



MLS NEXT ACADEMY DIVISION

***MATCHDAY GUIDE
2026-27***

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KEY CONTACTS

For any issues that come up during MLS NEXT Academy Division matchdays, please reach out directly to your league operator for support.

Conference(s)	Name	Phone Number
Carolinas, Garden State, Great Lakes North, Great Lakes South, Mid-Atlantic, New England, North, Northeast, South, Sunshine North, Sunshine South, Virginia	Brendan Faherty Sydney Stoll Abelson	<u>207-815-9211</u> <u>617-852-5835</u>
Desert, Pioneer	Kathy Belles Summer Anderson	<u>602-677-2734</u> <u>724-355-1494</u>
Heartland	Dan Popik Cole Loehr	<u>919-985-3497</u> <u>712-260-2948</u>
Mountain, Pacific Northwest, Southern California	Ashley Richards	<u>602-920-6465</u>
Northern California Coast, Northern California Redwood	Marley Wilson Devon Yoakam Dane Denkers	<u>925-701-1551</u> <u>925-599-2357</u> <u>925-596-9949</u>
-	Kitman Labs Support	<u>MLSSupport@kitmanlabs.com</u>

WEEKLY DEADLINES+ MATCHDAY TIMELINE

- Weekly Deadlines
 - Thursday at 5pm EST
 - Deadline to register players and add them to the roster for the upcoming weekend.
 - Friday 1pm EST
 - Deadline to raise any questions or challenges to the weekly suspension list.
- Matchday Timeline
 - 3 Hours Prior to Kickoff Time
 - Digital Matchday Roster (DMR) due in Kitman Labs.
 - 60 Minutes Prior to Kickoff Time
 - Teams and referees arrive at the match facility.
 - 15 Minutes Prior to Kickoff Time
 - Referees check in all players and staff ahead of the match.
 - Referees confirm that the correct ball size is being depending on the age group.
 - Kickoff Time
 - MLS NEXT Match Kicks off.

MATCHDAY OPERATIONS

- FairWhistle
 - Coaches or team administrators to complete assessments after every match
 - Assessments are sent out 60 minutes after the conclusion of the match
 - If you are not receiving email notifications post-match, please contact jose.perez@mlssoccer.com
- Video
 - VEO League Exchange
 - All Home Teams are responsible for recording all matches. (Filmed through your preferred camera provider Veo, Trace, Spiideo, etc.)
 - All video must uploaded to the league exchange by the Tuesday at 12pm following your match weekend.
 - If the match was unable to be recorded due to weather or technical issues please inform MLS staff.
 - If you need to be added to the system, please contact jose.perez@mlssoccer.com
 - Taka
 - All matches shared with MLS will be uploaded into Taka for video analysis.
 - For issues with video uploaded into Taka, please contact mls-video@taka.io

EQUIPMENT

- Match Ball
 - It is highly recommended that adidas balls are used for all MLS NEXT Academy Division matches.
 - Required Ball Sizes
 - U13 = Size 4
 - U14 & Older = Size 5
- Uniforms
 - Clubs are required to have one white (or similarly light-colored) uniform and one dark uniform.
 - Home Teams will always wear white/light color uniforms.
 - Visiting Teams will be required to wear their dark/contrasting uniforms.
 - Please be sure to bring both sets of uniforms to each match.
 - If both teams are wearing the same color, it is the responsibility of the home team to change kits.

AGE GROUP GUIDELINES

2026-2027 MLS NEXT Academy Division				
Age	Year	Match Length	Half time	Substitutions
U13	Aug 1, 2013 – July 31, 2014	3x25 min periods	2x5 min	Unrestricted substitutions. 2 moments per period
U14	Aug 1, 2012 – July 31, 2013	40 min halves	10 min	Unrestricted substitutions. 3 moments per half
U15	Aug 1, 2011 – July 31, 2012	45 min halves	10 min	3 moments per half. No re-entry allowed in the half
U16	Aug 1, 2010 – July 31, 2011	45 min halves	10 min	3 moments per half. No re-entry allowed in the half
U17	Aug 1, 2009 – July 31, 2010	45 min halves	10 min	3 moments per half. No re-entry allowed in the half
U18	Aug 1, 2008 – July 31, 2009			
U19	Aug 1, 2007 – July 31, 2008	45 min halves	10 min	3 moments per half. No re-entry allowed in the half
U20	Aug 1, 2006 – July 31, 2007			

