



# Calvert Soccer Association U.S. Soccer Age Group Policy

## **Background**

For the 2026/2027 seasonal year, US Soccer has announced that member organizations may choose the cutoff date for age groups that they feel best fits their needs. On March 5th 2025 US Youth Soccer (USYS), US Club Soccer, and American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) shared a joint announcement that they would be shifting the birth date cutoff from January 1st (birth year) to September 1st (school year). This has since been clarified to be August 1st instead.

As a USYS member, the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association will be aligning with this change. On September 12th The Girls Academy League confirmed that they will be shifting to August 1st as well. MLS Next has moved their second tier league to match while the top tier will stay aligned with the January 1st date.. The Olympic Developmental Program will also continue with the previous cutoff date of January 1st.

## **CSA Policy Changes**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all players participate in an age-appropriate environment that supports their physical, technical, tactical, psychological, and social development. Playing up an age group is an exception—not a norm—and is permitted only when it is demonstrably in the player’s best developmental interest. This policy fits Calvert Soccer Association (CSA)’s player, club, team priority system.

When considering whether a child should compete in an older age group, the guiding principle must be excellence at the highest level of play. A player who is “playing up” should demonstrate advanced individual skill, confidence with the ball, and the ability to make a meaningful impact on the game as outlined in the criteria in the policy below.

Parents and coaches often view a child’s ability to “hold their own” as sufficient justification for playing up. However, there is a critical distinction between being competitive and truly excelling. A child who plays up should not merely blend into the game but should actively influence its outcome. Impact can be measured through:

- Scoring goals and creating offensive opportunities
- Winning 1v1 matchups both with and without the ball
- Effectively distributing the ball and directing team play
- Making decisive saves and commanding the defense as a goalkeeper

# CSA “PLAY UP” POLICY

If a child is only a contributing player in the older age group, they risk losing valuable opportunities to fully develop their game. This can ultimately stunt growth and limit long-term potential. For example, a player who excels at dribbling in their natural age group may struggle to replicate that success in an older group due to the faster pace of play. In such cases, the player may be forced to rely more heavily on passing to remain competitive, thereby diminishing the opportunity to refine a critical developmental skill.

The expectation for a child playing up is clear: they should be a leader, not a follower. Their performance should elevate the team and showcase advanced capabilities beyond their age. Playing up should be reserved for those who can dominate, direct, and define the game, rather than simply participate.

## 1. General Policy

1.1. All players will be placed in their birth-year age group by default.

1.2. All requests to play up must be submitted in writing via email to the Director of Coaching ([doc@calvertsoccer.org](mailto:doc@calvertsoccer.org)) and Travel Administrator ([traveladmin@calvertsoccer.org](mailto:traveladmin@calvertsoccer.org)). Parents may select the option in tryout registration, but further information must still be provided.

1.3. Requests to play up will be considered only after formal evaluation against clearly defined developmental criteria and a full understanding of the pro's and con's to “playing up”.

1.4. Approval to play up is not guaranteed and must be renewed annually; prior approval does not guarantee future placement.

1.5. Player safety, long-term development, and team balance take precedence over convenience or coach and parent preference.

**1.6. High School Player Exception:** Since players in High School can play against those several years older, exceptions for these players will be considered directly by the coaches in those age groups with Director of Coaching approval.

**1.7. Grade Exception:** Players born in August who are in the same grade as players born in July of the same year will automatically have exceptions considered directly by the coaches in those age groups with Director of Coaching approval. (Example: Player A born 8/15/18 and Player B born 7/15/18 are both in 2nd grade).

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1.8. **Select Team Exception:** To provide developmental opportunities, players not selected for the Premier or higher level teams, it is in the player’s best interest to form a select team amongst multiple age groups at the discretion of the Director of Coaching.

1.9. While some parts of this policy may apply to all of CSA’s programs, they are specifically applied to the more competitive programs such as RecPlus and Travel.

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## 2. Evaluation Panel

2.1. A Play-Up Review Panel will be convened for all play-up requests and will include:

- The player’s current head coach(non-voting). The coach should be able to articulate how the needs of the player are addressed by playing up.
- At least two neutral coaches (not affiliated with the team or age group in question)
- The Director of Coaching or their designee

2.2. A player may only play up if all panel members agree it is appropriate.

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## 3. Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be considered when determining eligibility to play up. The player must demonstrate developmental superiority in most or all categories relative to age-group peers:

### 3.1 Technical Proficiency

- Ball mastery (first touch, dribbling, passing, receiving)
- Ability to execute skills under pressure
- Consistency of technique

### 3.2 Tactical Understanding

- Game awareness appropriate for the older age group
- Ability to read and anticipate play
- Positional understanding and decision-making speed

### 3.3 Physical Readiness

- Size, strength, speed, and stamina suitable for the demands of the older group
- Ability to safely compete in more physically challenging environments

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## 3.4 Psychological and Social Maturity

- Emotional resilience
  - Coachability and focus
  - Positive training habits and self-discipline
  - Ability to integrate socially with older teammates
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## 4. Standards for playing up in different side size

Because the transition between side sizes (7v7, 9v9, and 11v11) can be difficult for all players as each introduces significantly greater physical, tactical, and emotional demands, the standards for playing up become more stringent at these age groups (typically U13 and older):

4.1. Players must clearly exceed the developmental level of their birth-year peers and demonstrate the capacity to succeed in an 11v11 structure.

4.2. Consideration will be given to:

- Increased physicality and injury risk
- More complex tactical roles and responsibilities
- Greater training and game intensity

4.3. Only players who exhibit exceptional readiness across all evaluation criteria will be approved to play up in 11v11 formats.

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## 5. Trial Period and Review

5.1. Approved players will be assigned a trial period (typically 4–8 weeks) during which progress will be monitored.

5.2. If the panel or coaching staff determine the placement is not beneficial, the player may be returned to their birth-year team at any time.

5.3. All approvals are valid for one seasonal year and subject to re-evaluation.

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## 6. Documentation and Communication

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- 6.1. The Director of Coaching will document all evaluations, decisions, and rationale.
- 6.2. Parents/guardians will be informed of the decision in writing.
- 6.3. Decisions of the Play-Up Review Panel are final.

## 7. Policy Enforcement

Failure to follow this policy may result in the player being automatically placed in their correct birth-year group. Coaches may be suspended, fined, or removed based on the decision of the clubs Rules and Discipline Committee. Coaches and administrators are responsible for upholding the standards set forth in this document.

### Example: 2026/27 AGE GROUP MATRIX

Beginning with the 2026–27 seasonal year, the cutoff date for player age group classifications will shift to August 1. The following shows a player's age group for the 2026/27 seasonal year based on the month and year that they were born.

Birth Month/Year	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
January	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
February	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
March	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
April	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
May	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
June	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
July	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	-
August	-	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23
September	-	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23
October	-	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23
November	-	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23
December	-	-	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23

