

# **NOT JUST KICKIN' IT: HOW THE CURRENT UNITED STATES SOCCER SYSTEM WILL NOT YIELD SUCCESS IN MLS**

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“I’m not sure how to fix it [the pay-to-play system] but I think it needs to go back to looking at grassroots and seeing around the world soccer is not an expensive sport. It’s actually played barefoot in many countries and all you need is a ball and goal posts, and the goal posts can be trash cans or whatever is nearby.”

- *Alex Morgan*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Enough is enough. Soccer players unlucky enough to be born in the United States have suffered for too long. Professional soccer in America is in dire need of an overhaul, and the change must come at every level. From the chaotic athletic complexes of youth soccer to the twice-a-week well-oiled-machines of college soccer to the bankruptcy threatened professional league, American soccer must change.

Unfortunately for much of America’s youth, the impenetrable gates of poverty ensure that the athletically capable are also the financially stable. One cannot talk about the greatest athletes of all time without talking about financial hardships. Tom Brady, Mike Tyson, LeBron James, Michael Oher, and Tim Howard have two things in common. Each of these men represent the best their sport has to offer, but they had to escape poverty to stand on that stage.

These paywalls are not unique to youth soccer, but they are the most polarizing in youth soccer. For instance, in hockey, a parent wishing to sign their child up for the youth hockey league

will need to shell out between \$280 to \$1000 for equipment alone.<sup>1</sup> That does not include the cost and maintenance of ice skates, time rental at local skating rinks, or team fees. Those costs are dwarfed by the capitalist giant that youth soccer in America has become. The ripples caused by the paywalls of youth soccer in America reverberate throughout soccer in the NCAA. College coaches mainly recruit from club soccer tournaments and showcases.<sup>2</sup> Club soccer comes with a large price tag, so colleges only recruit from a class fortunate enough to buy their way into the system.

Players wealthy enough to compete at the collegiate level must play two to three games a week over a season that only lasts four months. College soccer is not a viable option for players who want to become professionals because the packed schedule does not provide enough recovery time which leaves players injury prone and not at peak performance. Major League Soccer (MLS) drafts less than 2% of NCAA players.<sup>3</sup> Recruiting and college soccer schedules create another barrier players must overcome if they want to play professionally.

Other countries are better at professional soccer. According to the October 2020 Soccer Power Index rankings, the United States failed to make it on the list.<sup>4</sup> Despite two decades of growth, professional soccer teams in the United States cannot compete internationally. MLS remains “largely unprofitable.”<sup>5</sup> Only a “handful” of the twenty-four teams in MLS made a profit in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Money aside, failing to qualify for the 2018 World Cup proves that

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<sup>1</sup> How Much Does Youth Hockey Really Cost?, hockeyfamilyhq.com, <https://hockeyfamilyhq.com/how-much-does-youth-hockey-really-cost/#:~:text=For%20a%20child%20just%20starting,is%20between%20%24680%20and%20%243%2C500> (last visited Nov. 20, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> How to Get Recruited for Men’s Soccer, ncsasports.org, <https://www.ncsasports.org/mens-soccer/how-to-get-recruited> (last visited Nov. 30, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> John Roman, How Many College Soccer Players Go Pro? exactsports.com, <https://exactsports.com/blog/how-many-college-soccer-players-go-pro/2020/01/28/> (last visited Nov. 30, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> David Lange, Best Soccer Club Teams Worldwide - Soccer Power Index as of October 2020, statista.com (Nov. 26, 2020), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/808025/best-soccer-club-teams-worldwide/>.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Keating, MLS Sees Itself as World’s Top League in 25 Years, Reuters (Feb. 29, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-soccer-usa-mls-future/mls-sees-itself-as-worlds-top-league-in-25-years-idUSKBN20N13A>.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

the United States men's professional soccer league has not produced a team that can compete worldwide. MLS' single-entity corporate model shields successful tactics such as promotion and relegation from being implemented. Poor-performing teams remain in MLS, despite their bad record. There is a lack of competition with the professional league, both domestically and internationally.

