

MIDWEST SUPER LEAGUE

Team Formation Policy

August 1 - July 31 Annual Cycle

NEW POLICY - Effective 2026-27 Season

Effective: August 1, 2026

Last Updated: June 2026

Approved by MSL Board of Directors

Section 1: Overview of the New Team Formation Year

1.1 What is Changing

Beginning with the 2026-27 season, the Midwest Super League is adopting a standardized team formation year that runs from August 1 through July 31 of each year. This aligns team building, tryouts, rostering, and competition into a single, predictable annual cycle.

1.2 Why This Change

Previously, clubs operated on varying calendars for team formation, which created confusion around player movement, roster deadlines, and commitment timelines. The new August 1 - July 31 cycle provides:

- A clear start and end date that all clubs follow
- Alignment with the school year and traditional soccer seasons
- Predictability for families planning their year
- Reduced mid-season roster disruption
- A defined tryout window that respects all member clubs

1.3 Effective Date

This policy takes effect August 1, 2026. The first full team formation year under this policy will be August 1, 2026 through July 31, 2027.

Section 2: Annual Team Formation Calendar

2.1 The Formation Year at a Glance

The team formation year is divided into the following periods:

AUGUST 1 - AUGUST 31: Tryout & Team Formation Window

All clubs conduct tryouts and form teams for the upcoming year. Players commit to their club for the full formation year.

SEPTEMBER 1 - NOVEMBER 30: Fall Season

Regular season league play within geographic pods. Rosters are locked for fall competition.

DECEMBER 1 - FEBRUARY 28: Winter Break & Development

No league matches. Clubs may run internal training, futsal, or development programming. Limited roster adjustment window (see Section 4).

MARCH 1 - MARCH 15: Spring Roster Confirmation

Clubs confirm rosters for spring season. Final opportunity for approved roster changes.

MARCH 15 - JUNE 30: Spring Season

League play resumes. Cross-pod weekends are scheduled during this phase. Rosters are locked for spring competition.

JULY 1 - JULY 31: Transition Period

Season concludes. Players are released from commitment. Clubs prepare for next year's tryouts.

Section 3: Tryout & Recruitment Guidelines

3.1 Tryout Window

All MSL member clubs must conduct their primary tryouts within the month of August (August 1-31). This ensures a level playing field and prevents early poaching of players from other clubs.

3.2 No Early Contact

Clubs may not initiate contact with players registered to another MSL member club prior to July 1 for the purpose of recruitment for the following formation year. General club marketing and open-house events that are non-targeted are permitted year-round.

3.3 Open Tryouts

All tryouts must be open to any eligible player within the age group. Clubs may not restrict tryout attendance based on prior club affiliation. Tryout dates and locations must be communicated to the league office for publication on the MSL website.

3.4 Tryout Results

Clubs must communicate team placement decisions to players and families no later than August 31. Players not offered a roster spot are free to seek placement with other MSL clubs or non-member clubs immediately.

3.5 Multi-Club Tryouts

Players are permitted to attend tryouts at multiple MSL clubs during the August window. However, once a player formally accepts a roster spot and commits to a club, they are bound to that club for the full formation year (subject to the release provisions in Section 5).

Section 4: Roster Rules & Commitment

4.1 Player Commitment Period

When a player accepts a roster spot with an MSL club, they are committing to that club for the full formation year (August 1 - July 31). This commitment means:

- The player will train and compete exclusively with that club in MSL play
- The player will not participate in tryouts at other MSL clubs mid-year
- The player will fulfill financial obligations as agreed with the club

4.2 Roster Lock Dates

Rosters are locked for competition during the following periods:

- Fall Lock: September 1 (rosters locked through November 30)
- Spring Lock: March 15 (rosters locked through June 30)

4.3 Mid-Year Additions

Clubs may add players who were not previously registered with any MSL club at any time during the formation year, provided the addition occurs outside of roster lock periods. These additions must be registered with the league office.

