

SPORTING

BLUE VALLEY



2026-2027

US SOCCER AGE CHANGE

GUIDEBOOK



SPORTING BLUE VALLEY

LEAGUES



ECNL GIRLS



ECNL-RL GIRLS



MLS NEXT BOYS



NAL BOYS



PRE-ECNL GIRLS



MADL



SPORTING DEV



HEARTLAND

OVERVIEW



US SOCCER DECISION 2026-27 & BEYOND

- ❖ Effective Fall 2026–Spring 2027, the national youth soccer age-groups will shift from starting January 1 to August 1.
- ❖ This change is designed to better align age groups with the school-year calendar, but it does *NOT* create grade-level teams.
- ❖ The shift establishes a new, standard registration year of August 1 through July 31.
- ❖ This decision was made by US Soccer & announced by US Club Soccer, US Youth Soccer, and AYSO in June 2025.



IMPORTANT:

**THIS CHANGE IS NOT A SPORTING
BLUE VALLEY DECISION.**

**THIS IS A U.S. SOCCER DECISION,
THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALL
SOCCER IN THE USA.**

**EVERY CLUB AND FEDERATION
IS MOVING TO THE NEW MODEL.**

IMPORTANT:

THIS IS **NOT** A "CHANGE TO
GRADE"

IT IS A **US SOCCER - MANDATED
CHANGE** FROM A JANUARY 1 START
TO AN AUGUST 1 START.

IT ALIGNS BETTER WITH YOUR SCHOOL YEAR,
BUT DOES NOT CREATE GRADE-LEVEL TEAMS.

WHEN DOES THIS CHANGE TAKE EFFECT?



- ❖ The US Soccer age-group start will officially shift from January 1 to August 1, effective for the Fall 2026–Spring 2027 seasonal year. The new standard registration year will be August 1 through July 31.
- ❖ This means:
 - The Spring **2025-26** season will maintain the current calendar-year model.
 - Starting **August 2026**, all competitive programs will transition to the new seasonal-year model.



WHY THIS TRANSITION MATTERS



U.S. Soccer aims to resolve two issues in the current youth soccer landscape:

❖ 1. The “Trap Year” - 8th to 9th Grade Transition

- Under the birth-year model, some 8th graders lose half their team to high school programs while they remain in middle school. Calendar-year alignment helps players advance with their academic classmates and minimizes mid-season roster disruption.

❖ 2. The “Gap Year” - Senior Graduation Timing

- Older teammates graduating before younger birth-year players leads to fractured U19 seasons. By trying to align better with school year, this shift aims to keep groups together through their final competitive year before college. By smoothing out these key stages, athletes should experience more consistent development, stronger team cohesion, and clearer pathways from U13 through U19.



HOW IS SPORTING BV PREPARING?



Sporting Blue Valley club leadership and coaching staff are actively preparing for the transition with a focus on:

- ❖ Analyzing all current rosters and birthdates to evaluate team impacts.
- ❖ Designing new evaluation/ID clinic processes for the 2026-27 age groups.
- ❖ Providing early communication on timelines and rationale.
- ❖ Creating support resources, including a birth range calculator and dedicated program pages. (Will be sent on Friday, Dec 19th)
- ❖ Monitoring governing body updates to ensure full compliance with all new guidelines.



SBV RESPONSE



- ❖ **Age Group Directors are analyzing the implications of the new age groups**
 - How the realignment looks with our current players
 - We focus on our current players first, will worry about new adds in late spring/early summer
- ❖ **Age Group Training with the new 2026-27 age groups**
 - The current coaches in each age group will work with the coaches who are new to the age group
- ❖ **In House offers to current SBV players**
 - Date to be announced by KSYSA (Mtg Feb 28th)
- ❖ **Open Tryouts**
 - June 5-7, 2026
 - The tryout process will be the same as last season



HOW IS SPORTING BV PREPARING?



