MLS NEXT ACADEMY DIVISION
TECHNICAL STANDARDS
2026–2027

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I. GENERAL

a. Age Groups

MLS NEXT Academy Division Age Groups for the 2026-2027 Season are as follows, U13, U14, U15, U16, U17, and U19.

Playoff Age Groups are as follows, U13, U14, U15, U16, U17, and U19.

b. High School Soccer Participation

High school soccer participation is permitted by Players in the MLS NEXT Academy Division.

c. College Player Participation

Players who have participated or are participating in any college program at any level (i.e. NCAA Division I, junior college) are not permitted to participate in MLS NEXT Academy Division.

d. Professional Player Participation

Players who have participated or are participating professionally at any level are not permitted to participate in the MLS NEXT Academy Division.

e. Outside Competition

i. Event Participation

MLS NEXT Academy Division Team may only participate in approved outside tournaments, showcases, or events.

Requests can be made by completing the Outside Competition Form. MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator will evaluate each request according to their consistency with these Technical Standards, schedule, and commercial conflicts.

ii. League Participation

All MLS NEXT Academy Division players are permitted to participate in outside leagues with their current MLS NEXT club.

iii. Talent Identification

Primary Players may only participate in approved outside talent identification events with U.S. Soccer, Canadian Soccer, and all other FIFA recognized international federations. Players can participate in any National Team call-up at any time.

II. ROSTERS

a. Minimums & Maximums

The minimum number of players on an MLS NEXT Academy Division roster is 14 players per Team.

The maximum number of players on an MLS NEXT Academy Division roster is 28 players per Team.

b. Matchday

The maximum number of players on an MLS NEXT Academy Division matchday roster for regular season matches is 20 players per team.

c. Start Percentage

It is recommended, for all age groups, that all Primary Players start in 25% of official matches. For the U13 age group, it is required that each player on the matchday roster must play at least one (1) period uninterrupted. For the U14 and U15 age groups, it is recommended that all players participate in 50% of minutes per week.

d. Playing Up

Players are eligible to play in an older age group while being rostered in their younger age group, so long as they meet competition standards and play only 90 minutes per day across a maximum of two (2) matches.

e. Player Designations

i. Overage Player (O)

Each MLS NEXT Academy Division Club is permitted to register a maximum of three (3) overage players (e.g. school year of 8/1/2006-7/31/2007) on the U19 roster at one time.

ii. Trapped Players (T)

At the U14 age group, an unlimited number of U15 8th grade players are eligible to be rostered on the U14 team during the club's High School season. A maximum of three (3) Trapped Players are eligible to be selected on any U14 Matchday Roster. These players do not count toward the total roster number for the U14 team. Trapped Players must participate with the U15 team during MLS NEXT Cup and/or an MLS NEXT Cup Qualifier.

f. Roster Adds

MLS NEXT Academy Division teams are permitted to add an unlimited number of players during the MLS NEXT Academy Division season.

i. MLS NEXT Cup Qualifier and MLS NEXT Cup Eligibility

Clubs with both Homegrown Division and Academy Division teams cannot transition players down to the Academy Division within two (2) weeks of that club's MLS NEXT Cup Qualifier. Additionally, these clubs are not permitted to transition players down to the Academy Division within two (2) weeks of MLS NEXT Cup.

ii. Roster Freeze

There is no roster freeze within the MLS NEXT Academy Division.

iii. Player Movement

During the MLS NEXT Academy Division season, Player Movement will not be permitted between clubs within the Academy Division or between clubs within the Homegrown Division and the Academy Division. Please refer to the MLS NEXT Academy Division Player Movement Guidelines for additional regulations.

g. <u>Staff Technical Standards</u>

i. Registration Requirements

Any Club Staff members that will be working with MLS NEXT Academy Division players, will be traveling to away matches and MLS NEXT Academy Division Events, and/or will be in the technical area during MLS NEXT Academy Division matches are required to complete the entire registration process in the MLS NEXT Academy Division registration platform.

