

# A PARENTS GUIDE TO TRAVEL SOCCER

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## A Parents Guide to Travel Soccer

### Introduction

This guide was developed to assist you in answering some of the more common questions concerning travel soccer. Travel soccer team play not only requires that your son or daughter be capable of playing at a high level relative to the rest of their age group, but also involves a substantial commitment in time, energy, and money from both the player and their families. While we attempt to respond to many of the different situations, you may find that some extraordinary circumstances, based on your family's personal demands are not included in this guide.

### **What is travel soccer?**

Travel soccer is a sponsored program of SYC. The travel soccer program is organized by age and gender. It provides a highly competitive training and playing environment for those players (and their families) who have the required athletic ability, soccer skills, commitment, and can meet the other demands placed upon them.

### **How does travel soccer differ from the regular house or recreation soccer league?**

SYC soccer travel teams are competitive. Therefore, making the roster, and staying on the roster, must be earned based on the team member's play. In the house or recreation soccer league, all players are placed on a team roster regardless of playing ability. Recreation soccer also has unique requirements to encourage participation by all players such as all players must play 1/2 of each game. Travel soccer playing time is based on the team's needs and is at the coach's discretion.

### **How does SYC's travel soccer program work?**

SYC sponsors up to three travel teams in each age and gender bracket. The first team formed in each age and gender bracket are frequently the more highly advanced teams that may eventually compete for state and regional championships and other honors. Each SYC soccer travel team, though affiliated with SYC, is independent and, therefore, has different goals and team characteristics.

Both the SYC house and travel soccer programs have a commissioner and serve under the umbrella of the SYC Soccer Committee and ultimately the SYC Board of Directors. The SYC Travel Commissioner coordinates the new team formation process. This includes directing the initial coach hiring process for the U-9 teams and conveying the recommendations of the Travel Commissioner and/or the Evaluation Committee (when formed) to the SYC Soccer Committee.

Unlike many Club travel programs in the Washington area, SYC does not employ an "A-B system" when forming new U-9 (3<sup>rd</sup> grade) teams. All travel teams have the same fundamental mission for the players - to create a meaningful, positive experience; to develop soccer skills, and to teach the lessons associated with team play. SYC Soccer does, however, stagger the establishment of its travel teams at the younger ages so as to encourage the clustering of players of similar skill and athletic level on the same team by forming two boys and girls teams to begin play at U-9 level annually.

### **How does competition affect the travel soccer program?**

SYC Soccer travel teams play in one of three travel leagues: the National Capitol Soccer League (NCSL), for boys ages U-9 through U-19; the Washington Area Girls Soccer (WAGS), for girls ages U-11 through U-19; and the Old Dominion Soccer League (ODSL), for boys and girls ages U-9 through U-19. Except for the teams in the youngest age groups, or in certain ODSL age groups, teams are assigned to particular divisions based upon their level of play. Each season teams are placed in a higher or lower division based upon their won/lost record. Generally the top two teams in a division are moved up a division and the bottom two are moved down a division. For this reason and others, travel soccer play inevitably becomes quite competitive.

While age alone is not a limitation in making a team, you may find that the competitive nature of travel soccer and the necessity of a team's rigorous ongoing training may make it increasingly difficult as players get older to make a team if the player has no previous travel experience. This is particularly important to understand when trying out for teams in either WAGS and NCSL upper division level teams.

### **How old must my child be to play travel soccer?**

Each summer, SYC forms two new boys travel teams and two new girls travel teams. These teams begin play the following fall as U-9 teams (generally 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). The boys teams play in the National Capital Soccer League (NCSL) and the girls play in the Old Dominion Soccer League (ODSL).

[Note: SYC determines if your child is U-9 if they turn nine years old at any time from August 1 - July 31. For example, if your child turns 9 between August 1 - July 31 they qualify to play U-9 soccer for that season. If they turn 10 at any time between August 1 - July 31, your child qualifies to play U-10 soccer. A birth certificate or other documentation are required to establish your child's age.]

### **How do I get on a travel team?**

You must tryout to join a travel team. SYC requires all travel teams to have a tryout each year generally in June. Some teams however, may have tryouts at other times during the year.

### **When and where are tryouts?**

SYC requires all its soccer teams to hold open tryouts generally in June after the spring season ends. Tryouts typically consist of 1-3 or more practice sessions to evaluate your child's athletic ability, skills, and interest. After the tryouts, an offer may or may not be extended

to your child. Alternatively, after the first tryout, the coach may ask your child to return for additional tryouts or suggest that the team is not a good fit for your child.

Some teams invite players to guest play in a tournament as part of the evaluation process. Occasionally, teams may pick up a player or two between the fall and spring seasons. However, WAGS, NCSL, and ODSL limit the number of players who can be picked up between seasons (generally three players may be picked up). However, once seasonal league play begins, rosters are fixed and no additional players may be added.