*Oldest Overage Player: Aug, 1 2006

MATCHDAY ROSTERS

- Matchday Roster
 - 14 Player minimum per Team.
 - 20 player maximum per Team.
- Playing Up
 - Players are eligible to play in an older age group while being rostered in their younger birth year age group, so long as they meet competition standards and play only 90 minutes per day across a maximum of 2 matches.
- Substitution Rules
 - U13 = 2 moments per period. Unrestricted substitutions. Intermissions do NOT count as a moment.
 - U14 = 3 moments per half. Unrestricted substitutions. Halftime does NOT count as a moment.
 - U15 and Up = 3 moments per half. No re-entry allowed in the half. Halftime does NOT count as a moment.

MATCHDAY STAFF

- Matchday Staff
 - Maximum of 5 coaching staff members permitted in technical area and must be listed on the Digital Match Roster on Kitman Labs (Not including Qualified Medical Professional or ATC)
 - There must be a minimum of 1 registered staff member in the technical area for each match
 - Any Staff members that will be working with MLS NEXT players or will be in the technical area during MLS NEXT matches will be required to complete the registration process, including the risk management requirements

FACILITY STANDARDS

- Match Locations
 - Clubs can use multiple locations for MLS NEXT Regular Season matches, subject to MLS NEXT approval
 - MLS NEXT encourages neutral sites to prevent overnight stays when applicable
 - All Clubs must provide a turf or synthetic alternative in the event of inclement weather
 - Evening MLS NEXT Matches may only be played at venues with appropriate lighting installations
- Field Standards for Matches
 - Expectations for MLS NEXT clubs to provide appropriate, high quality fields to host MLS NEXT matches
 - Minimum Field Sizes
 - U13 = 65x84
 - U14 = 65x100
 - U15 & Older = 70x110
 - Any fields outside of these standards, must be approved by MLS NEXT staff before the season
- Warm Up Periods
 - Teams must be provided with an appropriate warm up area 30 minutes prior to kick off
- Technical Area
 - Home club must provide adequate seating (benches) for both teams
 - Home Club must provide adequate hydration (water) for both teams

DISCIPLINE

- Discipline within Fixture
 - If a player receives a Yellow Card in two different matches within the same fixture, both cards will count towards their Yellow Card accumulation
 - If a player receives a Red Card in the first match of a split fixture, then they will not be able to appear in the rest of the matches in the fixture
 - If a player receives a Red Card or Yellow Card that triggers YCA in the first fixture of a double fixture weekend, they are suspended for the remainder of the fixtures that weekend
- Red Card Protocol
 - A player who receives a Red Card is allowed to remain on the bench for the duration of that match as long as they are respectful to all players, coaches, referees, and spectators
 - Staff members who receive Red Cards must leave the technical area and the entire bench side of the field for the remainder of the match
 - Staff members may remain at the facility as long they are on the spectator side of the field for the remainder of the match
 - If a player or staff member receives a red card in any match, they are not permitted to participate in any other matches for the remainder of the weekend.

SPECTATOR GUIDELINES

- Home club must ensure there are no spectators/parents in the technical area or that sideline.
- Each club is responsible for the behavior of their spectators.
- All Spectators must abide by the MLS NEXT Code of Conduct.
- All Spectators must be respectful of referees, players, coaches, and other spectators.

HEAD INJURY PROCEDURE

- A player who is suspected to have suffered a head injury may be substituted while being evaluated by a Qualified Medical Professional (QMP). The substitution for the evaluation of the concussion/head injury will not count against the team's total number of substitution moments in the match (temporary substitution).
- If the player is deemed by a QMP to not have suffered a concussion, the player may re-enter the match at any stoppage of play and must replace the temporary substitute; this head injury evaluation substitution will not count as a substitution moment. Furthermore, the temporary substitute will be able to re-enter the match at a later time if not previously substituted out earlier in the match for a non-head related substitution.
- If the player is deemed by the QMP to have suffered a possible concussion and is not cleared to return to play, the temporary substitute will be considered a permanent substitute.
- Policy Principles
 - A "concussion substitution" may be made regardless of the number of substitutes or moments already used.
 - If all substitutes have been used the "concussion substitute" can be a player who has previously been substituted.
 - Each team is permitted an unlimited amount of "concussion substitutions".
 - If the team has only 2 goalkeepers eligible to play on the game day roster and the starting goalkeeper has been subbed out during the match and the new goalkeeper is suspected of a concussion, the previously substituted goalkeeper will be allowed to reenter for the head injury evaluation.
 - If the goalkeeper cannot return, the previous goalkeeper will remain in the match.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY GUIDLINES

