

Q&A on the USL Super Y-League



The following interview with Jeff McRaney, Senior Director of Youth Development with United Soccer Leagues, presents some common questions about the USL Super Y-League in an effort to explain how the Super Y-League is doing its part to provide the highest level of youth competition for clubs around North America.

What does the Super Y-League mean to player development?

The Super Y-League is designed to help in “professionalizing” player development in the United States and Canada. The Super Y-League focuses on the most elite youth players in the U.S. and Canada. Our system provides the opportunity for players to compete in top-level soccer throughout the year. The Super Y-League puts the spotlight on these players during the summer months as well as our North American championship event and gives them an opportunity to participate in our Olympic Development Program.

What are the reasons for USL being the organizing body for the Super Y-League?

USL has operated National and North American professional, amateur, and youth soccer leagues since 1986 and is in its third decade of operation. Many of our fully operational senior USL franchises take advantage of utilizing several Super Y-League teams to develop a vertically integrated professional club. USL uses its experience and national influence to produce the best competition possible. We can do this without asking for exorbitant player or team fees – fees that sometimes prevent players from competing.

How is the Super Y-League competition structured?

The Super Y-League primarily follows FIFA’s laws of the game as well as other common rules. Our league avoids many typical restrictions placed on competition and offers expanded rosters and no limits on recruiting. The restrictive rules and regulations that are appropriate for recreational-level soccer are detrimental to player development when applied to elite youth leagues. Our league season culminates in the annual North American Finals which is something other organizations cannot provide. One of the advantages of the Super Y-League is its flexibility and proficiency in adjustment. Over the course of the Super Y-League’s growth in the last decade, shifts in the youth landscape were inevitable. We are prepared for more foreseeable changes to soccer in this country and are leading the way for growth of the game.



Who can compete in the Super-Y League?

Any player can compete in the Super-Y League. There will be no restrictions on who can participate. The league will have a 26-player roster. Teams wanting to restrict themselves to an 18-player roster may do so. We encourage all athletes, regardless of race, origin, or financial background, to compete in the Super Y-League. This is reflective of the types of teams not only free to come into the league, but also those typically recruited by the Super Y-League. As long as the standard of play and the club administration is consistent with Super Y-League requirements, we welcome all club teams.



Can states with no current USL clubs field teams in the Super Y-League?

Membership in the Super Y-League is not restricted to USL-affiliated teams or teams in states where USL franchises are located. We look at the Super Y-League as a system for not only developing the youth game, but also helping our USL efforts to identify players for our senior teams. The Super Y-League will reach out to all top-level teams in all states. It will be possible for a Super Y-League team to develop the same group of players until they are ready to enter the various USL amateur and professional leagues.

The Super Y-League is not a recreational league. We admit only top-level clubs with the competitive and administrative ability to compete at the highest level. The league contains established youth clubs and youth teams of senior USL and MLS teams. The Super Y-League is the biggest stage for the top 60-80 clubs in North America.



Could you describe a typical competitive playing season for the Super Y-League?

This depends on the division of the Super Y-League. Ultimately, we see this as a six to nine month league. We are now in a six-month season, which would run from mid-spring to late fall.

This season mirrors the current professional calendar in the U.S. Time is allotted for the Super Y-League ODP National Camps, the US Club Soccer National Cup and foreign travel. We want to build in enough flexibility so that teams and divisions can work with their respective associations. The natural gaps built into the schedule allow local teams and divisions to coordinate scheduling.

Each division is unique due to climate, various soccer activities, scholastic sports, and end of the school year. Each division collectively designs their own division. This includes the number of teams, games, start dates, and age groups. We leave it to the soccer people within these divisions to give us the best input on what they need to have for a successful season.

What does the Super Y-League offer that is different than what other national youth associations, such as U.S. Youth Soccer, are providing on the local or regional level?

The Super Y-League system is much broader in geographical scope and is organized on a divisional level. Because of that, teams can compete at a higher level. Most other leagues in the country are localized in terms of their members. Our members represent the top teams in a geographical area. The Super Y-League is also designed specifically for the elite level player. Another difference is reflected through expanded roster sizes, no recruiting restrictions, and the club pass system. These are not typically available through other youth associations. Their programs put heavy emphasis on recreational soccer.



