



As of October, 2023

Travel and Intramural Programs -- Guidelines and Procedures

I. Introduction

A. Philosophy

The basic philosophy of the Marblehead Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) Travel Soccer and Intramural Programs is to provide players with an appropriate level of coaching and competition to further enhance their skills and knowledge of the game at a pace consistent with their gender, age group, talent, and commitment, while at the same time focusing on player development and fostering a love of soccer, learning to be part of a team and the need for teamwork, and having fun.

B. Program Description

1. Definition of Competition Level

a) Travel Team Competition

MYSA Travel Soccer Teams compete in Essex County Youth Soccer Association (ECYSA) in divisions commensurate with their ability. While MYSA will provide guidance to ECYSA to help facilitate placement in the appropriate division, ultimately ECYSA makes the determination and MYSA has limited ability to affect their determination after the fact. While MYSA Travel teams should seek to win, as it is a developmentally-appropriate motivator, winning is a secondary factor to player development and fun. *The ideal Travel season is a .500 record, as it implies a well-placed team with lots of fun and competitive games during the season.*

b) Intramural Team Competition

MYSA Intramural (IM) Soccer Teams will compete in an IM program within the Town of Marblehead against other Marblehead teams. The MYSA will make efforts to follow ECYSA and Mass Youth Soccer age competition guidelines. IM programs are non-competitive and standings are not kept or promoted. In addition, in accordance with such guidelines, round robin tournaments will not include standings, league tables or finals. All efforts will be made to provide balanced skills across the teams of each IM league, however

this is very difficult to execute with precision given lack of information about players (including the lack of field evaluations) and how quickly players change their skill levels at the younger levels. The Coordinator should develop IM teams by leveraging end-of-season coach evaluations and their own understanding of the cohort to guide team formation (e.g., the strongest and weakest players should be spread across different teams) with a paramount goal of competitive balance above any other factors (e.g., coach/player pairing requests). Especially in IM the emphasis is upon player fun and development, and not about winning.

2. Number of Teams to be Fielded

Final determination of the number of Travel teams will be based on the guidelines contained herein and any exceptions will be made only upon the recommendation of the Gender VP to the MYSA Board for approval.

The number of Intramural teams will be determined by the Gender VPs with input from the President and the Registrar with respect to the number of players who have registered, and the availability of coaches and fields for the season.

The numbers rarely work out perfectly, but the below guidelines reflect the dual goals of a) having enough players on each roster to field full teams even during low-attendance weeks (e.g., spring break weekends) without undue reliance on the player pass system (available for Travel teams), but also b) having few enough players on a roster so that when everyone shows up, all players still get to play at least half a game.

Also, lower-ranked teams should generally have marginally larger rosters than higher-ranked teams within an age group. This is both to accommodate ECYSA-specific “guest player pass” rules and also to facilitate player movement between teams as necessary.

a) Guidelines for the Number of Grade 4 (“G4”) Travel Teams

The number of G4 teams to play travel soccer in both the Fall and Spring seasons shall be determined by the Gender VPs with input from the President and Registrar, with respect to the number of players who have indicated that they have the interest and commitment and the availability of coaches and fields for the season

G4 players who do not wish to play Travel will be eligible to play IM at the same age level, either G2/3/4 or G3/4 as appropriate by season. No player in Grade 3 or younger will be eligible for Travel placement.

The ideal number of players for both Travel and IM G4 teams, given the games are 7v7, is 10-11 per roster, when possible. 13 is the maximum unless Coordinators and Gender VP determine an exception is required.

b) Guidelines for the number of grade 5/6 (“G6”) and grade 7/8 (“G8”) Travel Teams

The number of G6 and G8 teams to play travel soccer in the spring season shall be determined by the Gender VPs with input from the President and Registrar based on the number of players who have registered, and the availability of coaches and fields for the season. No Intramural teams will be fielded in the spring.

G6 travel soccer consists of small-sided 9 vs. 9 competition. A G6 travel team may consist of no more than 15 players, unless the age group coordinator and Gender VP determine an exception is required. The ideal roster size is 12-13.

