

Advance Soccer USA

**THE PATHWAY GUIDE FOR ELITE
GIRLS' YOUTH COMPETITIVE
SOCCER IN THE USA**

MAY 2024

Thony Ngumbu





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Thank you for spreading knowledge about youth soccer!



Advance Soccer USA
Empowering Parents & Youth Soccer Players

Contact Info:

Location: Houston, Texas, USA

Email: info@advancesoccerusa.org

Website: www.advancesoccerusa.org



Youth Soccer Pathways

Helping Players Achieve Their Goals

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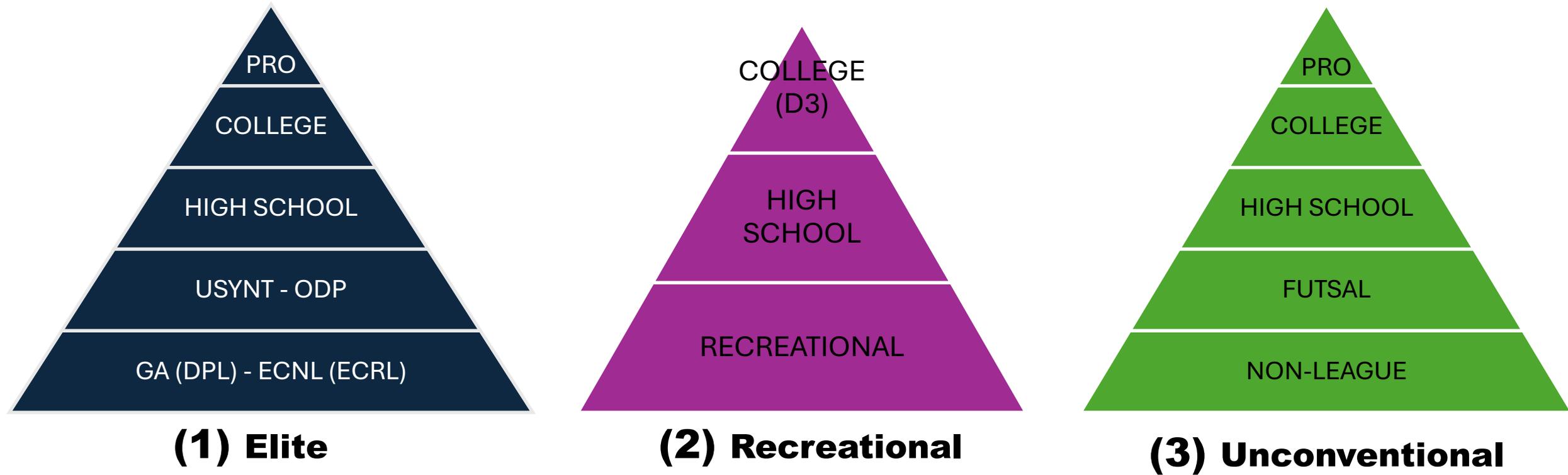
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What is Youth Soccer “PATHWAY”?

Climbing to the top of the pyramid

A youth soccer pathway in the USA outlines the progression of a young soccer player from the earliest stages of involvement in the sport through to the highest levels of competition and potential professional play.

Here’s a general overview of the typical stages in **3 pathways**: elite, recreational and unconventional.



Each stage of the pathway involves increasing levels of commitment, competition, and specialization. The pathway is designed to develop players to their full potential, whether their goal is to play recreationally, collegiately, or professionally.



What is “Girls Academy” (GA)?



Meghan Frey,
GA President



David Richardson,
GA Vice-President

- Youth development platform for female soccer players only.
- Created in 2020 after the closure of the **U.S. Soccer Development Academy (DA)**.
- Founded by a group of leaders from the **Development Player League (DPL)**.

What are the “DA” & “DPL”?



What is the U.S. Soccer Development Academy (DA)?

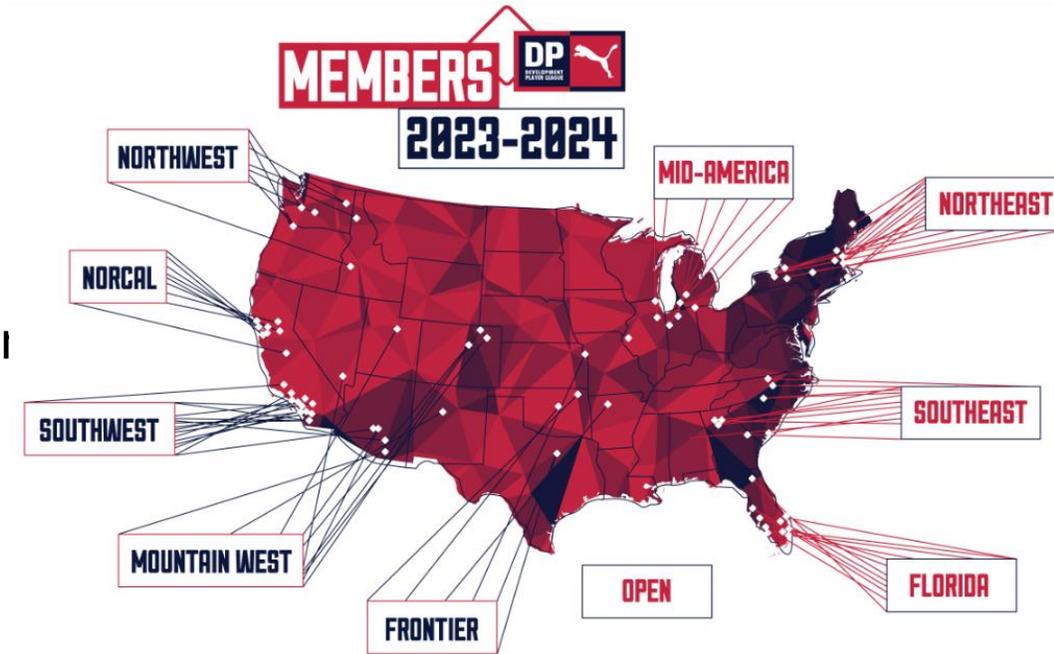
- Soccer league created in 2007 by US Soccer, in partnership with **MLS** and **USL** (boys only).
- Created Girl's Development Academy in 2017.
- March 15, 2020: abrupt closure by U.S. Soccer (due to COVID-19 –related financial situation)
- Some clubs were promptly accepted into the ECNL.
- The majority joined the new GA, founded by a group of leaders from the Development Player League (DPL).