The problem with professional soccer in the United States is a direct result of other institutional issues stemming from the youth and college levels. The costly youth leagues cater only to the wealthy. There is not enough diversity and inclusion within the youth leagues because the pay-to-play system restricts an entire socioeconomic class. As a result of the flawed pay-to-play system, college recruiters are limited to one class of athletes - those that can afford to perform in clubs and leagues where recruiters show up. Further, college soccer is not a viable path for an athlete wanting to go pro because the intense schedule allows no time for proper recovery. Lack of adequate recovery time results in more injuries. On the professional level, MLS teams do not stand a chance at competing with successful European leagues. The current soccer system is subpar at best. United States professional soccer will not reach long-lasting success unless youth programs become cheaper, and collegiate and professional recruiting becomes more inclusive. These three systemic changes will take Major League Soccer all the way to the World Cup.

In the U.S., soccer does not have what it takes to be a competing force on the international playing field. Other countries set the precedent for elite soccer programs, not the United States. This paper argues that there are three underlying problems hindering the success of the U.S. Soccer system: the absence of promotion and relegation, lack of diversity and inclusion, and unbalanced schedules in college soccer. Part I of this paper will outline the first problem - the anticompetitive business model - and explains how the single-entity corporate structure prevents competition within MLS teams and prohibits promotion and relegation. Part II addresses the second problem - lack of diversity and inclusion within the current youth developmental programs and recruiting methods. Then, in part III, this paper describes the issues within college soccer. Finally, in part IV, this paper outlines

a three-tiered package solution and justifies how each solution can improve the soccer system.

## I. BACKGROUND

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is the international federation governing all of association football.<sup>7</sup> FIFA comprises 211 national associations and is arguably the most prestigious sports organization in the world.<sup>8</sup> Member countries of FIFA must also be members of one of the six regional confederations. The United States belongs to The Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football, “CONCACAF.”<sup>9</sup> Whereas CONCACAF provides international governance for one of the six FIFA regions, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), commonly referred to as U.S. Soccer, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the official governing body of the sport of soccer in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The USSF governs U.S. amateur and professional soccer, including men, women, youth, beach soccer, futsal, and Paralympic national teams.<sup>11</sup> Article 14 of the FIFA Statutes provides that member associations like USSF can “manage their affairs independently and ensure that their own affairs are not influenced by any third parties.”<sup>12</sup> This paper will focus on one division of the Professional League Organization Members: Division I. Division I consists of Major League Soccer (MLS) alone, the preeminent professional soccer league.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Who We Are, [fifa.com](https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/), <https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> FIFA Soccer’s World Governing Body, [ussoccer.com](https://www.ussoccer.com/history/organizational-structure/fifa), <https://www.ussoccer.com/history/organizational-structure/fifa> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> How Soccer in the US is Organized: International, Professional, Amateur, Collegiate & Youth Soccer, <https://www.challengersports.com/challenger-blog/soccer-us-organized/> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Soccer History, [ussoccer.com](https://www.ussoccer.com/history), <https://www.ussoccer.com/history> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> The FIFA Statutes are the overarching rules that guide FIFA’s governing system. See FIFA, *FIFA Statutes: Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes; Standing Orders of the Congress* (2018), <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/the-fifa-statutes-2018.pdf?cloudid=whhncbdzio03cuhmwfxa>.

<sup>13</sup> See generally Soccer Organizations: Professional Council, U.S. Soccer, <https://www.ussoccer.com/about/affiliates/professional-soccer>.

MLS is a men's professional soccer league sanctioned by the United States Soccer Federation.<sup>14</sup> MLS represents the sport's highest level in both the United States and Canada.<sup>15</sup> Its inception began after the United States hosted the 1994 FIFA World Cup. The league consists of twenty-six teams; twenty-three in the United States and three in Canada.<sup>16</sup> MLS has been the "fastest growing league in North America" over the past five years.<sup>17</sup> With its growing popularity, the league will expand to a total of thirty teams by their 2023 season.<sup>18</sup>

## II. ANTICOMPETITIVE BUSINESS STRUCTURE

Professional soccer follows a different business model than every other professional league in the United States. Football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey are the top four sports in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Each of these sports' professional leagues operate on contractual agreements among independently owned member teams.<sup>20</sup> The National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), and the National Hockey League (NHL) were built on a capitalist foundation. Soccer in the United States has a much different professional league because of its single-entity business model.

