



## MYSA Travel Placement Process: Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What are the goals of MYSA Travel soccer?

The two primary goals of MYSA's soccer program, including Travel leagues, are for the players to have fun and to develop their soccer skills and knowledge. All other goals (winning games, etc) are secondary to those.

One important consideration we keep in mind is that studies have shown that players develop better over the long run (and tend to have more fun) when they are on teams full of other players of roughly similar skills, playing against other teams of roughly equal skills. One of the major benefits of Travel soccer is that our league (the Essex County Youth Soccer Association, or ECYSA) works hard to place all teams into divisions of similar skill levels. This is in contrast to our intramural leagues, where for parity reasons we need to put teams together with wide ranges of skillsets and experience. Thus, as kids get older we start putting more emphasis into the Travel experience and decrease our intramural options (also, we tend to simply not have the numbers necessary for intramural leagues among the older age groups).

It's worth repeating from above: Even with Travel (ie: Marblehead versus other towns) soccer, the primary goals remain making sure players have fun and develop. Town pride or playing for tournaments or such can be part of the fun. But coaches in the MYSA should be working to make sure kids have fun regardless of their teams' win-loss records. In many ways, the ideal outcome for a team is a .500 record (it means lots of fun, competitive games), not a divisional championship (that team was probably placed into too low of a division).

### 2. Is anyone denied a Travel team spot?

As long as families meet necessary RSVP and registration deadlines, we will always offer a spot to anyone interested. This is true even if, for example, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader wants to try soccer for the very first time in their life. MYSA is open to all!

### 3. What is the Travel soccer commitment?

The expectation is that if a player signs up for Travel, they will make every effort to attend practices (twice a week one-hour sessions, generally) and games (typically Saturdays for 4<sup>th</sup>

through 8<sup>th</sup> grade – ECYSA picks our times and locations, we do not control that). Seasons are roughly three months long, between pre-season practices and the potential for post-season tournaments. Regular seasons are usually 8 games in total, 4 at home and 4 at some other town in northeastern Mass.

It is impossible for us to build fun teams if people do not sign up with this commitment in mind. We either need to build teams that are too large (and then players don't get as much time on the field as we all want), or we build teams that only have a few subs (and then if a couple of players skip games the entire team may not have enough players to play).

We are not like some other youth sports and activities where kids are told that if they skip even one practice or rehearsal, they don't get to perform or play in games. We understand and embrace that soccer players have other interests as well. So usually our coaches will be understanding and try to adapt when players have conflicts that couldn't be helped. But please do take this commitment seriously, to do your best to be there for your team, before signing up.

#### 4. What do the Field Evaluations look like?

Field evaluations are pretty simple: Once a year we get all the kids of one age group together on the same field, and have them do some drills and some scrimmaging, for roughly two hours. Meanwhile, evaluators roam the field marking down simple scores for each player on a few key soccer attributes. Afterward, the scores are aggregated for use by the placement committees. The specifics of the event will be designed by our VP of Technical Development, our gender VPs, and our Director of Coaching.

Players should bring an appropriately-sized ball, water, cleats and shin guards. Coordinators will usually send out any additional instructions ahead of time.

Evaluators will be recruited from among coaches, other parents, and sometimes external experts (for example, high school players or college players). We try to make sure a significant portion of the evaluators are not related to any of the players at that specific eval session, and evaluators are told not to score their own child. Our goal is objective info, so we want as many scores as possible for each player, to eliminate potential biases.

But all that said... the field evaluations are not the most important placement factor. So please do not stress out your player about these sessions, let them just relax and enjoy two hours of soccer!

#### 5. What does the full Travel placement process look like?

Setting up for a Travel season takes weeks of effort by our volunteers and much of that has to happen months in advance of the actual season.

Roughly four months before each season, our volunteer organizers start to pull together information from all the coaches from the prior season. That plus info from the most recent field evaluations are compiled into confidential data sets. Teams are then built by placement committees (more on this below), and players are invited to register.

We are required by ECYSA to submit not only the rosters but also divisional placement requests and data months ahead of each season, which is why we are forced to ask everyone to register months in advance each time.

In terms of the actual placement process, as mentioned above the primary goal is to build teams of players with similar skillset and experience levels. While this is inevitably a subjective process, we work hard to make things as objective and transparent and fair as possible.