What is the Development Player League (DPL)?

- National all-girls league/platform created as a counter to the DA restrictions on players:
 - i.e.: 4 training nights & prohibited high school soccer
- DPL was the answer for players who wanted a **balanced soccer experience**.
- Strategic partnership with GA called the **Development League Alliance (DLA)**:
 - Top DPL teams and clubs get a pathway to GA events, to prove themselves for future GA membership considerations.





GA Advisory Panel, The Players' Voice

- One of the unique aspects of the GA is the **Advisory Panel**. It is a player-led board that gives players the opportunity to represent their collective voice within the Girls Academy, engage in the league's strategic growth initiatives, and develop leadership skills.
- The Advisory Panel consists of over **750 total players**.





GA's Official U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) Membership

February 10, 2024: GA became an Official Member Organization of the U.S. Soccer Federation (Annual General Meeting vote)



116 Organization Members receive guidance and resources :

promote, organize and grow the game of soccer.

Across USA

Grassroots to professional leagues.



US YOUTH SOCCER



U.S. FUTSAL



STX SOCCER





What is ECNL?



Christian Lavers,
ECNL Co-founder,
President, and CEO



Doug Bracken,
ECNL Vice President

- **Elite Clubs National League (ECNL)** league-based platform for both girls and boys created with a vision to improve youth soccer.
- Founded in **August 2009** as a **girl-only league**:
 - 40 founding clubs.
 - U15, U16, & U17 age groups.
- **ECNL Boys** founded in **August 2017**:
 - 57 inaugural member clubs
- Girls started the **ECNL Regional Leagues (ECRL)** in **August 2019**:
 - Teams wanting high-level competition, with less travel.
 - The biggest difference: ECRL is limited to playing teams in their region, ECNL teams play nationally.





ECNL Initiatives

Heritage Project & Breaking the Line



- **ECNL Heritage Project** launched on April 9, 2024:
 - Directed by Pat McStay
 - Provides additional pathways for **current** high-level ECNL players & ECNL **alumni**
 - Connects players with foreign heritage to **Federations** around the world
 - Eligibility based on parents' or grandparents' place of birth, as well as other factors.
- **“Breaking the Line” podcast** launched in September 2020:
 - Great resource to stay up to date on the latest ECNL changes.
 - Available on **YouTube** and other platforms.





What is ODP?



- The US Youth Soccer (USYS) **Olympic Development Program (ODP)** was formed in 1977:
 - to help facilitate growth and development among young soccer players,
 - to help identify the best youth soccer talent across the country for the U.S. National Teams.
- Players get selected during their **State's tryouts**:
 - Not designed to replace players' club team training and games ;
 - Designed to act as a supplement.
- Benefits of Participating in US Youth Soccer ODP today:
 - Development as a player.
 - Opportunity to train and play with the best players in one's age group.
 - Quality instruction from nationally licensed coaches.
 - Quality competition in games against other state association ODP teams.
 - Exposure to regional and national team coaches.
 - Potential Exposure to college coaches.
- Over **90% of the United States' 2019 Women's World Cup roster** & many of the nation's top players end up playing for an ODP club at some point in their youth careers.
- With the **growth of elite youth leagues**, ODP has lost its appeal as an essential pathway towards U.S. Youth National Teams or college recruitment.



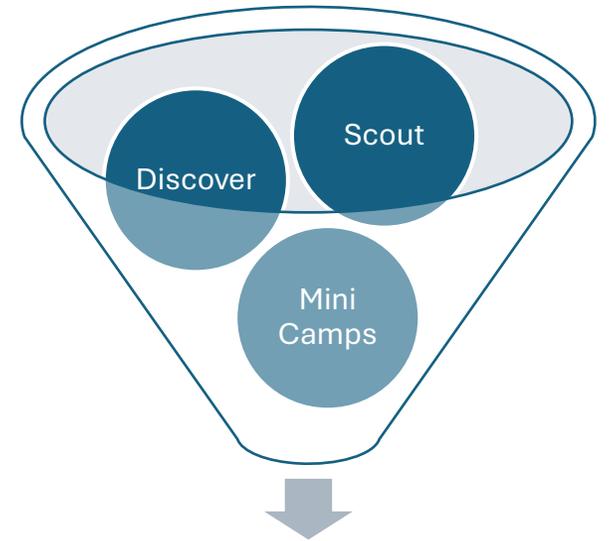
The U.S. Youth National Teams (YNT)

- 14 youth national teams under the U.S. Soccer Federation: 7 women and 7 men

	Girls / Women	Boys / Men
1**	U.S. Under-14 Girls (U-14)	U.S. Under-14 Boys
2	U.S. Under-15 Girls (U-15)	U.S. Under-15 Boys
3	U.S. Under-16 Girls (U-16)	U.S. Under-16 Boys
4	U.S. Under-17 Women (U-17)	U.S. Under-17 Men
5	U.S. Under-18 Women (U-18)	U.S. Under-18 Men
6	U.S. Under-19 Women (U-19)	U.S. Under-19 Men
7	U.S. Under-20 Women (U-20)	U.S. Under-20 Men
8	U.S. Under-23 Women (U-23)	U.S. Under-23 Men

- ****Under-14 (U14) National Development Program**

- Launched in 2019
- Mostly a national Development and Talent Identification Program
- Do not compete in international competitions
- Created to discover top U-14 talents and create a large player pool
- for future older YNTs.