### *A. Single-Entity Corporate Model*

MLS follows a different business model than other traditional sports leagues.<sup>21</sup> The soccer league in the United States is

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<sup>14</sup> About Major League Soccer, [www.mlssoccer.com](http://www.mlssoccer.com), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/post/2018/01/01/about-major-league-soccer> (last visited Nov. 20, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> 2020 MLS Season Brochure, [www.mlssoccer.com](http://www.mlssoccer.com), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/media-resources/mls-season-brochure> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> MLS Announces Plans to Expand to 30 Teams, [mlssoccer.com](http://www.mlssoccer.com) (Jan. 1, 2018), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/post/2019/04/18/mls-announces-plans-expand-30-teams>.

<sup>19</sup> Top 10 Most Popular Sports in America 2020 (TV Ratings), [sportsshow.net](http://sportsshow.net) (Oct. 4, 2020), <https://sportsshow.net/most-popular-sports-in-america/>.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Mathias, Comment, Big League Perestroika? The Implications of Fraser v. Major League Soccer, 148 U. PA. L. Rev. 203, 208 (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Carolina I Velarde, Note: Home-Field Disadvantage: How the Organization of Soccer in the United States Affects Athletic and Economic Competitiveness, 117 Mich. L. Rev. 970 (2019). (citing Business Wire, Lawsuit Charges U.S. Soccer Federation and

structured as a “so-called single-entity league.”<sup>22</sup> Teams in MLS do not maintain economic autonomy or have individual owners.<sup>23</sup> MLS founder, Alan Rothenberg, ensured all teams would be centrally owned by the league and investors would “merely own shares in MLS itself.”<sup>24</sup> Rothenberg created MLS as the sole entity to assign athletes and staff and set local ticket and concession prices.<sup>25</sup> Problems arose because the original MLS structure Rothenberg proposed eliminated nearly all forms of off-field competition. The only competition possible within the original structure “is in the form of on-field games themselves.”<sup>26</sup> Potential investors were originally discouraged from investing “by the anonymity of their roles and preferred to be more involved in running a team.”<sup>27</sup> Before operations began, Rothenberg modified his system, which is the same business model followed today.

The revised MLS structure still functions as a single-entity. The league centrally owns each player and controls every contract.<sup>28</sup> In the modified system, MLS retains formal ownership of its franchise but has a special division of stocks designated to “investor-operators.”<sup>29</sup> This special class of stock allows almost full operating control over a particular franchise.<sup>30</sup> Investor-operators are the closest thing to an “owner” that MLS has. Investor-operators manage their teams as an owner would, but share a percentage of their revenue and expenditures with the entire league.<sup>31</sup> Unlike other professional leagues with individual owners, MLS investor-operators invest in the success and

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Major League Soccer with Conspiracy to Deprive L.A. Soccer Fans of World-Class Matches, (Nov. 13, 2001), See [<https://perma.cc/L47W-YQTP>].

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Mathias, *supra* note 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 221.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> Jason Davis, What is the MLS Business Model?, [ussoccerplayers.com](https://ussoccerplayers.com/2018/04/what-is-the-mls-business-model.html) (Apr. 11, 2018), <https://ussoccerplayers.com/2018/04/what-is-the-mls-business-model.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> Emma Parker, A Match of Leagues: MLS v. CSL, [sites.duke.edu](https://sites.duke.edu/soccerpoliticsemmaparker/homepage/corporate-structure-revenue-and-expenditure-flow/), <https://sites.duke.edu/soccerpoliticsemmaparker/homepage/corporate-structure-revenue-and-expenditure-flow/> (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

sustainability of the league as a whole, not just their individual team.<sup>32</sup> Investor-operators are partners, not competitors.