- ❖ We are player-focused for this transition, not team-focused. We want to do what is best for the player right now, and will worry about the team once everything has shaken out. **Long-term, it's what is best for our families.**



INDIVIDUAL EXAMPLES:



A player like Johnny Soccer, born in October 2015, currently plays on a U11 team. Under the new age groups, Johnny would play with the 2015/16 team that would be in the U11 age group.

A player like Maria Futbol, born in March 2017, is on a 2017 birth-year team playing in the U9 division. In the 2026/27 soccer year, Maria would play on the 2016/17 team playing in the U10 age group.

A player like Joey Messi, born in October of 2016, may be excelling in the 2016 birth-year age group. If the coaches select him for the first team in the 2015/16 age group he could play in the U11 division. (Playing up)



SPORTING BLUE VALLEY

AGE GROUP REALIGNMENT CHART

AGE GROUP	2025 - 2026		2026 - 2027	
	BIRTH YEARS	BIRTHDAY RANGE	BIRTH YEARS	BIRTHDAY RANGE
U4	2022	1/1/2022 - 12/31/2022	2022/23	8/1/2022 - 7/31/2023
U5	2021	1/1/2021 - 12/31/2021	2021/22	8/1/2021 - 7/31/2022
U6	2020	1/1/2020 - 12/31/2020	2020/21	8/1/2020 - 7/31/2021
U7	2019	1/1/2019 - 12/31/2019	2019/2020	8/1/2019 - 7/31/2020
U8	2018	1/1/2018 - 12/31/2018	2018/2019	8/1/2018 - 7/31/2019
U9	2017	1/1/2017 - 12/31/2017	2017/2018	8/1/2017 - 7/31/2018
U10	2016	1/1/2016 - 12/31/2016	2016/2017	8/1/2016 - 7/31/2017
U11	2015	1/1/2015 - 12/31/2015	2015/2016	8/1/2015 - 7/31/2016
U12	2014	1/1/2014 - 12/31/2014	2014/2015	8/1/2014 - 7/31/2015
U13	2013	1/1/2013 - 12/31/2013	2013/2014	8/1/2013 - 7/31/2014
U14	2012	1/1/2012 - 12/31/2012	2012/2013	8/1/2012 - 7/31/2013
U15	2011	1/1/2011 - 12/31/2011	2011/2012	8/1/2011 - 7/31/2012
U16	2010	1/1/2010 - 12/31/2010	2010/2011	8/1/2010 - 7/31/2011
U17	2009	1/1/2009 - 12/31/2009	2009/2010	8/1/2009 - 7/31/2010
U18	2008	1/1/2008 - 12/31/2008	2008/2009	8/1/2008 - 7/31/2009
U19	2007	1/1/2007 - 12/31/2007	2008/2009	8/1/2007 - 7/31/2008

EXAMPLES:



CHILD	BIRTHDAY	GRADE 26-27	AGE GROUP
Emma	July 15, 2018	3rd Grade	U9
Noah	August 10, 2018	3rd Grade	U8
Ava	September 20, 2018	4th Grade	U8

✓ Emma makes the U9 cutoff (born before August 1, 2018)

✗ Noah and Ava fall after the August 1 cutoff -> assigned to U8

In Kansas, Emma and Noah are 3rd graders but play in different soccer age groups.



SPORTING BV'S NEXT STEPS



How we're using this change to benefit you.

Player Focus, NOT Team: Sporting Blue Valley is fully adopting the new US Soccer age-group formation structure for the entire Premier Program, effective Fall 2026. Our initial focus is on our current players, with coaches and Age Group Directors actively analyzing all rosters and birthdates to project team impacts under the new August 1st cutoff.

Evaluations and Training: "New Age Group" evaluations, dedicated to the 2026-27 age groups, will be conducted early in the Spring season. Coordinated training sessions for these new age groups are being scheduled throughout the winter and spring. The tryout process itself will remain the same as in previous years, with open tryouts currently scheduled for June 5-7, 2026.