Older YNTs Age Groups



What is the Pathway to the U.S. Youth National Teams?

- U.S. Soccer Talent ID Centers (IDCs) are the **pathway** to the YNTs.
 - IDCs are **cost-free, single-day** player identification events
 - Opportunities for top talents to train and play games under the direction of U.S. Soccer Talent Identification Managers

Talent ID Markets - Girls

- U.S. is divided in **4 Talent ID Regions** and markets:
 - Regions: North, East, West and South
 - Talent IDCs are organized across the country to give as many local kids a chance as possible.
 - Over 4,000 boys and girls aged 13-15 attended Talent IDCs in 2022 (according to US Soccer).





How can your player be selected for a U.S. YNT?

- Talent Identification Managers lead all player selections in **2 ways**:
 - **A) Scouting** games and/or events
 - **B) Receiving recommendation** by coach or club director
- Additional information:
 - **Eligibility**: Top America talents from any team, club or organization are eligible for selection
 - **Cost**: no cost to the player, upon invitation only
 - Parents and spectators are **not allowed to attend** the sessions
- 2023 U-14 Cycle:
 - Total of **224 players** attended single-day U-14 IDCs in West, Central and East regions.
 - A total of **36 players (~16%)** selected and invited to the Girls U-14 Talent ID **National Camp** in Chula Vista, California from May 22-27, 2023.
 - The 36 players went through multiple training sessions, were divided into **2 teams of 18** and scrimmaged each other twice (similar to ODP format).

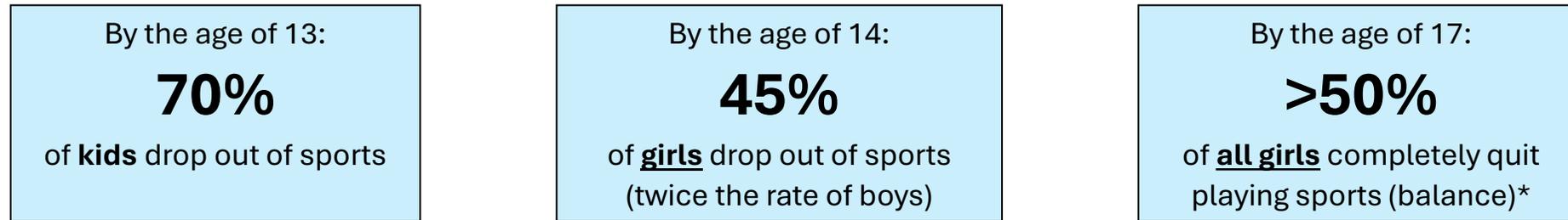
Quitting Soccer



Image from “#LikeAGirl campaign by © Dove

- Many kids quit playing organized sports for good before high school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports:



Main Factors for Quitting Sports

- **Injuries** (ACL, overuse, etc.)
 - repetitive stress with insufficient recovery
- “It’s just not fun anymore” (**psychological**): Burnout or Disappointments
 - AAP recommend taking at least **1 to 2 days off a week** from competition and sport-specific training,
 - **2 to 3 months** a year away from a specific sport (physical and psychological recovery)
- **Body image issues & Social media**
 - Low body confidence & dissatisfaction influenced by social media, influencers online or on TV, and in advertising.
- **Other notable reasons:** coaching styles, lack of role models, lack of women coaches



High School Soccer



- Less competitive than pay-to-play club soccer, but great school activity with friends and community.
- Offers a combination of competitive play and school pride.
- Important experience for mental well-being and happiness (friendships).
- Used to be explicitly discouraged by elite youth leagues, but not anymore (led to frictions in the DA before its demise).
- Typically, open to most students and typically tryout based.
- High school soccer can serve as a stepping stone to college soccer.



College Soccer

TITLE IX



TITLE IX has made college soccer accessible to most competitive players and those who just want a college experience.

What is TITLE IX?

A federal law that was passed 52 years ago, as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. The **37-word statute** reads:

*“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, **be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination** under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”*



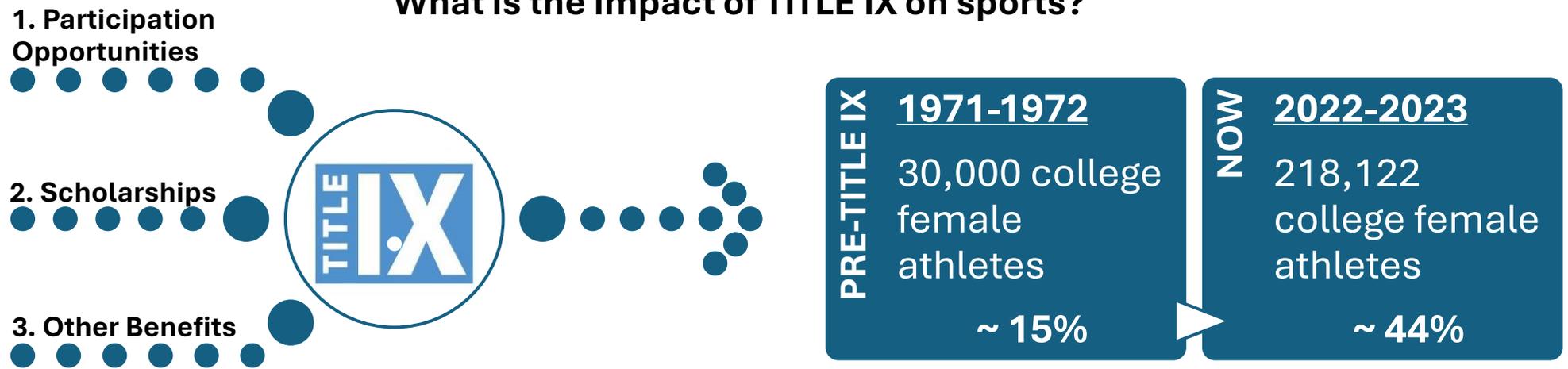
College Soccer

The Impacts of TITLE IX

Is TITLE IX a sports law?