We use three general inputs:

- The most important criterion is the input from coaches. Near the end of each season we ask coaches to fill out confidential evaluation forms for all of their players. We expect all coaches to provide this info as objectively as possible, and we want it from all of the coaches on a team, not just the “head coach”. This way, we hope that any player’s ratings will be determined by multiple coaches, not just their own parent (if their parent is one of the coaches on that team).
- Because coaches’ evaluations vary, and because in many cases we don’t get a chance otherwise to see players together on the same field, once a year (in the Spring) we hold “Evaluations”. These look like “tryouts” but again, everyone there is getting a spot on a Travel roster. Because any kid’s performance on one random day may vary, or players may not be able to attend their evaluation because of illness, injury, or other conflicts, the coach evaluation forms are weighed more heavily.
- Where possible, we also try to account for other factors like putting family members onto the same team or such. So please do make any such requests, but remember, ultimately the goal is to build teams of similar skill levels so we cannot always accommodate such requests.

More specific info and additional criteria can be found in our Procedures and Guidelines doc, which is linked to on [our Travel page](#) on the MYSA website, and is (generally) kept up to date.

## 6. What are the “placement committees”?

Again, our primary goal in this process is to build teams as accurately as possible, which means being as objective as possible. And so, no one single person picks the rosters.

Team placements are actually done prior to each season by confidential “placement committees” who are pulled together by each age group coordinator. These will typically be 3-6 coaches or other heavily soccer-engaged observers who are knowledgeable about the players in that particular age group. The age group coordinator recruits these individuals onto the committee and organizes their meeting, which typically lasts a couple of hours for each age

group. Members of the committees are asked not to publicly share who is on the committees, so that we can keep the process objective without outside pressure. The placement committees may or may not include evaluators from the field sessions.

In that meeting, confidential coach and eval data are shared with the committee, who then debate and work through each player's placement, individually. This process is taken very seriously and with due responsibility.

We build teams in the Fall that we expect will largely stay together through the following Spring season, but of course changes are inevitable, either because of players leaving or entering the league, or to adjust to make the teams as balanced as possible.

No, the President and other officers of the MYSAs do not get any special say in the process and often aren't even included on these committees. No, the age group coordinators do not make the placement determinations themselves, they are just the organizers of these committees.

No, players are never "grandfathered" onto a team simply because they were part of that team the prior year – every year players are placed anew, based upon the most recent data available. Players develop skills and physical attributes at different times from each other. Their soccer "career" is not destined by their most recent team placement. *"Popcorn is prepared in the same pot, in the same heat, in the same oil and yet ... the kernels do not pop at the same time. Don't compare your child to others. Their turn to pop is coming!"*

No, players are not placed onto teams because their parent is a coach of that team, it's always the other way around – players are placed onto the right team for them, as best as possible, and then coaches are recruited / selected from among the parents on that team. No, players are not placed onto a team simply because their parent is one of our volunteer organizers.

The committees do the best they can, but please be patient with the results – they are inevitably forced to work with incomplete information and conflicting ratings, months ahead of the actual season, and some players will unfortunately end up misplaced every season. But ultimately, the goal is to build teams as equitably and accurately as possible, and overall (but yes, not in every case) the MYSAs have a very good track record on this score.

7. My child can't make the particular evaluation day for their age group. Can they attend another group's session?

Since the main point of the evaluation is to see players on the same field with the other players in their age group, attending a different age group's session doesn't really help. If you truly cannot make this once-per-year evaluation session, please do RSVP anyway as that's how we know to reserve a Travel roster spot for your child. As mentioned above, the coach evaluations are more informative for the placement committees than the field evaluation scores in any case.

8. I don't like the team my child was placed onto. Or I wanted my child to be placed onto a team with their friend, and they weren't. Can I request a change?

You can always request a change, but in most cases we won't be able to accommodate such requests. As you can see from the description of the process and goals above, there is a lot of work put into building teams with roughly level skillsets, and shifting players around for other personal reasons hurts the soccer experience for everyone else.

Players cannot be placed into an older age group. To open the door to that would get everyone making the same request; that way lies chaos.

9. Can I help?

Volunteers are always needed for one role or another! Please always feel encouraged to reach out to your age group coordinator if you would like to help. We generally discourage efforts to lobby your way onto a placement committee or into an evaluator role, but otherwise we greatly appreciate people stepping up to help as organizers, coaches, and in other roles.