- Qualified Medical Professional (QMP)
 - The home club must provide a Qualified Medical Professional (QMP) 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 until a QMP arrives.
 - If no QMP arrives, then the home team will receive a forfeit and fine.
 - The most common QMPs
 - Certified Athletic Trainer, Nurse Practitioner, Doctor with the following credentials:
 - certified in concussion screening
 - assessing on-field injuries
 - emergency treatment, etc.
- AED
 - All venues must have an AED on-site
 - The QMP as well as the home club must know the location of the AED in relation to the fields.
- In case of emergency dial 911.

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

- Abandonment
 - If a Club refuses to play a Match or to continue playing one that it has begun, and there is no rationale under the MLS NEXT Rules and Policies detailing why this action would be permissible, it may be Sanctioned by forfeiting the MLS NEXT Match. Additional Sanctions may be imposed against the Club in your League Operator's sole discretion. In serious cases, the Club may also be disqualified from the MLS NEXT Competition in progress and its MLS NEXT Membership may be revoked.
- Postponement
 - All postponements and cancellations for any reason other than the health and safety of MLS NEXT Participants must be approved by your League Operator. A Club may postpone any Match in the event the Club believes in good faith that proceeding with an MLS NEXT Match would pose a significant risk to the health and safety of any MLS NEXT Participants.
- Rescheduling a Postponed Match
 - Provided the postponement is approved by your League Operator or is made in accordance with the exceptions provided for herein, the Clubs in question are given the first opportunity to arrange a reschedule date for a postponed MLS NEXT Match. If there is no rescheduled date within seven (7) days after the postponed Fixture, your League Operator will choose the date, location, and time for the rescheduled Match and each Club will be required to participate, subject to any health and safety guidelines released by your League Operator. Fees associated with that date will be the responsibility of the involved Club(s).
- Rescheduling Considerations
 - U13 Matches must reach the 50th minute to be considered a completed Match. U14 Matches must reach the 60th minute of the Match to be considered a completed Match. U15, U16, U17, and U19 Matches must reach the 75th minute to be considered a completed match. If a Match does not reach the designated threshold, your League Operator shall have the authority to review all of the facts (including fault on the part of either Team, unavoidable conditions, expense for both Teams, and requests by a Team to take a particular action in the best interests of MLS NEXT, the MLS NEXT Clubs, and the Club's teams) in determining whether and when a Match should be rescheduled, who should bear the financial burden as a result of cancellation or rescheduling, whether the Match should be forfeited or cancelled permanently and whether other fines should be levied. Unless the Sanction or remedy is set forth specifically in any MLS NEXT Rules and Policies, your League Operator shall decide what action to take, and these decisions shall be final (subject to the MLS NEXT Disciplinary Code).

WEATHER GUIDELINES

- If there are thunderstorms in the area, play should be stopped.
- All players, coaches, spectators, and match officials must seek shelter in the event of a thunderstorm.
 - Players and coaches should shelter in a locker room or the team bus.
 - Spectators should return to their cars.
- Consult the National Weather Service, the Storm Prediction Center or local media outlets for severe weather watches and warnings.
- The match official will notify that play may resume 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder or flash of lightning. The 30-minute clock restarts every time lightning flashes or thunder sounds.
- Any decision needs to be made with 3 parties: Home team coach, Away team Coach and the Official.
 - What is the longest you can wait to kickoff?
 - How long do you have the fields?
 - How long can the referees stay?
 - How long can the away team stay?
 - Is this a local matchup? How easily can the match be rescheduled?
- Refer to US Soccer Recognize to Recover for additional information.