G8 travel soccer consists of 11 vs. 11 competition. A G8 travel team may consist of no more than 21 players unless the age group coordinator and Gender VP determine an exception is required. The ideal roster size is 14-16.

c) Guidelines for the number of U-16+ Travel Teams

i. Spring

The number of U16+ teams to play travel soccer in the spring season is at the discretion of the Gender VPs with input from the President and Registrar with respect to the number of players who have indicated that they have interest and commitment and the availability of coaches and fields for the season.

ii. Fall

Generally there will be no MYSA U16+ teams in the Fall. The number of U16+ teams to play travel soccer in the fall season is at the discretion of the Gender VPs with input from the President and Registrar with respect to the number of players who have indicated that they have interest and commitment and the availability of coaches and fields for the season.

II. Selection of the Team

A. Eligibility Qualifications for Travel Soccer

1. Player Qualifications

In order to qualify to be eligible to play Travel Soccer in the MYSA program, players must:

Register with MYSA via the publicized electronic means (e.g., TeamSnap) prior to the communicated deadline for the respective season in which they wish to participate, and make best efforts to attend the Field Evaluations (at present, Field Evaluations are only undertaken once per calendar year) arranged for that age group; provided that the Gender VP and Age Group Coordinator should make allowances for sickness, injury, school/family/other conflicts, late moves to Marblehead from other towns, etc.

MYSA provides spots on a Travel team to all eligible and interested players and does not make “cuts”. It is expected that all Travel players who register will plan to have the time and commitment to attend all scheduled games and, at a minimum, 60% of all scheduled practice sessions. Depending on the circumstances, attendance may be used by Selection Committees when building rosters for the next season, especially where circumstances may indicate commitment (or lack thereof) to the MYSA Travel program.

B. Player Placement Criteria

Team Selection Criteria: Each Travel Selection Committee (organized by age/gender group) will review/discuss several aspects of a player’s performance when making placements. **THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO PLACE PLAYERS APPROPRIATELY FOR THEIR CURRENT SKILL LEVEL.** Studies have shown that teams overall and players individually develop best when placed with similar skill-level teammates.

The team placement factors shall include (in order of priority):

1. Skills/Ability/Positional Flexibility/Coachability

- a) Review/discussion of past seasons’ coaches’ evaluations, including ranking & comments
- b) Travel Selection Committee members’ personal observations and comments on player performance.
- c) Field Evaluation rankings, comments, and observations.
- d) If no or little coaching or Field Eval data is available (for example, a player is moving to Marblehead from another town), the age group coordinator is encouraged to seek out information through other means: Reaching out to the other town programs, including the player in a practice, anything to help provide the appropriate placement.

- e) Dedicated goalkeepers: MYSA generally does not encourage dedicated goalkeepers until G8. But if a player is goalkeeper-focused and ready to play that one position at a higher level than at other field positions, to the extent where it would clearly enhance their development and fun to be placed at a higher level than their evals would indicate, that is an acceptable exception for a Selection Committee to consider.

2. Attendance/Comments

- a) Coach's attendance comments on coach evaluations as noted above.
- b) Selection committees may also consider longer-term practice and game attendance record, with an eye toward commitment to continued development.
- c) Review of player's commitment to the travel team over other sporting activities or other extracurricular activities, with an eye toward commitment to continued soccer development and being present for their MYSA team.

3. Other Factors

If two or more players are roughly "equal" based on all aforementioned criteria, then the committee may use the following factors, in no particular order:

- a) Age, the older (or second year) player may be preferred.
- b) Parental involvement: the committee can consider parental involvement in the program with the player whose parent(s) has recently contributed the most time to the program.
- c) Consistent involvement with the MYSA: Players who have consistently been there both Fall and Spring and over multiple years shall be preferred over "equal" players with less consistent past participation.