### 1. Antitrust and NCAA

The traditional league model has given rise to antitrust concerns.<sup>33</sup> In *National Collegiate Athletic Ass'n (NCAA) v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*, the NCAA faced an antitrust challenge regarding its control over television broadcast rights of college football games.<sup>34</sup> The Supreme Court held that the NCAA overstepped by restraining competition, and clarified that sports leagues require a high level of cooperation among competitors for their productions to exist.<sup>35</sup> When teams agree to certain restrictions, they exclude potential competitors, suppliers, and distributors.<sup>36</sup> The Supreme Court did not condemn the television agreement as per se illegal and stated that their decision “rested in large part on [the Court’s] recognition that a certain degree of cooperation is necessary if the type of competition that petitioner and its member institutions seek to market is to be preserved.”<sup>37</sup>

### 2. The Fraser Era

The current MLS model “retains significant centralized control over both league and individual team operations.”<sup>38</sup> Most antitrust lawsuits in other established leagues are brought under section 1 of the Sherman Act, which only applies to concerted action between two economic actors.<sup>39</sup> Section 1 of the Sherman Act requires at least two colluding parties in order for antitrust laws to attach.<sup>40</sup> Single corporations, like MLS, are only regulated

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<sup>32</sup> Id.

<sup>33</sup> Velarde, supra note 23.

<sup>34</sup> Mathias, supra note 22.

<sup>35</sup> Id. at 101.

<sup>36</sup> Id.

<sup>37</sup> Id. at 117.

<sup>38</sup> *Fraser v. Major League Soccer, L.L.C.*, 284 F.3d 47, 53-54 (1st Cir. 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Id. (citing *Copperweld Corp. v. Independence Tube Corp.*, 467 U.S. 752, 767 (1984)).

<sup>40</sup> 15 U.S.C. § 1 (2012) (“Every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, is declared to be illegal.”).

by section 2 of the Sherman Act which prohibits monopolization or attempted monopolization of trade.<sup>41</sup> As a single corporation, MLS cannot “combine, contract, or conspire” with itself so internal league practices are not actionable under section one of the Sherman Act.<sup>42</sup>

The single-entity model shields MLS from antitrust lawsuits, as seen in *Fraser v. Major League Soccer* because the league is a single-entity corporation.<sup>43</sup> At the time of *Fraser*, MLS had sole ownership of its teams, intellectual property rights, tickets, supplied equipment, and broadcast rights.<sup>44</sup> Further, MLS maintained sole control over team schedules, stadium leases, and salaries of all league personnel.<sup>45</sup> The plaintiffs argued the league’s authority over player employment, which included responsibility for players’ contracts and the negotiation of their salaries, was evidence of monopolized trade.<sup>46</sup> The league’s control led to illegal price fixing.<sup>47</sup> The First Circuit disagreed and found for MLS.<sup>48</sup> The court held that the single-entity structure of MLS was not a “sham for horizontal price fixing” but a means for competition that created “new opportunities for players” and achieved “real economic integration.”<sup>49</sup>

To this day, the *Fraser* decision “insulates” MLS from antitrust lawsuits. Once an investor-operator sets his roster, MLS negotiates each contract. Professional soccer players have very little room to negotiate the terms of their contract because the terms of the agreement “are subject to the league’s salary cap and any restraints on player movement.”<sup>50</sup> Even with the Designated Player Rule in effect, only three players per team can receive

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<sup>41</sup> Id. § 2 (“Every person who shall monopolize, or attempt to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons, to monopolize any part of the trade or commerce among the several States ... shall be deemed guilty of a felony ....”).

<sup>42</sup> Mathias, supra note 22, at 204.

<sup>43</sup> Velarde, supra note 30, at 970.

<sup>44</sup> *Fraser*, supra note 47, at 53-54.

<sup>45</sup> Id.

<sup>46</sup> Id.

<sup>47</sup> Id.

<sup>48</sup> Id.

<sup>49</sup> Id. at 59.