4.4 Winter Adjustment Window

Between December 1 and February 28, clubs may make limited roster adjustments with league office approval. This window exists to address situations such as:

- Players who have relocated to the area
- Players released by their club (see Section 5)
- Roster shortages due to injury or other hardship

The winter window is not intended for general player movement between clubs.

Section 5: Player Releases & Transfers

5.1 Club-Initiated Release

A club may release a player from their roster at any time by notifying the league office in writing. Once released, the player is free to join another MSL club (subject to roster lock rules). Released players have no waiting period.

5.2 Player-Requested Release

A player/family may request a release from their club at any time. The club is encouraged to grant releases in good faith. If a club denies a release request, the player/family may appeal to the league office.

5.3 Release Appeal Process

If a release is denied and appealed:

- The player/family submits a written appeal to the MSL league office
- The league office notifies the club and requests a response within 7 days
- The MSL Board reviews and issues a decision within 14 days
- The Board's decision is final

The MSL philosophy supports player mobility when a situation is clearly not working. Clubs should not unreasonably withhold releases.

5.4 Transfer Between MSL Clubs

A player transferring between two MSL clubs during the formation year must:

- Obtain a release from their current club (or win an appeal)
- Register with their new club through the league office
- Observe a 14-day waiting period before competing for the new club
- Transfer outside of a roster lock period

5.5 Financial Obligations

Player release does not automatically cancel financial obligations to the releasing club. Payment disputes between families and clubs are private matters and are not adjudicated by the MSL.

Section 6: Age Group Determination

6.1 Birth Year Method

Age groups in the MSL are determined by birth year in accordance with US Soccer Federation guidelines. For the 2026-27 formation year:

- U13: Players born in 2014
- U14: Players born in 2013
- U15: Players born in 2012
- U16: Players born in 2011
- U17: Players born in 2010
- U19: Players born in 2008-2009

6.2 Playing Up

Players may play up one age group with their club's approval. A player playing up must be rostered at the higher age group for the full season (fall or spring). Players may not move between age groups mid-season.

6.3 Playing Down

Playing down an age group is not permitted in MSL competition.

Section 7: Communication & Compliance

7.1 Club Responsibilities

Each member club is responsible for:

- Communicating this policy to all coaches, families, and players
- Conducting tryouts within the designated August window
- Submitting final rosters to the league office by August 31
- Reporting any mid-year roster changes to the league office
- Responding to release requests in a timely manner

7.2 League Office Responsibilities

The MSL league office will:

- Publish a master calendar with all key dates annually
- Maintain a central roster database for all registered players
- Facilitate the release and transfer process
- Adjudicate disputes when necessary
- Publish tryout information for all member clubs

7.3 Violations

Clubs found to be in violation of this policy (early recruitment, tampering, roster fraud, etc.) may face sanctions including:

- Written warning
- Fines
- Forfeiture of matches involving ineligible players
- Suspension from cross-pod play
- Probation or expulsion from the league (severe/repeated violations)

Section 8: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: My child wants to switch clubs mid-year. Can they?

Yes, but they need a release from their current club and must transfer outside of a roster lock period. A 14-day waiting period applies before they can compete for their new club.

Q: What if my child's club folds or cannot field a team?

Players from a dissolved team are immediately eligible to join any MSL club with no waiting period. The league office will assist with placement.

Q: Can my child play for a non-MSL club at the same time?

Players may participate in non-MSL activities (rec leagues, school soccer, etc.) at their club's discretion. However, MSL league matches take scheduling priority.

Q: What if we miss the August tryout window?

Players who miss the August window may still join a club as a mid-year addition, provided the club has roster space and it falls outside a roster lock period.

Q: Does this policy apply to all age groups?

Yes. The August 1 - July 31 formation year and all associated rules apply equally to all MSL age groups (U13 through U19) and both boys and girls divisions.

Q: When can clubs start planning for next year's teams?

Clubs may begin internal planning at any time, but external recruitment and contact with players from other MSL clubs cannot begin until July 1 for the following formation year.