### **How do I find out about a tryout?**

Teams use various methods to publicize their tryouts. Newspaper advertisements, bulletin board notices, word of mouth and asking players to tryout are common methods. At SYC, especially at the younger levels, travel team coaches will watch their respective recreation or house All Star teams as they play in the season ending tournaments. Several players from those teams may be asked to tryout for a team. However, even if you are not asked you may still tryout for a team.

If your child is interested in trying out for a travel team please check out the respective age group travel team contact information located on the SYC website ([www.sycva.com](http://www.sycva.com)). You can also call your child's house league director for contact information. If you're having trouble hooking up with a team, please contact the SYC soccer travel commissioner listed at the end of this guide.

### **What type of training is provided?**

Most travel soccer teams either have a professional coach or use a parent volunteer as a coach. If a parent volunteer coaches they generally use a professional trainer to provide specialized training. Many trainers are also coaches and/or have special relationships with particular clubs or coaching organizations.

Trainers, like coaches, have areas of strength and experience. Some are better with younger teams; some trainers have more experience and a better record with a particular gender; and some trainers are strong teachers of particular skill sets, such as fast footwork. The fees which trainers charge vary widely therefore, can impact the overall cost of being part of any travel soccer team.

If a team uses a trainer, understand what the trainer's role and responsibilities are. The trainer is an assistant to the coach. The coach continues to make decisions as to what skills are worked on in practice; how the practice is run; how the games are run; and, perhaps most importantly, what are the team's priorities and its tone and tenor.

### **When do travel soccer teams play their games?**

Most SYC Soccer travel games are held on Sundays but there are some Saturday games. It is not uncommon to play games on both a Saturday and Sunday of the same weekend. Occasionally, there may be a game on a weeknight based on weather cancellations at the end of the season. The fall season runs from September to the beginning of November. The spring season runs from the end of March until the first part of June.

Most teams also participate in tournaments. Tournaments consist of 3-5 games during a weekend. Generally tournaments are held several weeks before the season begins (i.e. in August and March), after the season (November and June), and during breaks in the season such as the Columbus Day and Memorial Day weekends. Tournaments may be local (i.e. the Washington DC metro area) or elsewhere in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, etc. Top flight teams may travel to prestigious tournaments such as those in Texas, California, Florida, and other locales.

Most SYC travel teams play one to three tournaments per season including at least one out of town tournament per season.

Many SYC Soccer travel teams at the U-12 and older ages compete in State Cup events. These events may also require out of town travel.

### **How many players are on a team?**

Experienced travel coaches try to keep their rosters small, especially when coaching younger aged teams. The players are training hard and want to play. Their parents certainly want them to play. If a team is carrying 17 or 18 players on its roster (or 12 to 14 on a small-sided roster), there is simply no way that the team will be able to provide adequate playing time for every player. Smaller rosters assume that all players will be at the practices, matches and especially tournaments.

### **What volunteer positions are needed to support a team.**

Teams organize in a number of different ways. Generally there is a team manager who is the go between the parents and the coach. The team manager generally handles many of the administrative details of the team such as league matters, applying to tournaments, communication, etc. The team manager position is the most time consuming job on the team beside the coach. Teams generally have a treasurer and may have a parent coordinate fund raising, uniforms, be the team's Virginian Tournament representative, coordinate home field setup, etc. It takes a great deal of time and energy to operate a travel team and requires significant help at times by all player families. To avoid the \$35 SYC volunteer fee on an annual basis, each travel soccer and house soccer family must volunteer a minimum of 4 hours in an approved job by the coach or manager. The Virginian Tournament participation does not count as the 4 hours of volunteer work since the team is compensated for its collective effort. The team Virginian representative is the only volunteer job that will satisfy the 4-hour volunteer credit.

### **What is the player's time commitment?**

Most SYC travel teams operate a 9-11 month per year program, including outdoor league play in the fall and spring, indoor play in the winter and camp and tournament play at various times throughout the summer. (High school age travel teams sometimes do not play in the spring when their high school squads are competing.)

Most SYC travel teams train twice a week for 1 1/2 hours per session. Occasionally, some teams may practice three times per week. Including tournaments, most SYC travel teams play approximately 15-20 games each spring and fall season and possibly 8 -10 games during indoor league play.

While most SYC travel teams, particularly younger teams, encourage their players to participate in other sports, travel teams also expect that team members will give preference to travel team games over conflicts with other sports.

### **My child wants to play high school soccer. Will playing travel soccer help?**

Possibly, though there is no guarantee that your child will make his/her high school team. The fact that your child is participating in a higher level of play with more practices and games against better skilled competition will improve their game and increase their chances of making their high school team.

### **Where do travel soccer teams travel to for league play?**

Locations for league games are generally within the area bounded by I-81 in western Virginia, Annapolis on the east, Baltimore on the north and Fredericksburg on the south. Locations of games are ultimately determined by the league your team is a member of such as ODSL, WAGS and NCLS and the makeup of the teams in your division. At times, you may find that a game will be played in a close-by community or one that requires a 2 hour car drive.