- Title IX is not specifically a sports law but it **responsible for the increased participation** of girls and women in sports:
 - almost all secondary schools and colleges receive federal funding
 - sports count as education programs
 - requires almost all colleges and high schools to provide equitable treatment to athletes in **3 broad categories**: Participation opportunities, Scholarships, Other benefits

What is the Impact of TITLE IX on sports?





College Soccer Divisions

Is TITLE IX a sports law?

• More than **1,500 soccer colleges** with women’s teams in 5 different division levels:

- 1. NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division 1
- 2. NCAA Division 2
- 3. NCAA Division 3
- 4. NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics)
- 5. NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association)



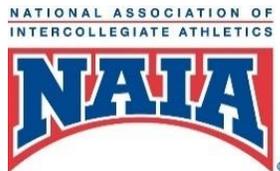
Division I



Division II



Division III



However!!!

Only about **10 %** of U.S. high school women’s soccer players will compete at the college level.

Only about 2% will play Division 1 soccer!



Differences Between NCAA Divisions

There's about 1,118 NCAA schools to choose from.

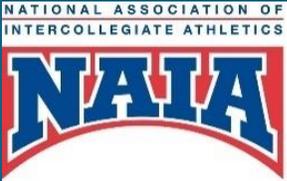
	DIVISION I	DIVISION II	DIVISION III
	Seeking Highest Competition Level	Seeking Athletics & Academics Balance	Seeking Well-Rounded College Experience
Number of Schools	349	313	434
Average Soccer Roster Size	~30	~30	~27
Max Athletic Scholarships	14**	10**	N/A***
Competition Level	Highest	Highly Competitive	Competitive
Commitment Level	Year-round commitment to competition and practice	Rigorous training with enough time to pursue other interests	A lot of freedom outside of the season to pursue other interests
Top 5 College Women Soccer Rankings (December 2023 rankings)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Florida St. (ACC) 2. Stanford (Pac-12) 3. Clemson (ACC) 4. BYU (Big 12) 5. Penn St. (Big Ten) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Point Loma Nazarene University 2. Washburn 3. University Florida Tech 4. Adelphi University 5. Gannon University 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. California Lutheran University 2. Washington University (Mo.) 3. Messiah University 4. Tufts University 5. Christopher Newport University

• ** The NCAA categorizes women's soccer as an **equivalency sport (vs. head count sports)**. Consequently, **schools are not required to give out full rides**. It's up to the coach to determine how much money they want to give to each athlete on the team. The average scholarship offered to recruits only covers around 35% of the cost to attend the school. Good grades are essential to getting additional scholarships.

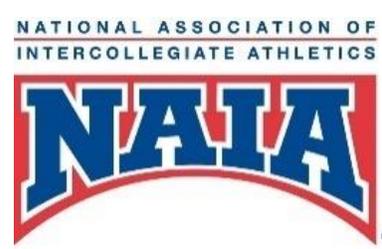
• *** Substituted by other forms of financial aid.



The NAIA & NJCAA Divisions

		
	A Smaller Private College Experience that Fits Many Needs	Develop Athletically and Academically While Saving Money **
Number of Schools	250	500 +
Average Soccer Roster Size	25	19
Max Athletic Scholarships	12	24
Competition Level	comparable to NCAA D3 schools	Competitive
Commitment Level		
Top 5 College Women Soccer Rankings (December 2023) *	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. William Carey (Miss.) 2. Spring Arbor (Mich.) 3. Cumberlands (Ky.) 4. Central Methodist (Mo.) 5. Columbia (Mo.) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Iowa Western Community College 2. Seminole State College 3. Tyler Junior College 4. Salt Lake Community College 5. Monroe Community College

• ** Some junior colleges are feeder programs for D1 college women's soccer teams.



How To Get Recruited for College Soccer

Recruiting is not an exact science!

- NCAA women's soccer recruiting is very competitive and every soccer recruiting journey is a little different from athlete to athlete, from school to school.

6 important steps:

- 1. Properly assess your talent and set proper expectations:** Involve your club coach and have a frank conversation about your skill level and future potential.
- 2. Create a target school list: Division 1/ Power 4 or bust?:** Consider all division levels when starting the recruiting process. D1 or Power 4 (formerly Power 5) might not be the right level.
- 3. Do the heavy lifting/ recruit yourself:** Depending on your skill level or name recognition, coaches might not be reaching out to you. Succeeding in the recruitment process is all about the effort that players put in. Proactively reach out to the coaches (emails, phone calls, etc.)
- 4. Create a recruiting / highlight videos:** A great highlight video can be the difference maker in your recruiting. 20-25 of your best plays can help you stand out among comparable recruits.
- 5. Compete at showcases and tournaments:** Coaches prefer to evaluate recruits at club tournaments and showcases. Participate in events attended by coaches from targeted schools and other colleges.
- 6. Attend ID Camps and Clinics**



College Soccer Recruiting

“Players recruit themselves!”