C. Travel Team Selection Process

1. The Travel Selection Committees

- a) **Mandate**

The Travel Selection Committees are charged with forming teams for their age group that will align with the MYSA Philosophy and Travel Team Competition Level discussed above, endeavoring that all teams/players in the cohort will have a successful season as understood by MYSA. There has been ongoing debate between “grade-based” and “skills-based” team-building. For example, should the “top team” in G8G be entirely 8th graders or should it be the top-ranked players across 7th and 8th graders. MYSA does not have a hard and fast rule on this choice, as it may vary by age group and specific numbers of players registered for the season.

b) Membership

The Gender Age Group Coordinator with the approval of the Gender VP is responsible for selecting a panel of not less than three (3) and not more than five (5) qualified individuals for the travel selection committee in each gender/age group. The panel should include the gender age group coordinator and gender VP. Care should be taken to ensure that the individuals have experience with and understanding of the players across the cohort (e.g., familiarity with players of varying abilities, not only top players), as well as an understanding of the game, coach licensing, playing and coaching experience, and participation in Field Evaluations.

Age group coordinators and Gender VPs should strive to keep Selection Committee members anonymous to preserve the independence of the process without fear or favor.

c) Team Selection Committee Conduct and Meeting Date

The team selection committee should meet to select the teams after the end of registration but sufficiently prior to any ECYSA deadlines to allow for a deliberative process and without risk of incurring late fees. Age Group Coordinators should gather and compile Coach Evaluation and Field Evaluation data prior to the Committee meeting. The VP Travel shall communicate these ECYSA deadlines and thus establish internal process deadlines accordingly.

All proceedings of the team selection committee are confidential. During and after the team selection process there shall be no dissemination of information in writing / electronic communications, concerning the rankings or comments about any individual players to anyone except Committee members and the MYSA board. The Coordinator and/or Gender VP shall reinforce the need for confidentiality of this information and may, as warranted, aggregate and/or anonymize the data presented at the actual Committee meeting.

d) Procedure/Conduct

- i. Coordinators shall summarize content of the most recent Field Eval rating sheets by player, and provide this content to the Committee at the actual meeting.
- ii. They shall also summarize content of current and past coaches ranking sheets by player, including attendance and other notes.
- iii. Coordinators shall NOT provide a suggested “answer” for the Committee for their cursory approval, as MYSA wants a robust discussion during all meetings, but an initial draft ranking is acceptable to help focus the discussion. This initial ranking may include context necessary to help level-set for ratings from coaches from teams playing at different placement levels in the current season, at the Coordinator’s discretion.
- iv. Selection Committee Members shall arrive at the meeting with the intention of being objective and unbiased, with a commitment to 1) providing the best outcome for the entire cohort and not just their own child / child’s team, 2) engaging with the data first and their personal opinions second, 3) preserving confidentiality, and 4) supporting player development and fun rather than winning.

e) Completion of the Process

It is expected that travel team rosters will be finalized at the selection meeting along with prioritized list of alternates for each team.

At the determination of the MYSA Board, final rosters for all teams within an age group may be provided upon request to anyone or even published publicly. While we want to preserve individual player and coach confidentiality, the MYSA also wants to provide as much transparency and demonstration of objectivity as possible.

2. Evaluation Methods

a) Purpose of Field Evaluations

The purpose of holding Field Evaluations is to make the selection process more objective by putting all eligible players on the same field at the same time. Children develop their athletic potential at different rates over the course of the year. It is important that the selection process recognize those differences. Placement on a Travel team should

not be automatic or based on the previous season's rosters. Open Field Evals should be held every year for every gender age group.

b) Conducting the Field Evaluations

i. Responsibility for designing and coordinating Field Evaluations:

The VP of Technical Development shall be responsible for designing the overall format of annual Field Evaluations by age group, including demonstration of both technical skills and game situations.

The Gender VP, in conjunction with the Gender Age Group Coordinator, is responsible for enlisting the evaluators. Evaluators shall be chosen with the intention of a blended mix of coaches familiar with the age group, and unaffiliated evaluators (including possibly from outside of MYSA altogether), to provide as much balanced objectivity as possible. The Gender Age Group Coordinator is responsible for all other aspects of the Field Evals.