### **How much does it cost?**

SYC soccer travel team participation is expensive. League and club fees; shoes, uniforms, and other gear; and travel and lodging costs for out of town tournaments can range from \$200.00 to well over \$500.00 per family, per season. For older teams, with paid trainers or coaches, the costs may be considerably higher. Travel teams can help defray their team expenses through team fund raising activities (car washes, sales, etc.) and volunteering for Virginian Tournament jobs.

### **Is there any financial assistance available?**

SYC's Travel Soccer Program makes every effort to ensure that all Springfield children who are accepted onto a travel squad are able to participate without regard to financial considerations. If your son or daughter's participation is jeopardized because of financial considerations, talk to your coach or manager about your situation. You can also talk directly to the SYC Travel Commissioner.

### **What are the advantages of playing for a SYC travel team rather than for another club?**

The objectives of SYC Travel Soccer are to:

- 1) Maintain a positive, but challenging environment that allow players to develop their physical, physiological, technical and tactical soccer potential;
- 2) Field teams that play quality soccer at a level of competition to commensurate with their talent;
- 3) Provide the opportunity for the most talented and dedicated players in the area from the same schools to play together and to allow teams to play at the highest level of competition possible;
- 4) Promote fairness, equity and good sportsmanship in pursuing the above objectives.
- 5) Supervise and support each team to attain the above objectives.

### **Is there any commitment to SYC?**

Yes, all SYC Soccer travel teams must participate in the SYC-sponsored Memorial Day weekend Virginian tournament. This tournament is well run and organized (experienced travel soccer families will tell you that this is one of the best tournaments they ever participated in) and offers all SYC travel soccer teams the opportunity to earn money for their teams by working the tournament".

Additionally, all players and parents are required to adhere to SYC's code of conduct. Please refer to the SYC code of conduct policy at the end of the SYC Soccer Program Guide.

### **How is the coach chosen?**

All coaches must apply for a coaching position to the SYC travel commissioner. The factors considered include the coach's experience, temperament, and commitment. The Travel Commissioner selects all travel team coaches after a careful examination of the coach's credentials. In addition, all coaches must apply to SYC's KIDSAFE program.

At the younger ages (U-9 to U-12) the coach may be a parent volunteer. The coach may have been your child's coach in the house league and/or was the coach of one of the season ending all-star teams. Teams with a paid coach generally employ a trainer to work with the team on soccer skills once a week. Some teams also employ a professional coach at the younger age groups. At the older ages (U-13 and above, the coach is generally a paid professional coach.

### **What Can Parents Expect From Travel Coaches?**

Soccer travel team coaches must meet high standards for technical competence; knowledge of soccer rules and tactics; ability to work effectively and positively with travel team players; and the ability to interact effectively and positively with travel team parents, other coaches and club league administrators. Travel team coaches are responsible for the selection of travel team members; for team training; for all on-field decisions; and for the overall conduct of the team on and off the soccer field. The travel team coach is the official representative of SYC Soccer in dealing with players, parents, league officials and the public.

Most volunteer coaches, but not all, may have a son or daughter playing on the team. In such an event their child is automatically included on the team roster. The volunteer coach has offered up significant amounts of time and effort to ensure the team receives all the necessary attention it requires and deserves. All coaches should be regarded in the same manner that you wish to be respected. In the case of paid coaches, some of the off-the-field responsibilities are vested in the team manager, as discussed above.

Coaching a travel soccer team is a wonderful and gratifying experience but also a challenging and, at times, terribly frustrating experience. SYC Soccer is very proud of its cadre of travel team coaches.

**Can my child be cut from the team?**

Yes, coaches may decide to drop a player. As a practical matter, this is almost always confined to June as the team's roster is prepared for the upcoming fall and spring seasons and offers to join a team are for a full year (fall and spring seasons).

There are number of reasons why it becomes necessary to cut a player and the discretion belongs entirely to the coach. Experienced travel coaches know, however, that cutting a young person can be one of the most difficult things a young person has to deal with. Not surprisingly, parents can become very emotionally involved. The coach should try to give the child (and if a younger child, the parents) lots of notice that the child is at risk of not making next year's squad. At the same time, the coach should identify those aspects of the player's game, which need to be improved in order for the child to stay on the squad. When faced with a cut, the coach will often try to talk the parents into moving the child to another team. Experience shows that if the parents and child opt to move the player from the team, the emotional hurt and impact is minimized. Also, most coaches believe that it is their responsibility to work with the player and the parents to try to find the player another, more suitable team.

**Whom do I contact if I have an issue or problem?**

The Travel Commissioner represents SYC Soccer in providing support and oversight of the SYC Travel Soccer Program and in handling disputes.

Travel Soccer Commissioner: Gene Thomas 703- 690-4946 or [coachgene@juno.com](mailto:coachgene@juno.com)