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MSA-CS Grassroots Soccer Program – FAQ

May 14th, 2025

Q: What are the new changes to grassroots soccer in Manitoba?

A: Manitoba Soccer is aligning its grassroots programming with Canada Soccer's national standards, which emphasize inclusive, developmentally appropriate environments for players aged 8–13. Key changes include eliminating tryouts, introducing open registration, rotating training groups, and replacing leagues with festival-style events.

Q: What is the difference between developmental and grassroots programming now?

A: The primary goal of Grassroots Programming is to keep more young players involved in soccer for longer by providing them with an enjoyable experience through access to high quality training and meaningful competition based on interest rather than ability. Clubs are encouraged to offer programming based on training frequency. Families who wish to take part more 'recreationally' would be able to do so regardless of ability level while still receiving quality programming.

Q: How will players be grouped if there are no tryouts or permanent rosters?

A: Players will be placed into fluid groupings that change week to week based on growth, engagement, and effort. This model supports player development without the pressure of fixed rankings.

Q: What is station-based training?

A: Station-based training is a format where players rotate through small-group stations focused on specific skills. It ensures higher engagement and more touches on the ball.

Q: What are rotating training groups?

A: Rotating groups mean players will consistently train with different teammates and coaches to ensure broad exposure, reduce bias, and support well-rounded growth.

Q: How will the year be structured for soccer programming?

A: Programming will be delivered in seasonal blocks, potentially totaling 30 weeks per year, split into three blocks of 8–12 weeks from March to January. Families can register for one, two, or all blocks.

Q: What options are available in winter months when space is limited?

A: Clubs may offer futsal-style play, scaled-down indoor station training based on space availability, or outdoor festivals where weather permits.

Q: Who will manage the games if referees are not used in younger age groups?

A: Games at the grassroots level (festival style) will be facilitated by Game Leaders, scheduled by the host club. One or two Game Leaders will help run each match with the active support of both team coaches. The Game Leader will look to achieve a few objectives on the field: Enable children to have a fun and rewarding experience while competing in small-sided games; Ensure player safety; Implement simplified rules while keeping the game moving — limiting stoppages and assisting the young players with all restarts. Referees will not be used for the younger age groups, as the emphasis is on development, enjoyment, and learning rather than formal officiating.

Q: Who does this affect?

A: All MSA member youth clubs delivering U8–U13 programming will be required to follow this model. MSA will support clubs through training, audits, and resources.

Q: Why are these changes important?

A: They foster inclusive, player-first environments, remove early selection pressures, improve coaching consistency, and align Manitoba with national player development standards.

June 16th, 2025 - Updated Follow Up FAQ's

Since releasing the May 14th FAQ, Manitoba Soccer has received several thoughtful questions and concerns from grassroots coaches, parents, and community members. As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency and collaborative improvement, we will continually update the Frequently Asked Questions.

Q: Why is Manitoba Soccer changing its grassroots model? Why now?

A: These changes are not arbitrary — they are part of a national alignment initiative with Canada Soccer's Grassroots Standards, which must be implemented by 2026. The current model has shown systemic inefficiencies in how young players are grouped, trained, and supported. The new model is designed to better serve all players, not just early bloomers or those with prior access to experienced coaching.

Q: What's wrong with the current grassroots system?

A: While many clubs work hard, the existing model has flaws that limit player development:

- Inexperienced coaches are often placed with teams of mixed-ability players without adequate mentorship or structure.
- Coaches are frequently left to manage small groups (5–6 players) alone when attendance is low.
- Training quality and consistency vary wildly between teams.
- The current game structure still prioritizes results and fixed team identity, stifling broader development and causes friction between coaches and clubs when relationships deteriorate.

Q: How does the new model fix these issues?

A: This new training model requires each club to deliver training through a technical team. Novice coaches still participate, but in mentored roles responsible for repeating one activity throughout the session — increasing their confidence and skill while being supported by the lead staff.

Q: Is this just a move away from competition? Will kids still play games?

A: Players will absolutely continue to compete — the format is simply evolving. Instead of traditional weekly league play, competition will take place in the form of festival-style events. These events still feature structured games, with each team typically playing at least two matches. On alternate weekends, clubs can host internal game days or collaborate with other clubs to create local match opportunities. The competitive experience remains central — it's just delivered in a way that emphasizes development, variety, and inclusion over standings or fixed team outcomes.

Q: Are you saying the current coaches aren't good enough?

A: Not at all. This model supports community coaches by giving them better tools, mentorship, and structure. It acknowledges that many are doing their best with limited resources — this system helps raise the floor for everyone while preserving relationships and meaningful engagement.

Q: Why remove tryouts and permanent rosters?

A: Fixed teams can create early barriers to development and bias. The new model promotes fluid grouping based on effort, engagement, and growth, not exclusionary selection.

Q: Is this change mandatory?

A: Yes. The rollout will be phased in to allow for smooth adaptation:

- Year 1: U8–U10
- Year 2: U11
- Year 3: U12–U13

Q: Were grassroots coaches consulted before making these changes?

A: The structure of this model reflects years of learning not only from within our local soccer community, but also from nationwide trends, continental standards, and global best practices in youth development. While not every grassroots coach was formally surveyed, the design builds upon what many coaches in Manitoba already do well—shared sessions, skill-focused instruction, and creating fun, inclusive environments for players of all abilities. These enhancements are aligned with Canada Soccer's national standards, which themselves draw from global leaders in grassroots programming. The model is built around methods that

have consistently delivered stronger player retention, better coach support, and more positive sport experiences in countries where long-term development is prioritized over early selection. This is not a top-down imposition, but a scalable framework that continues to evolve with input from the people delivering it—local technical leads, coach developers, and mentors who work directly with players and volunteer coaches. In many ways, the new system formalizes and scales what effective coaches are already doing, providing them with the structure and support to go even further.

July 22nd, 2025 – Updated Follow Up FAQ's

Following the June 16th update, Manitoba Soccer has continued to receive insightful questions from parents and community members seeking further clarity on key elements of the grassroots rollout. In response, we are adding two new questions to this FAQ update. These additions are intended to provide deeper understanding around the transition from U3–U7 to U8–U13 programming, and to share research-based evidence supporting the importance of flexible, inclusive development models.

Q: How is the new U8–U13 rollout different from the current U3–U7 program?

A: While training structures may appear similar on the surface, the U8–U13 phase shifts the focus from general participation to more deliberate player development. This includes defined learning outcomes, structured progression, increased player feedback, and consistency across environments. Parents should understand that the model moves from play-based exposure to outcome-driven training — setting the stage for long-term success in the sport.

Q: What evidence supports removing early selection and focusing on late development?

A: In response to member requests for research-based justification, Manitoba Soccer has released the Talent Development Guide. This document outlines evidence showing that early success is not a strong predictor of long-term achievement. Many elite players were not identified early but re-entered and thrived. Development is often non-linear, and systems must remain flexible to support players who develop later. The guide cites expert research including work by Jan Verbeek.