<sup>50</sup> Mathias, supra note 22, at 223.



wages not capped by the league.<sup>51</sup> MLS contracts unlawfully prohibit athletes from profiting from licensing their name, image, and likeness.<sup>52</sup> MLS relies on the *Fraser* decision to reinforce their broad decision-making authority, despite monopolistic claims against them.<sup>53</sup> Further, the single-entity corporate model prohibits competitive practices, like promotion and relegation, because investor-operators benefit from the league as a whole, not just one team.

### *B. Promotion and Relegation Problem*

Promotion and relegation is a performance-based system where teams move between leagues based on the team's performance.<sup>54</sup> At the end of each season, the teams that poorly performed are relegated, or forced to a lower division. Teams that finish at the top of their league bump up to a higher league, if they are not already at the top. The level of movement between teams depends on the league. For example, in England, the top three and bottom three experience either promotion or relegation, while only two teams move up or down in Scotland.<sup>55</sup>

#### 1. Wild West Days

The lack of a merit-based system yields apathetic teams and league personnel who do not “fear the drop.”<sup>56</sup> Once a team is in MLS, they stay there regardless of their poor performance. In the early 90s, the United States seized an excellent business opportunity and successfully won the bid to host the 1994 World Cup. Rothenburg created the MLS anticipating the rise in

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<sup>51</sup> MLS Roster Rules and Regulations 2020, mlssoccer.com (Mar. 1, 2020), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/league/official-rules/mls-roster-rules-and-regulations>

<sup>52</sup> Mathias, *supra* note 22, at 223.

<sup>53</sup> Velarde, *supra* note 23, at 970.

<sup>54</sup> Desi Duncker, Promotion and Relegation in U.S. Sports?, Medium (Feb 22, 2019), <https://medium.com/@desiduncker/promotion-and-relegation-in-u-s-sports-c6aae9e4765d>.

<sup>55</sup> Premier League and Football League: Ups and Downs and European Qualification, BBC (May 28, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/43402150>.

<sup>56</sup> Ives Galarcep, Explained: Why US Soccer Doesn't Have Relegation and Promotion and Will MLS Ever Change?, goal.com (Apr. 3, 2019), <https://www.goal.com/en-us/news/explained-why-us-soccer-doesnt-have-relegation-and-promotion-and-7a2v9a1dga8v116cblr5lsp11>.

popularity after hosting the World Cup. At its inception, “MLS lived and died by the checkbooks of its clubs’ owners.”<sup>57</sup> Twenty-five years ago, soccer was not an established sport in the United States, let alone an established professional league. Flash forward to 2020 - MLS is no longer in their “wild west” days.<sup>58</sup> The league has blossomed from ten to nearly thirty teams, yet teams are not promoted or demoted for their season performance. Despite the rise in popularity and rapid growth, the USSF has not implemented any form of promotion and relegation.

## 2. Current United States System

Despite poor performances, MLS teams remain in the highest division in professional soccer, Division I. MLS teams do not earn their way in. They pay their way in. The Toronto Football Club, a MLS team, conceded 62 goals and earned the lowest points total in club history, 23 of 34 games.<sup>59</sup> The Cincinnati Football Club is ranked 26 out of 26 in MLS, for the second year in a row.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the Houston Dynamo finished bottom of the Western Conference standings, meaning they missed the playoffs six of the past seven years.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Toronto, Cincinnati, and Houston remain Division I teams. USSF’s tight knit “concentration of power and support” for MLS has caused a significant problem: a closed-league structure.<sup>62</sup> Closed-league athletic systems are common in traditional U.S. sports, but very uncommon for global soccer.

Many successful professional sports leagues in Europe have a merit-based system.<sup>63</sup> Although the founders of MLS have not

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<sup>57</sup> Jeff Carlisle and Noah Davis, *MLS Year One, 25 Seasons Ago: The ‘Wild West’ of Training, Travel, Hockey Shootouts and American Soccer*, ESPN (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.espn.com/soccer/major-league-soccer/story/4082408/mls-year-one25-seasons-ago-the-wild-west-of-trainingtravelhockey-shootouts-and-american-soccer>.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> Taylor Rockwell, *The 10 Worst Teams in MLS History*, Paste Magazine (Dec. 1, 2015), <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/12/the-10-worst-teams-in-mls-history.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Sigal, *Power Rankings: Sporting Kansas City, Colorado Rapids Ride Wave into Playoffs*, mlssoccer.com (Nov. 10, 2020), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/post/2020/11/10/power-rankings-sporting-kansas-city-colorado-rapids-ride-wave-playoffs>.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> Velarde, *supra* note 30, at 972.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

explicitly stated this, it is clear that the NBA and NFL influenced MLS' design. Promotion and relegation does not work for the NFL or the NBA because both have one professional league and do not compete on a global level. Unlike the traditional American sports, soccer has to compete both domestically and internationally.

