



# **FC Westchester and the U.S. Soccer Development Academy**

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# Why The USSF Created the U.S. Soccer Development Academy

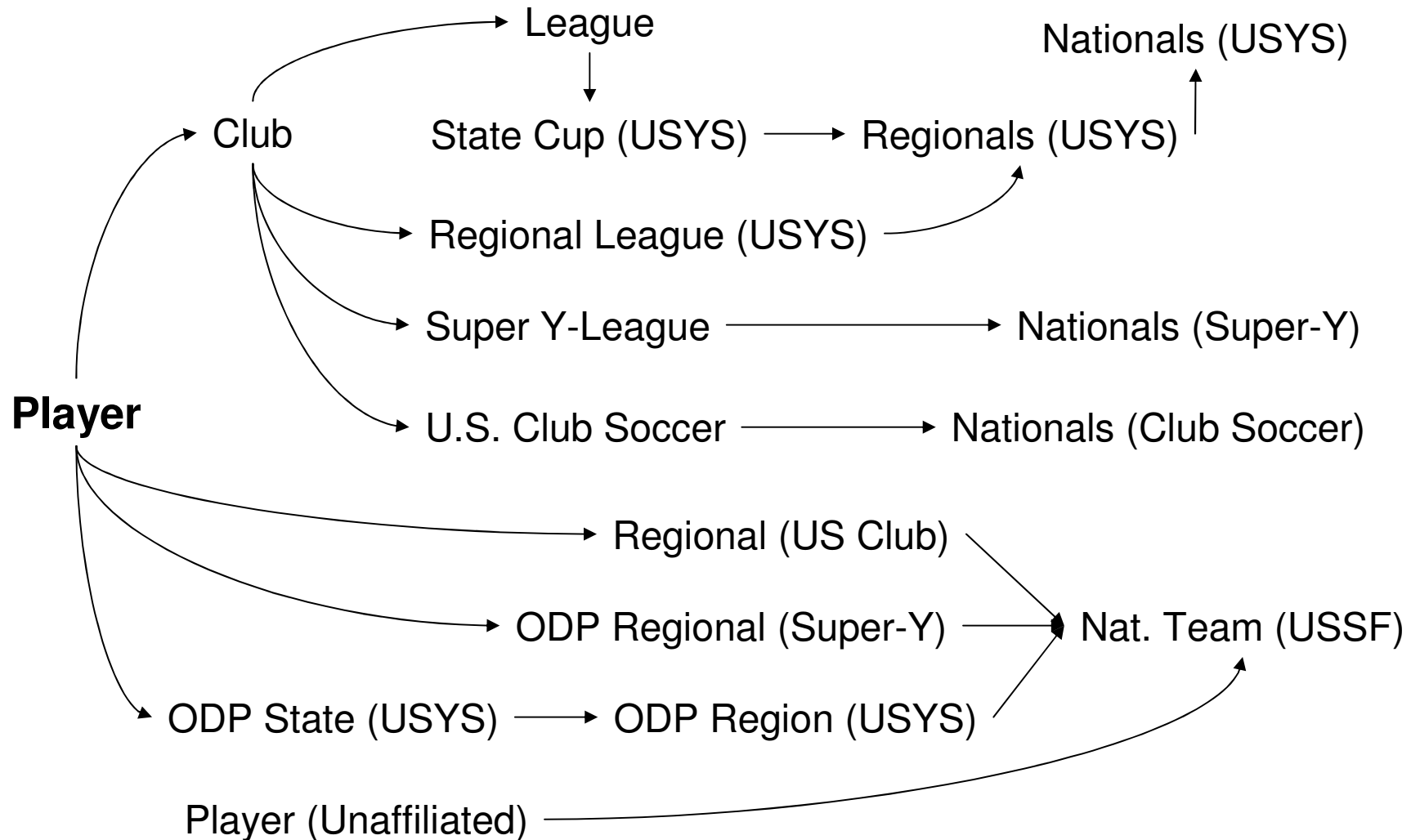
- “We are faced with a number of substantial challenges to player development in the U.S.” – Sunil Gulati, USSF president
  - Geography
  - Climate
  - Lack of Professional Infrastructure
  - Focus on winning at an early age
  - Composition of Playing Population (Majority are under the age of 10 and are recreation level players)
  - Education as a Priority
  - Wide-range of opportunities in other areas (music, video games, etc.)
- These challenges as a whole are unique to the U.S.
- We need to tackle these challenges to create momentum for elite soccer players.

# The Problem – Player and Coaches' View

- U.S. Soccer's Technical Task Force Has Found:
  - Our players elite players are behind rest of world
    - Technically (comfort with the ball)
    - Physically (soccer specific characteristics)
    - Tactical knowledge and understanding
    - Less mentally prepared (discipline/commitment)
  - The environment of the elite player is not good enough
    - Youth players are stretched too thin
    - Too many games (up to 100 per year)
    - Not enough good games/competition (12-16 “good” games per year)
    - Limited/low number of training sessions

# The Problem – Player and Coaches View

- Looking at the typical elite players' world – we understand why they feel stretched too thin.