Timeline and Staffing: The slate of 2026/27 coaches will be identified and announced in Spring 2026, with final coach assignments published in early April. The timeline for In-House offers to current SBV players will be announced once finalized by KSYSA.



CONCERN: Summer Birthdays



Will there be a grace period for players born near the cutoff who were held back in school?

No Grace Period or Exceptions: The August 1st age-group cutoff is rigid and mandated by US Soccer. There are no exceptions or grace periods for players born near the cutoff date.

School Grade is Irrelevant: It is much easier to consider the new age-group placement as relative to the August 1st cutoff and is not tied to their school grade level (whether they have been held back or are ahead).

Playing Status: Players are always allowed to play up to an older age group (typically if they make the top team, as per SBV club policy), but they are not allowed to play down in a younger age group.

Focus on Age Group: For clarity and compliance with the national mandate, families should determine their player's placement strictly by the new age-group definition chart earlier in this presentation. Will also share this document after these meetings.



CONCERN: "X CLUB ISN'T CHANGING"



What about clubs that say they aren't making the change?

It is possible some clubs are claiming this, but this is not a club-by-club choice; it is a nationwide mandate from the governing bodies (US Youth Soccer & US Club Soccer, AYSO, SAY, etc).

Because this change is driven by the sanctioning bodies (USYS, US Club, ECNL, MLS Next, KSYSA, etc.), a club cannot simply "opt out." If they did, their teams would be ineligible to play against compliant clubs in leagues, tournaments, or State Cups.

US Youth Soccer has designated the Fall 2026 season as the mandatory deadline for this transition:

- ❖ **Spring 2026: Adoption is optional.** Like Sporting Blue Valley, many clubs will finish the current seasonal year under the old format to minimize disruption.
- ❖ **Fall 2026: Strict Mandate.** All sanctioned clubs must transition to the new age cutoffs to remain eligible for league play and competitions.



SURVEY - Heartland PL



"Is Heartland Soccer Association definitely switching? I thought leagues had the choice to opt out."

US Soccer's language of "league" means governing body, not local league. US Youth Soccer (USYS), US Club Soccer (USCS), American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), Soccer Association for Youth (SAY).

While there is confusion over the term "League," US Soccer mandates apply to National Governing Bodies (like US Youth Soccer and US Club).

Because Heartland is sanctioned by KSYSA (Kansas State Youth Soccer Association), they are required to align with these new US Youth Soccer standards. They cannot simply "opt out" without losing their official sanctioning. Based on our industry conversations, this alignment is the standard moving forward nationwide.



SURVEY - PLAYER EVALUATIONS



How will players be placed during the shift from Birth Year to School Year?

THE PROCESS: Two-Step Evaluation Strategy

- 1. Continuous Assessment:** Evaluation is always ongoing. Your child's current coaching staff is already assessing their technical and tactical level daily during training and games to inform future placement. Same as we have always done it at SBV.
- 2. Spring ID Sessions:** In early Spring, we will host dedicated "New Age Group" sessions. Players will attend based on their 2026-27 eligibility (School Year). This allows our Directors to evaluate, in-person, the new player pools as they blend together for the first time.
- 3. Offers will be sent as soon as all this is complete**

Note: Step 1 evaluations for High School Girls have already been completed.



SURVEY - Playing Up



Can players play up a grade level?

SBV will retain the same policy we've always had: A player may play up an age group only if they make the top team in that older division.

- ❖ **Exceptions:** Exceptions are rare and reserved for specific Goalkeeper situations or to combine two small player pools to form a viable team.

Why we aren't delaying the changes:

- ❖ We have chosen to "rip the Band-Aid off" rather than kick the can down the road.
- ❖ While we could artificially keep current teams together by moving everyone to an older age group, we would eventually be forced to fix it.
- ❖ We believe it is better to realign correctly now. This avoids years of confusion and temporary fixes, ensuring every player is on the correct long-term development path immediately.