It is problematic that the United States of America, the model for capitalism, has a closed soccer system that does not allow for different opinions, different methods of training, or different ways of competing. Teams within the MLS and outside of MLS have no incentive for their performance. The New York Cosmos won the North American Soccer League title in 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2016.<sup>64</sup> Despite being the champions of the second division, the Cosmos returned to their same league in 2017 consisting of the same “mediocre opposition and ho-hum revenues.”<sup>65</sup> Investor-operators do not benefit as much from a system that follows promotion and relegation because the increased competition could drive individual teams into bankruptcy, which would affect the league's revenue as a whole. As seen in *Fraser*, the single-entity structure allows for a small percentage of people to continue to have broad decision-making authority.

### III. LACK OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

“The result is a system more attuned to identifying the best *payers* than the best players”<sup>66</sup> The United States soccer system caters to the wealthy. The cost of the game keeps an entire class from entering into the youth system. Soccer is a rich kid's game, both in the youth league and college level. The lack of diversity and inclusion of lower socioeconomic status players prevents an entire class of athletes from being able to play the game.

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<sup>64</sup> Why Is There No Promotion and Relegation in the United States?, *Economist* (Nov. 23, 2016), <https://www.economist.com/game-theory/2016/11/23/why-is-there-no-promotion-and-relegation-in-the-united-states>

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> Rick Eckstein, *Until Youth Soccer Is Fixed, US Men's National Team Is Destined to Fail*, *The Conversation* (Oct. 13, 2017), <https://theconversation.com/until-youth-soccer-is-fixed-us-mens-national-team-is-destined-to-fail-85585>.

### A. *Pay-to-Play Problem*

The pay-to-play American soccer system is rooting out an entire socioeconomic class. Former chairman of U.S. Soccer's Diversity Task Force, Doug Andreassen, passionately stated, "The system is not working for the underserved community. It's working for the white kids."<sup>67</sup> Only kids with families that can afford the best training programs have the greatest chance of success. The United States youth soccer system is broken. At every turn, commercial components seep into the youth soccer leagues. The added cost of apparel, equipment, fees, trainers, tournament travel, and practice travel adds up quickly. It is not uncommon for families to spend over \$10,000.00 per year per child to participate in youth soccer.<sup>68</sup>

#### 1. The Development Academy

Club sports are a huge investment. According to a 2017 article published by *USA Today*, the average cost for youth soccer, per child, can range from \$2,500 to \$5,000, not including transportation costs or hotel accommodations.<sup>69</sup> The USSF created the U.S. Soccer Developmental Academy under the U.S. Youth Soccer umbrella to offer an elite everyday environment for player development.<sup>70</sup> In order to compete in the Developmental Academy (DA), players had to pay thousands of dollars to be on the team.<sup>71</sup> However, the U.S. Soccer Development Academy released an official statement on April 15, 2020 that officially terminated the program. The DA's abrupt termination leaves

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<sup>67</sup> Les Carpenter, 'It's Only Working for the White Kids': American Soccer's Diversity Problem,' *Guardian: Sportblog* (June 1, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2016/jun/01/us-soccer-diversity-problem-world-football>.

<sup>68</sup> Mark Hyman, *The Most Expensive Game in Town*, (2012).

<sup>69</sup> Jason Smith, *Paying to Play: How Much Do Club Sports Cost?*, *USA Today* (Aug. 1, 2017), <https://usatodayhss.com/2017/paying-to-play-how-much-do-club-sports-cost>.