Remember:

- 1) Only about **10 %** of U.S. high school women’s soccer players will compete at the college level
- 2) Only about **2 %** will play Division 1 soccer.

Key Takeaway

Stay proactive & don’t wait for coaches to find you!



NATIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE

Professional Women Soccer



NATIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE

- National Women Soccer League (NWSL) and several professional leagues around the world.
- NWSL is the top professional league in the USA with **14 teams** (Houston Dash).
- NWSL Rosters: minimum of 22 players and a maximum of 26 players
- **2 paths** of entry for young U.S. players:
 - NWSL Draft
 - U18 Early Entry Mechanism



Path 1: NWSL DRAFT

- Annual event in January: selection of amateur players by NWSL.
- This year on January 12, 2024: 56 draft spots were available, 4 rounds, 14 selections per round.
- Players draft eligibility:
 - must be above the age of 18
 - must be playing in the USA
 - must have exhausted, lost, or renounced any remaining collegiate eligibility.

Trivia about 2024 draft:

230 players representing **138** schools declared for the draft & only **56** players selected (**24%**).





NATIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE

Professional Path 2: U18 Entry Mechanism

New 2023 Process



NATIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER LEAGUE

- The NWSL's U18 Entry Mechanism allows clubs to each sign a maximum of 4 players under the age of 18 (increased from 2 players at launch).
- Several measures to protect the young players:
 - Players must be signed to a guaranteed contract and the contract term must run until player turns 18
 - Players may not be waived or traded without consent from both the player and parent or legal guardian
 - Players must reside with a parent or legal guardian until their 18th birthday
 - Players must be citizens or permanent residents of the United States

3 successful U18 selections



Instagram, @sandiegowavefc



Melanie Barcenas, Forward

Youth club: San Diego Surf, ECNL

1st ever player to sign under the U18 Mechanism
Signed 3-year contract with **San Diego Waves** on
March 21, 2023, at **15 years and 138 days.**



Angelcity.com, March 2024



Kennedy Fuller, Midfielder

Youth club: Youth club: Solar SC, ECNL

Signed with **Angel City FC** on March 6, 2024, just days
before her **17th birthday.**



sandiegowavefc.com, March 2024

Kimmi Ascanio, Midfielder

Youth club: Youth club: Florida United, GA

Signed with **San Diego Waves** on March 24, 2024, at
16 years.





ECNL vs. GA Comparisons



Statement

“If you’re good enough, you will be seen!”

Is that statement true, especially in this age of social media?

Comparison points:

1. Number of Conferences
2. Conference Alignment & Travel distances
3. Showcases & National Events
4. College placement
5. National Team placement
6. Professional

Let’s finally get this right!



ECNL vs. GA:

Number of Conferences & Clubs



	GA	ECNL	ECNL-RL
1) Age groups	U-13 through U18/19	U-13 through U18/19	U-13 through U18/19
2) # of Girls' Conferences	10	10	17
		Combined ECNL/RL: <u>27</u> girls' conferences	
3) # of Boys' Conferences	N/A	12	20
		Combined ECNL/RL: <u>32</u> boys' conferences	
4) # of Girls' Clubs	95 <i>(111+ next year)</i>	128 <i>(131 next year)</i>	253
		Combined ECNL/RL: <u>381</u> girls' clubs	
5) # of Boys' Clubs	N/A	151	266
		Combined ECNL/RL: <u>417</u> boys' clubs	

Comparable # of conferences between GA & ECNL.
 ECNL has many more conferences factoring in ECNL Boys and ECRL

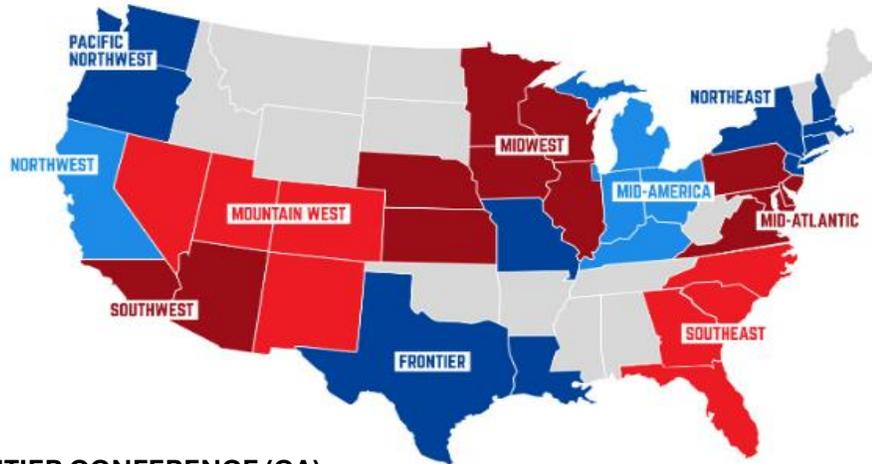


ECNL vs. GA:

I.E.: Travel For Texas Conferences



GIRLS ACADEMY | 2023-24 CONFERENCE ALIGNMENT



GA FRONTIER CONFERENCE (GA)

- 1) BVB International Academy NTX (Carrollton, TX)
- 2) HTX Soccer (Houston, TX)
- 3) Lonestar SC Red (Austin, TX)
- 4) Lonestar SC Black (Austin, TX)
- 5) Lou Fusz Athletic (St. Louis, MO)
- 6) Louisiana TDP Elite (Baton Rouge, LA)
- 7) Renegades Soccer Club (Richardson, TX)
- 8) RISE Soccer Club (Houston, TX)
- 9) San Antonio City SC (San Antonio, TX)
- 10) St. Louis Development Academy (St. Louis, MO)