# Improvement

- USSF Found
  - Elite player development is okay in U.S. but too narrow
  - There is no magic bullet – this is a long-term process
  - Training vs. Talent – USSF can use a scientific approach to improve players and training
  - It's a Numbers Game – Developing more elite players helps the level of all players
- Therefore, USSF focused on solutions that:
  - Could/would impact multiple thousands of players, not hundreds
  - Influence the everyday environment of the elite player

# EXECUTION

- USSF defined three areas/zones of development and the dynamics that are at play in each age grouping
  - Zone 1 – Base Level (ages 6-12);
  - Zone 2 Growth Level (ages 13-17);
  - Zone 3 Elite Level (above age of 17)
- Then decided to focus efforts on Zone 2, but also try and impact Zone 1

## Zone 2 Solutions

- USSF developed a solution that enables the clubs to:
  - 1) **Increase** the quality and quantity of training for elite players
  - 2) **Increase** the number of quality games
  - 3) **Reduce** the overall amount of games
  - 4) **Bring learning down** as young as possible
- ***Answer – U.S. Soccer Development Academy***



# The U.S. Soccer Development Academy



- Designate premier clubs (currently 74 and going to 80) as Academies; remove these players from the “current system”
  - Allow clubs to focus on proper training and high level competition by having teams/players only play in the Academy system
  - Players from ages 13 to 17 in two age groups (U15/U16 and U17/U18 in National Academy League; U14 and U15 in new League comprised of all Academy clubs in Northeast.
- U.S. Soccer provides a core curriculum for training and calendar for Academy League games
- Academies scouted by national team coaches and scouts (and college coaches)
- Apply key learning from the program
  - Bring coaches together once/twice per year for best practices discussions

# The New Model for Elite Players



- New model focuses on training and simplifies the life of the elite player
- Direct connection to National Team coaches/scouts



Players not in the Academy system will continue in the current model of Club and ODP with USYS, Super Y-League or U.S. Club Soccer

# **Academy Philosophy...Directed by USSF To Academy Clubs, Including FC Westchester**

- U.S. Soccer has established the following parameters for Academy Clubs regarding the philosophy of developing players:
  - The Academy program and Academy approach to player development begins at the younger ages (6-10, and 10-14-Zones 1 and 2) according to the principles outlined in the Best Practices - this approach and philosophy continues during the “competition” phase of the academy program (U-16 and U-18).
  - Academy clubs need to establish age appropriate developmental environments for the younger aged players in their club (6-10, 10-14).
  - Academy clubs have a responsibility to establish relationships with surrounding clubs at the grass roots level to ensure that the proper environment is created for the maximum number of players at the 6-10 and 10-14 year ages.

# What does the DA mean for FC Westchester?

- FC Westchester is ENYYSA's only "upstate" representative in the Development Academy
- In its first season, the club's U18s made it into the playoffs while the U16s finished in the middle of their division finishing the season strongly after a slow start
- The Club received high ratings from the USSF evaluators in almost every category
- As a result of his play one of our current U18s was invited into the U18 National Team training camp in December; another one expected to be invited to next national camp.
- On our recommendation, one of the current U16s was invited to the U15 National team camp

# Significance for FCW

- As a club FCW is now under much stricter supervision from the USSF which has implications for every aspect of our organization:
  - Facilities
  - Coaching Staff
  - Players
  - Parents
  - Revenues and Expenses

# Implications for FCW Players

- Under the direction of the USSF FCW is required to create a training environment beginning with our youngest teams (U10s) that:
  - Is competitive and challenging
  - Demands concentration and focus as well as technical proficiency and precision
  - Places a responsibility on the players to continuously improve their game
- A new coaching curriculum will be put in place for the 2009/10 season based on a combination of USSF Best Practices as well as research done on the youth programs of the top clubs elsewhere in the world.

# Implications for FCW Players

- There are increasing numbers of players for whom soccer is their #1 sport of choice and who are prepared to dedicate themselves to the game
- For FCW “player development” is our guiding principal
  - Preparing the players to be able to compete and giving them the tools to play at the highest possible level they desire
- Given the demands that our program makes on the player, it is suitable only for those players who are prepared to dedicate themselves to the game
- The committed player who is prepared to practice 3 times per week, work on his game by himself and wants a longer term career in the sport (National teams, college, MLS) is our core audience and will always be welcomed

# Conclusion

- The USSF has established the Development Academy with the aim of providing a quality environment to develop the next generation of US soccer players
- More of the developmental work is being pushed down to the Development Academy clubs including FC Westchester
- This responsibility is forcing FCW to change the way in which it is organized and what it is offering its players
- In addition we are charged with maintaining solid cooperative (not competitive) relationships with the clubs in our area to be more visible and transparent with the aim of ensuring that they push forward those players with appropriate abilities looking to move beyond the opportunities afforded by their local club