How does the Super Y-League spotlight players otherwise missed by the current system?

The divisional structure of the Super Y-League enables teams to scout their own areas for the best players. These players are then placed in a position where they can display their skills on a divisional and national stage. The ODP program of the Super Y-League can certainly provide this avenue to national identification for players as well.

Why is age 13 the best age group to start with for the Super Y-League?

This is the youngest age that fits into our system when coaches can clearly see elite level talent. Top clubs such as Holland's Ajax, actually begin training their best players as early as six years of age. While the Super Y-League does not turn 13-year-olds into professionals, professionalizing the system and development process can ultimately help elite players reach their full potential.



How does the Super Y-League work with high school and college seasons?

The Super Y-League schedule is designed to work with scholastic institutions. Our season is completed by the time college players must report for the start of the fall season. This timing also helps high school players who compete in the fall and who have even more time before the start of their respective seasons.

Could you summarize your goals for the Super Y-League?

Our primary and permanent goal is to provide a platform for players to develop and be identified. We strive to ensure that players develop at a faster pace through the Super Y-League system by playing more often against the best competition. Players will learn to excel in a pressurized environment, creating fine tuned soccer players ready to take the U.S. game to the next level.



What is the future beyond the Super Y-League?

Canada and the U.S. are gradually becoming soccer nations. The new leaders in the game are no longer the basic recreational organizations, but Technical Directors from clubs and soccer-focused organizations encompassed by USL and U.S. Club Soccer. The planning and foresight of these two groups will mold the game into what it should become in North America.

More and more professional clubs both domestically and internationally are focusing on the Super Y-League. The opportunities that our vertically integrated structure offers players from youth through the professional levels are something no other single organization can provide. Additionally, these players continue to feed our U.S. National Team Programs.



What will be the impact on the Olympic Development Program (ODP)?

The Super Y-League was granted ODP status in August of 2002 for two programs. These programs are: 1) The Super Y-League North American Finals as a National ODP event where players will be scouted by U.S. Soccer National Staff Coaches and 2) The formation of the National ODP Camps where players will be scouted by U.S. Soccer National Staff Coaches.

Please note that there is no connection with this system and the U.S. Youth Soccer ODP system. It is the belief of the Super Y-League and its membership that we can provide a better system and a better alternative for players to be identified. Our belief is that the identification of players is done best while the player is in their natural environment. Players who excel within their clubs should be identified through their performance in league play, just as it is done in soccer nations throughout the world. The state systems tend to lose players through politics. Some players are lost due to expense as many of the best players cannot afford the State ODP programs.

By centralizing the scouting and combining resources into significant events, the Super Y-League reduces player cost exponentially. Our goal is to create ODP events that heighten player identification while providing unique opportunities for players to be recognized.

What does a team get for the \$1000 administrative fee?

The following management services are provided for each Super Y-League team: league administration, scheduling, referee assignment, ODP administration, web site management, press and public relations including updated standings and statistics, player discipline, and the staging of championship events in each age group.

One reason for these fees is greater overhead cost for operating a North American youth league. However, tournaments these days can run from \$400-\$1000 for only three to four games. Clubs must consider that playing in several high cost tournaments per year far surpasses our annual league fee. Our cost is very reasonable for a six-month season and comes with added services to clubs. Super Y-League's ODP system allows players to be scouted while in their natural club environment thereby eliminating the need for players to pay for the State ODP system.

NOTE: Player registration fees through U.S. Club Soccer will remain separate from the administrative fees. Teams can participate in any other USSF competition year round with their USCS/SYL player cards.

What is the official relationship between the Super Y-League and U.S. Soccer?

The Super Y-League has "national affiliate" status with U.S. Soccer. This means that the Super Y-League falls into a category that includes organizations with teams in competition from 26 or more states.

How does a club apply to the Super Y-League?

Applications are located on the web site. Prospective clubs are interviewed by the league. We review club competition, administration, facilities, coaching staff, and club structure. After the interview, the league will notify the club of the acceptance or non-acceptance into the league.

