



Age Requirements - Metro and Selects Discussion Paper

Background

The issue of “playing up” has been the topic of considerable discussion within the Metro and Select programs. In creating the existing rule, the board tried to strike a balance between the extremes (e.g. no playing up vs a completely open system). Each of these extremes embodies difficulties that would likely be more difficult to manage than the current system that allows some opportunities to play up. The majority prefer a system that allows players to play-up under specific conditions. Trying to find a workable balance in these matters has proved challenging.

In applying the existing rule, several difficulties have been encountered. These include but are not limited to:

1. Coaches being placed in open conflict with one another over who shall sign specific players.
2. Popularity of a coach or desire of a player to join a certain team may precipitate a playing up request that is not necessarily related to the skill level of the player;
3. Playing up applicants or parents who do not fully understand the demands of the program and the commitment required;
4. Players/parents being pitted against one another, coach against coach, and district against district, as individuals maneuver to reach an end they desire;
5. The district board, committees of the board and individual directors have been hard pressed to effectively deal with these matters in a manner that will satisfy the various interested parties (players, parents and coaches).

While only a few cases in each season become seriously contentious, these cases can consume an inordinate amount of time and energy by all concerned. District rulings can leave feelings of resentment that are not easily assuaged.

That being said, it does appear there is a general consensus that at least a few of the most highly skilled players, under some circumstances at least, should be provided with the opportunity to play up. It has become clear this promotion must be based upon a clearly defined set of criteria that can be effectively communicated to the player/parent population and can be effectively and fairly managed on an ongoing basis. To this end the following recommendation is made:

Recommendations

That “in-district” professional coaching staff be tasked with making recommendations regarding players who might be provided with an opportunity to play with an older age group. Decisions on “exceptions” to the “in-age” rule will become an ongoing process within the district technical programs rather than one triggered by players and/or their parents/guardians and adjudicated by the board or a committee of the board. To accomplish this, Rule 604 of the Metro and Select Program must be re-written in a manner that will achieve these ends.

Rule 604 Rewritten

Rule 604 Player Eligibility and Age Requirements

- 604.1 Priority for playing positions on all metro and select teams shall be given to qualified players who live within the Lower Island District.
- 604.2 Subject only to an “exception” being recommended, all players are required to tryout and play “in-age” for each division.



604.3 Definitions:

Exception: An **exception** to playing “in-age” is a **privilege** that **may** be **offered** to an individual player who has **demonstrated** the highest level of soccer skill and maturity over a period of **one year or more** within **specified advanced soccer programs** .

Promotion: a player who has been provided with an exception to the “in-age” rule and is moved to a senior division team.

604.4 Recommendations for **exceptions** will be proposed by a committee of professional coaches for consideration by the Board of Directors.

604.5 **Exceptions** shall be restricted to the most highly qualified players who meet the following criteria:

- a) The player has trained for one full year within the LISA High Performance Program or an equivalent program within another jurisdiction;
- b) The player has been identified for and is actively participating within a Provincial or National teams program;
- c) The player has played for one full year with the metro or selects or an equivalent program within the district or within another jurisdiction;
- d) The player is highly skilled not only as compared to his or her peer group, but also as compared to the group into which promotion of the player is being considered.
- e) Having met all of the above criteria, players may be granted an exception only if the committee determine this will best serve the overall interests of district programs;
- f) The player and the player’s parent or guardian has provided written consent for promotion to a senior team.

604.6 The committee charged with making recommendations on exceptions shall be formed by October 15 of each season and shall include the following persons:

- a) The District Coach in charge of the High Performance Program;
- b) The District Coach in charge of the Academy Program;
- c) Three other coaches as selected by the two District Coaches.
- d) The three coaches selected in (c) will, preferably, be coaches who have participated within the High Performance or Provincial Teams Programs on an ongoing basis;
- e) The coaches must possess a minimum Provincial “B” Licence.

Conflict of Interest: Any committee coach who has a direct interest in a specific player or team (e.g. relative or is a team coach in one of the divisions affected) shall absent themselves from the committee considerations involving player(s) within those groups. An alternate committee member shall be named for those discussions.

604.7 No program coach shall, either directly or through a third party:

- a) seek to gain the playing services of a junior division player or free agent, or;
- b) permit a junior division player, club player or free agent to play in an exhibition match or train with a senior team,

without having first received the express written permission of the playing-up committee. In the case of a club player a written release must also be provided by the coach of the player’s club team.

A program coach who is approached by an underage player or an agent of the player, seeking to gain a position on a senior team or an opportunity to train with a senior team shall advise the player they must first seek written permission as noted above. A program coach may bring the request to the committee.