All Academy Directors must complete the entire registration process as is outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Rules & Regulations.

ii. Coaching License Requirements

MLS NEXT Academy Division Academy Directors must have a USSF Academy Directors Course, EFCL Certificate, or USSF/CSA B License or equivalent.

MLS NEXT Academy Division Head Coaches must have a C License or equivalent.

Any exceptions to the coaching license requirements outlined above must be approved by the MLS NEXT General Manager.

iii. Staff Recommendations

It is recommended that Head Coaches have additional Assistant Coaches, especially if coaching more than one team. Additionally, it is recommended that a coach shouldn't be the Head Coach for more than one team but instead should be a Head Coach for one team and an Assistant Coach for the other teams.

iv. Matchday

A maximum of five (5) coaching staff members are permitted in the technical area and must be listed on the Digital Match Roster within the MLS NEXT Academy Division matchday management platform. This maximum does NOT include a Qualified Medical Professional as is outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Safety & Wellbeing Policy.

There must be a minimum of one (1) registered staff member in the technical area for each MLS NEXT Academy Division match.

III. COMPETITION

a. Match Timeframe

i. Matchday Roster

Each team is permitted to have a maximum of 20 players and must have a minimum of 14 players per matchday roster.

Players are permitted to play in only 90 minutes per day across a maximum of two (2) in any competition, including Outside Competition.

Players are not permitted to appear in more than two (2) consecutive MLS NEXT Academy Division matchdays.

ii. Match Length

The U13 age group will consist of 3x25-minute periods and 2x5-minute intermissions.

The U14 age group will consist of 2x40-minute halves and one 10-minute halftime.

The U15, U16, U17, and U19 age groups will consist of 2x45-minute halves and one 10-minute halftime.

iii. Warm-Up Periods

Teams must be provided with an appropriate warm-up area 30 minutes before kick-off.

iv. Age Group Order

It is recommended that older age groups play first to accommodate younger players playing up in older age groups.

v. Kick Off Times

Regular season matches are not permitted to start earlier than 9:00 AM local time without approval from MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator.

vi. Time Between Matches

There must be a minimum of 18 hours between regular season matches if playing on consecutive days, unless otherwise approved by the MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator.

vii. Match Changes

MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator must approve of any request for schedule changes. Any requests for substantial changes in time or location received within two (2) weeks of the scheduled match may result in a fine.

b. Substitutions

The U13 age group will consist of two (2) substitution moments per period, substitutions are unrestricted, and intermissions do NOT count as a moment.

The U14 age group will consist of three (3) substitution moment per half, substitutions are unrestricted, and halftime does NOT count as a moment.

The U15, U16, U17, and U19 age groups will consist of three (3) substitution moment per half, there is NO re-entry permitted in the half, and halftime does NOT count as a moment.

There are exceptions to the above substitution provisions in accordance with the MLS NEXT Academy Division Concussion Protocol as outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Safety & Wellbeing Policy.

c. Match Ball

The U13 age group must use a Size 4 match ball for all MLS NEXT Academy Division matches. It is recommended that an adidas match ball is used.

The U14, U15, U16, U17, and U19 age groups must use a Size 5 match ball for all MLS NEXT Academy Division matches. It is recommended that an adidas match ball is used.

d. Hydration

The home club must provide adequate hydration for both teams.

e. Technical Area

The home club must provide adequate seating (e.g. benches) for both teams.

f. Qualified Medical Professional

The home club must provide a Qualified Medical Professional (QMP) as is outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Safety & Wellbeing Policy for all venues.