2022-23 ECNL NATIONAL MAP



TEXAS CONFERENCE (ECNL)

- 1) Albion Hurricanes (Houston, TX)
- 2) Challenge SC (Houston, TX)
- 3) Classic Elite (San Antonio, TX)
- 4) Colorado Rapids (Aurora, CO)
- 5) Dallas Texans (Dallas, TX)
- 6) DKSC (Dallas/Farmers Branch, TX)
- 7) FC Dallas (Dallas, TX)
- 8) OK Energy FC (Edmond, OK)

9) Pride SC (Colorado Springs, CO)

- 10) Real Colorado National (Centennial, CO)
- 11) Real Colorado Athletico (Centennial, CO)
- 12) Solar SC (Dallas/Allen, TX)
- 13) Sting Austin (Austin, TX)
- 14) Sting Dallas Black (Dallas, TX)
- 15) Sting Dallas Royal (Dallas, TX)
- 16) Tulsa SC (Tulsa, OK)

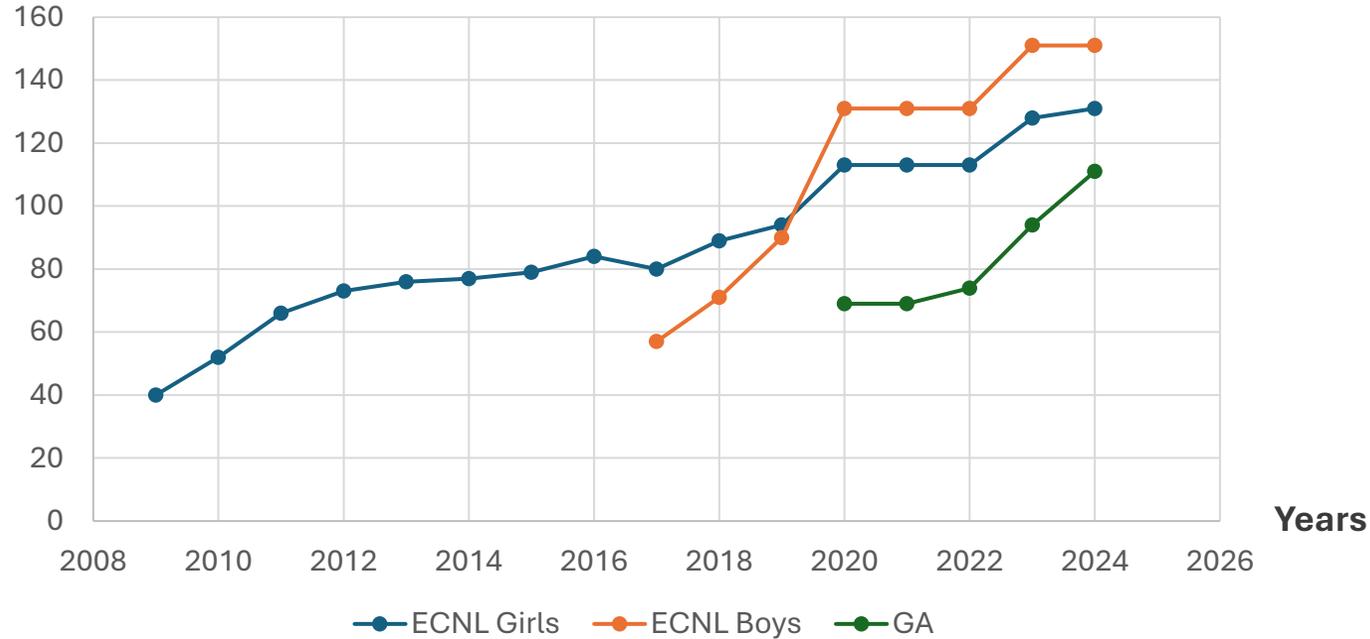


ECNL vs. GA: Growth Trends



of clubs

ECNL & GA Growth trend



- **August 2009:** founding of ECNL as girls’ only league with 40 founding clubs (U15, U16, & U17 age groups). Gradually added U13, U14 and U18 age groups.
- **August 2017:** founding of ECNL Boys with 57 inaugural member clubs.
- **August 2020:** founding of GA.
- **2024-2025:** projection of 111+ GA and 131 ECNL Girls teams.

ECNL Girls is 10 years older than GA!
Both GA & ECNL are on an upward growth trajectory.



ECNL vs. GA: *ECNL National Events & Showcases*



	 
Champions League Playoffs (Annual)	<u>32-team</u> tournament Single round robin format with 8 groups of 4 teams Draws 100s of college scouts
ECNL National Finals (Annually in July)	<u>Top 4</u> group winners of Champions League Playoffs ECNL's most prestigious tournament
ECNL Champions League National Champion (Annual)	<u>Bottom 4</u> teams of Champions League Playoffs
North American Cup	<u>Top 16</u> teams in points per game (including points earned at National Events) that don't qualify for the ECNL Champions League.
ECNL Showcase Cup	<u>Bottom 16</u> teams that don't qualify for the ECNL Champions League.
ECNL Open Cup	Single-elimination bracket format for ECNL RL teams and ECNL teams who do not qualify for the Champions League, North American Cup or Showcase Cup.

- ECNL host several national events and showcases each year
- Teams from multiple conferences play against competition they usually would not have a chance to compete against.
- Great opportunity for top teams to compete against each other and to be seen in person by college coaches.