SURVEY - Age Group or Grade



"My son has a July birthday but started Kindergarten at age 6, making him older than his classmates. Will this change align him with his grade, or will he still play with the age group above?"

Follow "Soccer Age," not "Grade Level" While the new cutoffs will align the majority of players with their school grade, there are always exceptions, such as students who started school later.

For clarity and consistency, SBV will strictly refer to players and teams by their True Age Group (e.g., U10, U11) according to the official chart. We avoid using "Grade Level" labels to prevent confusion for families in unique school situations.



SURVEY - Coaching Assignments



When will the Sporting BV Premier coaching staff be announced for next year?

We will publish the full coaching slate in early April, consistent with last year's timeline. Platform teams may come out prior, but early April at the latest.

Note: Evaluations are conducted by current coaches and Age Group Directors. Even if a coach is rotating to a new team next season, they possess the most knowledge of the players' development and remain the most qualified experts to conduct accurate assessments.



SURVEY - Trapped Players



"My child started school a year late. What happens during their 8th Grade year when the rest of their soccer age group moves on to High School?"

Trapped Players: In this scenario, 8th graders whose teammates have moved on to High School soccer will be temporarily added to a U14/U15 hybrid team for that specific season (Fall for Boys, Spring for Girls). Similar to how our U15s are currently split between 8th grade and HS players.

The Heartland Premier League creates specific U14/U15 Combined Divisions during these seasons. This ensures these "trapped" 8th graders have a place to play while their high school teammates are away.



GENERAL ANSWERS #1:



What is the starting age for the Premier Program under the new format?

U8 Division (2018/19) We will still begin forming Premier teams at the U8 Age Group.

For the upcoming 2026/27 season, this entry-level group will consist of players born in the 2018/2019 eligibility window (August 1, 2018 – July 31, 2019).



GENERAL ANSWERS #2:



Will all Sporting Blue Valley teams move to the new age groups at the same time?

Yes. All boys and girls programs currently on a birth year schedule (Premier, Independent Premier) will transition to the August 1st start date due to league and identification structures.



GENERAL ANSWERS #3:



How does this transition improve long-term player development?

The August 1st alignment helps eliminate two major developmental challenges:

The “trap year” is when players lose teammates during the move from middle school to high school

The “gap year”, when younger players are left behind after teammates graduate

By keeping groups together longer, players benefit from improved continuity, chemistry, and clearer pathways through U13–U19 and beyond.



GENERAL ANSWERS #4:



Will families be notified about individual player placement decisions?

Yes. Sporting Blue Valley directors and coaches will communicate directly with all families regarding your player's 2026-27 placement, team structure, and next steps.

These will come soon after the first date we can send offers, according to KSYSA guidelines.

Our priority is ensuring every player is placed in the environment that best supports their development, experience, and long-term goals.



GENERAL ANSWERS #5:



Who should I contact with questions?

Coaches and Age Group Directors will be in communication over the course of the next couple of months.

If you are a current Sporting Blue Valley player, go to your Coach and/or Age Group Director.

If you are not a current Sporting Blue Valley player, please email joew@sportingbv.org.



RESOURCES



Some outside resources that will help you determine your player's 26-27 age group

PLAYER'S AGE GROUP-ROSTER FORMATION TOOL:

<https://www.ussoccer.com/ecosystem-review/player-registration/age-group-calculator>

- This tool helps determine a player's age group based on their date of birth. After entering the player's birthdate, the tool will display the relative age group options for three roster formation cycles: January 1–December 31, August 1–July 31, and September 1–August 31. The results are intended as a guide; please consult your club, league, or organization member to confirm the most appropriate age group for the player.

GOOGLE SHEETS AGE GROUP CALCULATOR:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NRHUbSI5v4I2SkbBaGBNJolglSoS7ITtxaDag3Ksu9w/edit?gid=0#gid=0>



QUESTIONS?

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MORE CLUB INFO:

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