age in the year a competition ends. The fall season (in this case) ends in 2016; the summer season ends in 2017.

A current U13 player born in August 2002, will become a U14 for the fall 2016 season. That's not a change. But that player will now be in an age group with players born as early as January 2002. For the summer 2017 season, our example player will be a U15. In the transition year (only), players born Aug – Dec will effectively skip over an age group from one summer to the next.

Blackhawks plans to make an exception to the fall season U10 and U12 teams (see stars on the chart). The competition format changes between the fall and summer seasons 7v7 → 9v9, and 9v9 → 11v11, respectively). In these two special cases, our club will allocate players to teams based on the summer roster sizes, and play-up one age group in the fall. We believe most of the clubs in our area will do the same.

Age Group Transition U5 – U19



- Tryouts and Evaluations: No change to club policy
 - Place individuals at a level of play to best develop as players
 - Players *must* try out with age group
 - Players *may also* try out with current cohort/“play-up” age group
 - For transition year: larger age span possible when playing-up
- Teams subject to promotion/relegation
 - MYSA: Age group retains placement
- College recruiters will adapt to ensure a steady stream of players
 - Burden on coaches to watch HS Juniors



Saint Paul Blackhawks—like all clubs nationwide—expects some transition year confusion, then a return to normal.

For tryouts/evaluations, players must try out with their age group. Players who wish to play up may try out with the higher age group, too (transition year: no extra fee, director approval not required). As always, our coaching directors will place players with the most appropriate team for their development.

MYSA announced that status of teams subject to promotion and relegation will stay with the age group. The older players in the team, as they skip an age group, may be placed on a team in a different division.

Many players ask about “losing a year” of exposure to college coaches. College coaches need great players, and will adapt by observing an additional age group.

Age Group Challenges



- Sweden trip, a Blackhawks tradition for U15 teams
 - Players born Aug 1 – Dec 31, 2001 will skip U15 age group. Club is looking at options for inclusion, but no “silver bullet”
- Sudden seniors
 - Players born Aug 1 – Dec 31, 1997 will skip U19 age group (last youth year)
- Ongoing U14 split for fall seasons
 - Age group will span grades 8, 9; MSHSL: Club players ineligible for HS team
- Blackhawks has policies to address exceptional situations
 - Seek to provide the best outcome for the most players
 - Developmentally appropriate placement for each player



There will be challenges, including our Sweden international travel program for U15s. During the transition year, Blackhawks will extend the program to U16 players (half of whom will have skipped their U15 year).

Some of the current U18 players will skip their U19 year to become U20s, currently a senior age group (not youth). MYSA is pursuing a U20 youth program. Stay tuned.

With new age groups, there will be an ongoing shortage of U14 players for fall leagues. No longer aligned with school years, the U14 age group will be split between middle school and high school students. Players on high school teams may not participate on club teams during the high school season (fall). HS coaches may seek to include more middle-schoolers, and MYSA is investigating a 7v7 league for U14.

Our clubs existing policies enable the coaching directors to handle exceptional situations.

MYSA Delays Promotion/Relegation to U14

- Member clubs want U13 focus to be player development, not winning
 - Independent of US Soccer Player Development Initiatives
- U14 to be “self select”
- Delays Premier League until U15
 - Summer 2016 is the last year of a U14 Premier division
 - Current U13 C1s not playing for PR status this summer (2016)



At its Annual General Meeting in November 2015, MYSA affiliate members voted to delay promotion and relegation from U13 to U14. Promotion and relegation require a team to focus on winning. Affiliates agreed that U14 is a more appropriate time developmentally to introduce promotion and relegation.

As a result, U14 will become “self-select”. In other words, club directors of coaching will determine the competitive division in which they will register their U14 teams.

This also means that U13 C1 teams will no longer be playing for premier status this summer.

Concussion Safety Changes

- US Soccer, USYSA, AYSO, US Club Soccer recommendations
 - Effective Jan 1, 2016 (now); unrelated to Player Development Initiatives
 - Consistent concussion, return-to-play protocols for youth players
- Protocol/Rule changes
 - Immediate removal of player who likely sustained concussion
 - Substitution for concussion evaluation does not penalize player, team
 - Referee may stop play if coach returns un-cleared player
 - Prohibit headers U11 and under; limit headers in practices U12 – U13
 - MYSA and MnSRC agreed on indirect free kick for infraction, and protocol to avoid cards at U9–U10 level
- Blackhawks will provide concussion info for parents, players



US Soccer’s “Recognize to Recover” campaign, aimed at reducing the occurrence of concussions and providing standard protocols, is another source of new rules. This campaign was perhaps hastened by litigation, in which it and several affiliates were defendants. The changes have already taken effect.