If both teams arrive at the field and the home team does not provide a QMP, the match must not be played, and the home team will receive a forfeit and a fine as is outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Safety & Wellbeing Policy.

g. Match Video

The home club must upload match video for all matches to the MLS NEXT Academy Division video exchange platform by 12:00 PM EST on Tuesday following the match. If the home club fails to upload match video by the deadline, the club may be fined in accordance with the MLS NEXT Academy Division Fine Structure. The camera must be to the level that it records with sound.

h. Spectators

The home club must ensure that no spectator or parent is in the technical area or on the technical sideline. Each club is responsible for the behavior of its spectators. Additionally, as is outlined in the MLS NEXT Academy Division Rules & Regulations, all spectators must sit across from their own club's bench.

IV. DISCIPLINE

Please refer to the MLS NEXT Academy Division Disciplinary Code for additional understanding of all discipline provisions.

a. Red Cards

Red Card accumulation will follow an MLS NEXT Academy Division player and staff member across all age groups and must be served in the player or staff member's primary age group.

Red Card accumulation for MLS NEXT Academy Division staff is as follows:

- 1st Offense will result in a minimum two (2)-match suspension
- 2nd Offense is subject to additional discipline beyond a two (2)-match suspension.
- 3rd Offense is subject to a long-term suspension determined by MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator.

Red Cards received in a friendly match, scrimmage, or outside competition will only result in a suspension from MLS NEXT Academy Division activities if deemed egregious by the League Operator and/or PDev.

b. Yellow Cards

Yellow Card accumulation will follow an MLS NEXT Academy Division player and staff member across all age groups and must be served in the player or staff member's primary age group. In the event a player or staff member receives two (2) Yellow Cards in the same match, resulting in a Red Card, only the first Yellow Card will count toward Yellow Card accumulation.

Yellow Card accumulation for MLS NEXT Academy Division players is as follows:

- Eight (8) Yellow Cards will result in a one (1) match suspension
- Ten (10) Yellow Cards will result in a two (2) match suspension
- Twelve (12) Yellow Cards will result in a three (3) match suspension

Yellow Card accumulation for MLS NEXT Academy Division staff is as follows:

- Three (3) Yellow Cards will result in a one (1) match suspension
- Five (5) Yellow Cards will result in a two (2) match suspension
- Seven (7) Yellow Cards will result in a three (3) match suspension

c. Fixture

When two (2) MLS NEXT Academy Division clubs play against each other across multiple age groups over one weekend, then all matches between the two (2) clubs are considered part of the MLS NEXT Academy Division Fixture.

i. Discipline Within Fixture

If a player or staff member receives a Yellow Card in two (2) different MLS NEXT Academy Division matches within the same Fixture, both Yellow Cards will count toward that player or staff member's Yellow Card accumulation.

If a player or staff member receives a Red Card in the first match of the MLS NEXT Academy Division split Fixture, then that player or staff member is not permitted to participate in the remaining matches of that Fixture.

d. Serving Suspension

MLS NEXT Academy Division players and staff members are not permitted to participate in MLS NEXT Academy Division matches with any age group(s) until that individual has completed its suspension with their primary age group.

V. FACILITIES & TRAINING

a. Match Field Standards

It is the expectation that MLS NEXT Academy Division clubs will provide appropriate, high-quality fields to host MLS NEXT Academy Division Matches.

The minimum field sizes for each age group are as follows:

- The U13 age group must utilize a minimum field size of 65x84 yards.
- The U14 age group must utilize a minimum field size of 65x100 yards.
- The U15, U16, U17, and U19 age groups must utilize a minimum field size of 70x110 yards.

Any field outside of the standards outlined above must be approved by MLS NEXT Academy Division League Operator before the season begins.

b. Match Locations

Clubs are permitted to utilize multiple locations for MLS NEXT Academy Division Regular Season matches, subject to League Operator approval. MLS NEXT Academy Division encourages the use of neutral sites when applicable to prevent overnight stays.

c. Training Standards

i. Sessions Per Week

All age groups must train a minimum of three (3) times per week. The content and breakdown of these training sessions is up to Club discretion.

ii. Rest Day

Individual players must be given at least one (1) day off per week.