604.8 The committee members shall:

- a) Sign an oath of office and follow the rules of conduct outlined in the Standing Orders for Board Committees. Membership on the committee must be presented to the District President for approval.
- b) Make determinations during the course of the season on who might be considered for an exception to the in-age rule. This will be an ongoing process that is an integral part of the overall player development program.
- c) Seek out background information from coaches and others as the committee think necessary to assist in making recommendations;
- d) Keep notes or minutes of committee deliberations with copies being provided to the Director of the Metro and Selects and to the Executive Director in a timely manner. Discussions concerning specific players shall be done “in camera”. Notes or other evaluation documents shall remain confidential with access being provided only to the Program Director, the Executive Director and President. A copy of the notes shall be kept on file by the Executive Director.
- e) Provide notice of final recommendations on recommended exceptions to the Director of Metro and Selects and to the Executive Director by March 30 of each season. These recommendations shall be brought before the LISA board for final approval.
- f) In the event there are changes in team formation during the course of the spring that might necessitate reconsideration on promotions within specific divisions, the committee shall make determinations in these matters and bring recommendations to the Director of Metro and Selects and to the Executive Director for presentation to the Board as required.

604.9 Team formation considerations:

- a) Where a team is not available in one or more of the divisions of U14-U18, players from that age group will be permitted to tryout for a team position within the next older age group subject to the general limitations set by the rules of the GMSL (Girls Metro League) and BCYSSL (Boys Select League).
- b) In the event the Metro or Selects Leagues combine two divisions into one division (e.g. U17-U18), or, due to a shortage of players within the district in two divisions, the committee will make recommendations on the manner in which local teams will be formed within the combined division. Possible combinations include:
 - i) two in-age teams (e.g. one U17 and one U18);
 - ii) two mixed age teams of equal strength;
 - iii) two mixed age teams, one being an “A” and the other a “B”;
 - iv) one mixed age team, or
 - v) some other combination that will provide the maximum playing opportunities

“Exceptions” to the “in-age” rule will apply as may be determined appropriate by the playing up committee.

If possible the decision regarding formation of these teams should be made before the start of tryouts within the divisions to be affected.

604.10 Appeals

Appeals in these matters may be directed to the BCSA as outlined in BCSA Rule 13.

The remainder of the old section is deleted.



General Discussion:

While the proposed rule provides an opportunity for a player to play up, stringent guidelines are attached. The purpose of having stringent guidelines is to help make it clear that playing up opportunities are reserved for very special cases. In arriving at a decision to provide an exception for a player that is in an age group below U14, the committee shall take into consideration the following background information:

- a) When the U14 division was approved by the district membership, many concerns were expressed that we were placing a considerable burden upon very young players in terms of travel and commitment. Players entering U14 are 12 and 13 years of age. The pressure in soccer, as in many sports, is to place adult expectations for performance on very young children. When considering exceptions for very young players, the committee must take great care.
- b) There will have been little opportunity to observe these younger players compete at a higher level. While dispensated teams, LISA Academy training and/or IPL league teams provide some indicators of players to be watched, these players are new to the system and will have had little time in adapting to high level programs. Parents within these groups can be very forceful in promoting their child.
- c) In each year there is a very large player pool entering U14. At the present time over 325 girls and 425 boys are registered in U14, from which to select a maximum 18-player roster. For every underage player placed on a team, one highly skilled U14 will be displaced.

In this new rule, the playing up process is triggered within the program rather than by applications received and promoted by parents/guardians. While this might not suit some, it must be recognized that we are developing a cadre of professional coaches who are much better placed to make decisions in these matters than are parents or administrators within the system.

Rule 604.7 is intended to protect program coaches, and hence the integrity of the program, by having these matters dealt with in an open manner. Considerable suspicion and mistrust can build up within the program when players, parents, coaches or others think someone is attempting to gain an advantage by behind the scenes maneuvering concerning a position on a team.

As will be noted, appeals may only be directed to the BCSA. The reason for having the board approve all committee recommendations for "exceptions" is that any appeal in these matters must then go to the next level, the BCSA. The BCSA will only accept appeals in which it can be demonstrated that the rules governing the matters involved were not followed. That is, an appeal will not be allowed by reason of the fact the committee has not recommended an exception for a given player. Decisions rendered by the committee and approved by the board are final unless it can be demonstrated that the rules were not properly followed. If it can be demonstrated the rules were not followed, an appeal might be accepted by the BCSA. If the BCSA upheld the appeal, it would, very likely, turned back the matter to the district (and committee) to properly assess the matter according to the rules.

As a final word, those entering the system for the first time (players and parents) sometimes tend to think of the game played at the Metro or Select level as a simple extension of the game played at the club level. Experience will tend to temper this view and over time parents and players will generally develop a much broader outlook as they progress through the system. It is also important to remember that when a child enters the program and then moves to the High Performance Centre, to Provincial Teams or to other programs, the demands and level of commitment is increased exponentially. Everyone involved in the system must be very aware that burnout of players is a very real possibility.

It is hoped that these new rules will provide some solid guidelines to coaches, players, parents and to those assigned the responsibility for making decisions in these matters.