The protocol calls for immediate removal of a player who likely sustained a concussion. “Likely” means either the player shows symptoms or the observed collision was deemed likely to cause a concussion. Several parents asked if their player will be eligible to return to play if there is no concussion. The catch in this question: few players immediately show obvious symptoms of concussion. Even for a health care professional, it can be very difficult to say there is no concussion. Therefore, it’s difficult to provide any general answer to the question.

A rule change prohibits headers for U11 and under, and limits headers in practice for U12–U13. This implies that headers are a primary cause of concussion, which seems contrary to experience in these age groups. (In our observations, concussions are primarily the result of collisions.) Prohibiting headers also prohibits coaches from teaching safe technique.

This is a mandatory rule change and Blackhawks is abiding by it. MYSA and the Minnesota State Referee Committee (MnSRC) agreed both on an indirect free kick for infractions, and recommendations for addressing the player and coach. (At this level, there is always a desire to avoid warning/dismissing players.)

Summary



- US Soccer mandated rule changes standardize small-sided games, align to international age groups
 - This disruptive amount of change will take a few years to fully digest
 - Your patience and flexibility allow us to keep priority on players' developmental needs
- MYSA delays promotion/relegation to U14
 - Premier League entry will be U15
- Concussion policy: overdue changes mixed with compromises

While changes present challenges, Saint Paul Blackhawks remain committed to our mission: to develop highly skilled, respectful, competitive soccer players



Over the past several months, our governing organizations passed down what appears to be an unprecedented collection of mandatory rule changes. The changes affect every state, every competitive league, every club, though differently. Our Blackhawks club is committed to adapting in ways that yield the best outcome for our community.

Your patience and flexibility will enable Blackhawks navigate the challenges and provide great experiences for players and families.

Resources



- US Soccer [Player Development Initiatives](#)
- US Soccer “[Recognize to Recover](#)” campaign
- CDC “Heads Up to Youth Sports” for [parents](#) and [youth athletes](#)
- MYSA
 - [Birth Year Registration chart](#)
 - [Small Sided Standards chart](#)
 - [Article](#) announcing changes
- Have questions about Blackhawks approach to these mandates?
 - Coaching Director [Viktor Adamcsek](#) (U12+)
 - Developmental Director [Chris Scanlon](#) (U5 – U11)



If you are interested in further information, here are links to key resources. Several of these documents are targeted to coaches but may be useful for a broader audience.

Club contacts are also included above for questions specific to Blackhawks.

Links:

- [Player Development Initiatives](#)
- [Recognize to Recover](#)
- Heads Up for [parents](#) and [youth athletes](#)
- MYSA [birth year registration chart](#)
- MYSA [small sided standards chart](#)
- MYSA [announcement](#)
- Coaching Director [Viktor](#)
- Developmental Director [Chris](#)
- Feedback on this document? [John Wilson](#)

The End... Not So Much



In March, FIFA's member associations will vote to ratify changes

- Most comprehensive revision of the Laws ever undertaken in The IFAB's 130-year history
 - The International Football Association Board: Guardians of FIFA's rules
- "User friendly": Shorter, clearer, more concise
 - Improved structure, terminology, phrasing and consistency
- It is unclear when revisions would reach youth soccer in US
 - Not expected to be disruptive... for youth *players*

The only constant is change.

The rules that we play by are FIFA's Laws of the Game, as modified by US Soccer, US Youth Soccer, and MYSA in turn. The IFAB acts as FIFA's steward of the Laws.

While we haven't seen a draft on this comprehensive revision of the Laws, it is not positioned as being disruptive for players at any level (that may not extend to referees). That The IFAB is taking care of long-overdue housecleaning would be viewed positively. Most of the announced changes of substance subject to this vote would primarily affect competitions at the top professional levels (such not using data in the technical area received from fitness trackers).