ECNL vs. GA: *GA National Events & Showcases*



	
GA National Playoffs (Annual - U-13, U-14, and U-19)	<u>16-team</u> tournament top 2 clubs in each conference earning an automatic qualifier joining 2 wild card clubs
GA National Playoffs (Annual - U-15, U-16, and U-17)	<u>32-team</u> tournament top 3 clubs in each conference earning an automatic qualifier joining 11 wild card clubs
National Showcase Tournament (Annual)	<u>Tournament</u> teams that failed to qualify for the National Playoffs.
U13/14 Regional Events	<u>East Regional</u> , October 13-16, 2023, Westfield, IN <u>West Regional</u> , March 1-3, 2024, Oceanside, CA
Showcases	<u>Spring Showcase</u> , April <u>Summer Showcase & Playoffs</u> , June <u>Winter Showcase & Champions Cup</u> , November
Conference Talent ID	Organized for each conference across the USA. Frontier Talent ID: February 18, 2024, BVB NTX – Texas Southeast Talent ID: February 11, 2024, West Florida Flames – Florida



ECNL vs. GA: College Placement: “D1 or Bust?”



@ECNLgirls, X (Twitter), May 3, 2022



<https://girlsacademyleague.com/>, Class of 2024, November 17, 2023

• According to the “X” (Twitter) platform “I’m Youth Soccer,” as of **April 17, 2024**, there were **1,320 D1 verbal commitments** for the 2025 class.

- **ECNL:** 913 (69.2%)
- **Girls Academy:** 240 (18.2%)
- **ECRL:** 66 (5%)
- **Other Leagues:** 58 (4.4%)
- **International:** 42 (3.2%)

• Let’s breakdown the 2025 class data to provide more context !



@ImYouthSoccer, X (Twitter) May 2024



ECNL vs. GA: College Placement: “D1 or Bust?”

Let’s breakdown the **2025 class data** to provide more context and highlight the challenges, opportunities and odds of playing **D1 college soccer**. Inputs & Assumptions

1) Inputs & Assumptions (@ImYouthSoccer, X (Twitter))

# D1 Programs	349
# of 2025 D1 commits (April 2024)	1,320
Estimated Roster Size	32
Estimated Yearly Class	8
Total D1 Available Spots	2,792

Insights:

Most soccer players **will not** play D1 soccer:

- Lack of opportunities and spots
- Decision to play division other than NCAA D1
- Decision not to play college soccer.

2) Recruiting Class Size

	ECNL	GA	RL	Total
# of clubs	127	94	127	348
Avg Recruiting Class	22	22	22	66
Total Available Players	2,794	2,068	2,794	7,656

3) Allocated D1 Roster Spots (Extrapolation)

	ECNL	GA	RL	Other Leagues	International	Total
Allocation % (April 2024)	69.2%	18.2%	5.0%	4.4%	3.2%	100%
# of committed (confirmed)	913	240	66	58	42	1,320
Projected on Total D1 Spots (Extrapolation)	1,932	508	140	123	89	2,792
Total Available Players	2,794	2,068	2,794			
Players left out of D1	862	1,560	2,654			

It’s all about finding the right fit. Not all D1 programs are created equal!



ECNL vs. GA: *Youth National Team Placement*

2023 U.S. UNDER-14 TALENT ID NATIONAL CAMP ROSTER

May 22-27, 2023, Chula Vista, California

Clubs represented: 26

Players invited: 36 – [Goalkeepers (4), Defenders (12), Midfielders (10), Forwards (10)]

	GA  GIRLS ACADEMY	ECNL 
# of Clubs	7	19
Clubs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Chicago FC United (1) Houston Dash Youth (HTX) (1) Lamorinda SC (2) Lonestar SC (now ECRL) (2) South Shore Select (1) The St. James FC Virginia (1) TopHat SC (1) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Arizona Arsenal SC (1) Bay Area Surf SC (2) D'Feeters Kicks SC (3) FC Stars (1) Internationals SC (1) Kansas City Athletics (2) Kings Hammer FC (1) Legends FC (1) Minnesota Thunder (1) Oklahoma Energy FC (1) PDA (2) Pittsburgh Riverhounds SC (1) Rebels SC (1) San Diego Surf SC (2) San Juan SC (1) So Cal Blues SC (2) Solar SC (1) St. Louis Scott Gallagher (2) Virginia Development Academy (1)



ECNL vs. GA:



Youth National Team Placement

2023 USA U17 Women Youth National Team (USWYNT)

3 USYNT & NWSL U18 Mechanism stars



Melanie Barcenas, Forward
Youth club: San Diego Surf, CA (**ECNL**)
NWSL: San Diego Waves



Kimmi Ascanio, Midfielder
Youth club: Florida United, FL (**GA**)
NWSL: San Diego Waves



Kenney Fuller, Midfielder
Youth club: Solar SC, (**ECNL**)
NWSL: Angel City FC.

2024 USA U17 Women Youth National Team (USWYNT)



Mya Townes
Youth club: TSJ FC Virginia, VA (**GA**)



Sofia Atehortua
Youth club: IMG Academy, FL (**GA**)



ECNL vs. GA: *Youth National Team Placement*

2024 USA U19 Women Youth National Team (USWYNT)



AMALIA VILLARREAL
Michigan Jaguars FC

Amalia Villarreal
Youth club: Michigan Jaguars FC, MI (**GA**)
College:



REESE KLEIN
Florida United SC

Reese Klein
Youth club: Florida United SC, FL (**GA**)
College:



KEALEY TITMUSS
Nationals Blue

Kealey Titmuss
Youth club: Nationals Blue, MI (**GA**)
College:

Both GA & ECNL provide pathways to youth national teams

Unconventional Pathway: *The Phenomenal Case of Maria Sanchez*



Instagram, @mariagsanchez17

- **María Guadalupe Sánchez Morales**
- Former Houston Dash top goal scorer & current San Diego Wave FC forward.
- Born from Mexican Immigrant parents in Nampa, Idaho, on 20 February 1996
- Never played pay-to-play club soccer
- Drafted by the Houston Dash in 2019
- Briefly became the **highest paid** professional NWSL player last December 2023, with a deal worth \$1.5 million.