Each Gender Age Group field evaluation shall be conducted with the same format under the guidance of the Technical Development VP.

3. Placement Notifications

Following team selections, players/families should be promptly advised of their Travel team placement for the season. Generally, all players within an age group should be notified simultaneously to prevent rumors and the premature leaking of selections. Notification can be made via notice through the MYSA league platform (i.e., TeamSnap) or via an email from the Coordinator or Gender VP. Placement notices should state that MYSA reserves the right to reassign players as needed per section 4 below.

4. Post-Notification Transfers

a) Pre-Season Transfers

If late additions or subtractions, injuries or other circumstances require subsequent changes to rosters up to and including the first week of the season, it is up to the judgment of the Coordinator and Gender VP to make these

determinations. If the changes seem significant, the Coordinator and Gender VP are encouraged to communicate with or even reconvene the Selection Committee to provide input.

b) Mid-Season Travel Transfers

Players should not be moved between Travel teams in-season except in rare circumstances. These may include: a) early season feedback from coaches that a player is vastly misplaced on a skills level, to an extent that would obviously disrupt their development; and b) a significant number of injuries or withdrawals on a team, making their viability a question. Players should not be moved in-season with an eye toward improving the receiving team's competitiveness.

In-season player movement should not be discussed first with the player or the player's family. Instead, coaches interested in in-season player movement should first discuss fully with the Age Group Coordinator and if needed the Gender VP. Any subsequent communications with any of the players or families involved should be undertaken only by the Age Group Coordinator and/or the Gender VP, not by the coaches involved. If needed, such discussions can be elevated to the President, other Gender VP, VP Travel and VP Technical Development for ultimate determination. All of which should take place before any communication with the players and families involved.

D. Travel Team Coach Selection Process

Volunteer coaches are the lifeblood of the MYSA and the biggest determinants of player development and family enjoyment. Coach training, behavior, and attitudes are vital for the success of the MYSA in its mission to help every child develop and have fun. It is also important to remember that while coaches are assigned to an individual team, all MYSA coaches are part of a community and overall team of coaches and should be evaluated accordingly.

After the Travel Teams have been organized (selected), and before rosters are filed with the ECYSA, each Age Group Coordinator will nominate Head Coaches and Assistant Coaches for each team in their Gender Age Group. Having received indications of interest from travel team parents, prior coaches, or other qualified individuals, the Age Group Coordinator will submit these names to the Travel Coach Selection Committee for endorsement or rejection. At times the MYSA may also implement a self-nomination process for soliciting coaching volunteers.

The Travel Coach Selection Committee shall include the MYSA President, VP Technical Development, VP Travel, and each Gender VP. This Committee can meet via electronic communications to finalize review and approval of Age Group Coordinator recommendations. The Travel Coach Selection Committee may also overrule the Age Group Coordinator and consider alternative candidates, as the

Committee deems appropriate. The Travel Coach Selection Committee shall make the final determination of coaches invited to participate according to the following criteria, in no particular priority order:

- A. Demonstrated availability and commitment to the MYSA
- B. Past violations of the Coach Code of Conduct, including past ECYSA sanctions
- C. Past adherence to the Coach Behavior Guidelines
- D. Coach training certifications
- E. Qualitative feedback from parents and MYSA volunteers including other coaches

In the event a member of the Travel Team Coach Selection Committee is being considered for a travel team coach position, that person will be recused from that portion of the coach selection process. The deliberations and decisions of the Selection Committee shall be documented so that any third-party can review upon request, although confidentiality may require leaving out certain details from the written record.

The travel team coaches will be notified by the Age Group Coordinator.

E. Intramural Coach Selection Process

Intramural coaches shall be recruited and selected by the Age Group Coordinators. Where possible the same Travel Coach Selection criteria should be included in the process. Gender VPs shall be consulted for approval before IM coach selections are finalized.

IM coaches should be strongly encouraged to attend internal MYSA coach training sessions and also get US Soccer Coach Training. Willingness to do this will be a factor in their eligibility for future Travel Coach consideration.