Instagram, @sandiegowavefc



Let's review her Pathway.

Unconventional Pathway: *Maria Sanchez to the Pros*



Instagram, @mariagsanchez17

- **Youth:** Never played pay-to-play club soccer. Constantly played with boys in the Mexican community around Nampa, Idaho.
- **High School:** Became a phenom at **American Falls High School**
 - Broke school and state records: 178 goals and 68 assists during career.
 - Twice named Idaho State Journal Soccer Player of the Year
 - American Falls retired her number when she graduated.
- **College 1:** Only offered one scholarship, from Idaho State University.
 - Scored 22 goals in 37 appearances for Idaho
 - Earned All-Academic and All-Conference honors from 2014-15.
- **Mexican National Team:** selected after attending open tryout with the Mexican national team in California
 - become the youngest player on Mexico's 2015 WWC team.
- **College 2:** Transferred to Santa Clara in 2016 for her last two seasons:
 - 42 appearances, scored 13 goals.
 - Became the first player in NCAA Division I history to record 16 assists in a single season.
 - Graduated in 2018.



NWSL, Game Changers, 2022 (YouTube)



Instagram, @mariagsanchez17



Donald Jedlovec/Santa Clara Athletics, 2018

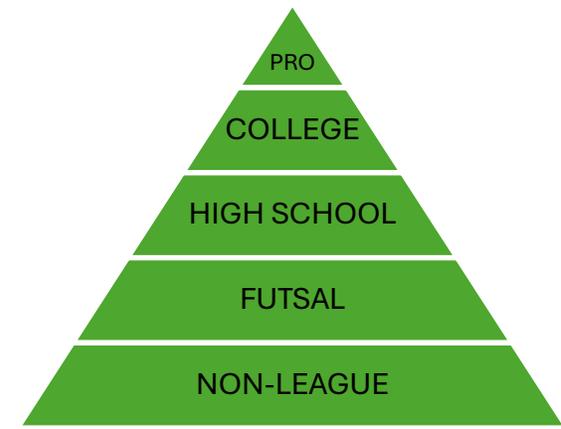
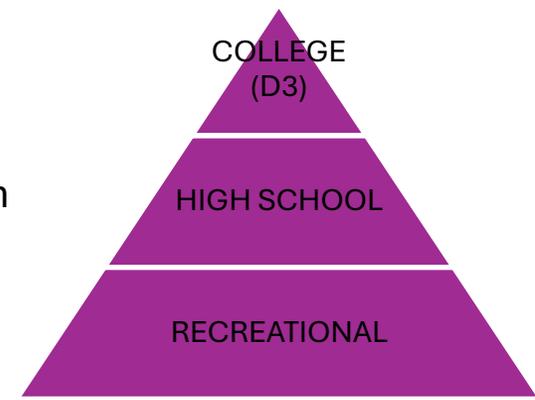
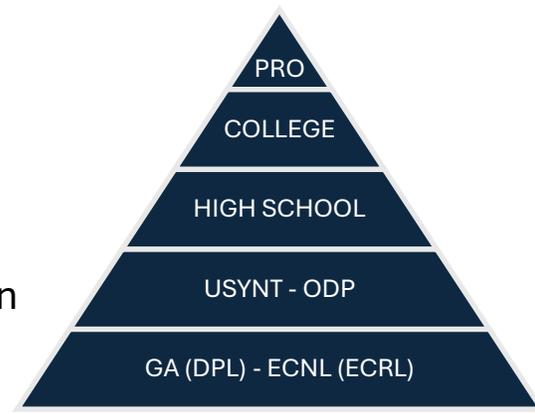
Every pathway is unique



Choose the pathway that is best for you.

Closing Remarks

- Choosing a league and a club can be a daunting task with a lot of uncertainties.
- We face many questions: Should my child stay at the current club, should I join another league, how can I help my child achieve his/her soccer goals?
- **Understanding** the challenges and opportunities of **different pathways** and setting specific goals will help you choose the right environment (beyond the badge).
- Development is holistic and does not only happen within individual clubs. Development also happens in our homes, our individual training, etc. (**i.e.**: the case of Maria Sanchez).
- It can be a balancing act, but it is important to consider **factors other than the badge**. Factors such as **coaching**, your **child's well-being** and **mental stability**, your child's development, etc. Here are a few questions to help you arrive at the right decision:
 1. Is your child happy and thriving mentally?
 2. Does the club have credible institutional knowledge?
 3. Are there players who were successfully developed towards the pathway you are choosing?
 4. Is your club coach knowledgeable, developing you and invested in you?
 5. Is your club focused on developing players or recruiting players from other clubs? If the club recruits, what happens to the development of players who lose their spots?





Conclusion

- It's about helping our children develop in the environment that suits them and a pathway that will help them succeed.

Finally, once you have selected a pathway for your children, keep your eyes on the goal and help them **become excellent players.**

- An excellent player is a **Complete Player**, assessed by **5 characteristics**:
 1. Technical Abilities
 2. Tactical Understanding
 3. Physical Abilities
 4. Mental Strength (Attitude, Resilience, Drive)
 5. Creative & Flexible Problem Solving (Creativity, Cognitive training)



- You can find information of how to become a complete player at www.advancesoccerusa.org

THANK YOU!

Email: info@advancesoccerusa.org



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Let's Empower Parents and Help Our Youth Soccer Players
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Advance Soccer USA

Location: Houston, Texas, USA

Email: info@advancesoccerusa.org

Website: www.advancesoccerusa.org