<sup>70</sup> Christian Hambleton & Michael K. Wheeler, *Guest Post: Are U.S. Youth Clubs Leaving Money on the Table?*, *jetlaw.org* (June 20, 2014), <http://www.jetlaw.org/2014/06/20/guest-post-are-u-s-youth-clubs-leaving-money-on-the-table/>.

<sup>71</sup> Under the pay-to-play model, teams typically charge each player a fee of around \$ 1,200 a year (which can increase to \$ 2,200 for traveling expenses). See Peter Staunton, *How Many Howards and Dempseys Are the US Losing Due to Pay to Play?*, *goal.com*, <http://www.goal.com/en/news/how-many-howards-or-dempseys-are-the-us-losing-due-to-pay-to/4c10dtk0u17c16q7nsalg3x4y>.

many questions unanswered and creates uncertainty in the youth soccer community.

## 2. The Game of the Suburbs

Athletic ability is not defined by socioeconomic status. Tim Howard, one of the greatest goalkeepers in American soccer history, almost slipped through the cracks due to the pay-to-play system.<sup>72</sup> Tim Mulqueen, former goalkeeping coach for Rutgers University's men's team, waived the standard \$25 private coaching fee for Howard because his mother could only afford a one-time session.<sup>73</sup> Howard describes Mulqueen's offer as "life-altering"<sup>74</sup> But for Howard's mom scraping up the money to send her son to one specialist goalkeeping lesson, Howard might not have ever been found. It is terrifying to know that cost could have been the one factor that kept Tim Howard from working his way through the Olympic Development Training Program that led to his remarkable career.

Although Tim Howard's \$25 private coaching fee is considered expensive, that cost pales in comparison to the fees charged at the U.S. premier soccer clubs. Brad Guzan's first youth club cost - \$25 to try out and \$2095 upon registration.<sup>75</sup> DeAndre Yeldin played with the Emerald City club in Washington where it cost \$1300 per season. Jozy Altidore's time spent training in Boca Raton's Junior Soccer Club cost \$3000 per month, not including uniform fees.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, there is a direct correlation between an athlete's chance of success and "how many zeros a parent can write in their checkbook."<sup>77</sup> There is a reason soccer is coined as the 'game of the suburbs'.<sup>78</sup> Without getting incredibly lucky, gifted athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds fall through the cracks of this broken system.

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Staunton, *How Many Howards and Dempseys Are the US Losing Due to Pay to Play?*, goal.com (Oct. 14, 2017), <https://www.goal.com/en/news/how-many-howards-or-dempseys-are-the-us-losing-due-to-pay-to/4c10dtk0u17c16q7nsa1g3x4y>.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

### *B. Recruiting Problem*

Scouts for top European teams watch pickup matches in inner-city neighborhoods, local club teams partner with schools and universities, and children are provided facilities and coaching regardless of their economic background. It is no coincidence that many of the greatest soccer players in the world, such as Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, Luis Suárez, and Ballon d'Or winner Luka Modrić, grew up in impoverished areas.<sup>79</sup> Soccer should be an accessible sport that anyone with a ball can play. While that might be partially true, soccer players in the United States have to pay the right price to have a chance of being seen by a scout. The pay-to-play system and recruiting problem are mutually dependent. Scouts only come to high-end clubs and academies that follow the pay-to-play system because those are the leagues consistently producing quality athletes. Athletes have to pay to have the opportunity to perform in front of collegiate and professional scouts.

#### 1. Overview

The U.S. Youth Soccer Association (USYS) advertises that they register nearly 3 million players annually.<sup>80</sup> In a 2018 study by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association, there was a 4.4% reduction in soccer participation by kids aged 6 to 12 from 2015 - 2018.<sup>81</sup> This reduction shows that the pay-to-play system and current recruiting strategies are failing to provide, discover, and develop elite athletes.

#### 2. Not-So-Easy Path to Success

The interest in the game is clearly present, but there is no clear path carved for continued player development. Typically, successful athletes start out very young in clubs or travel teams. The best option is to join a free MLS youth development academy

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<sup>79</sup> Sophie Roberts, *Murder, War, and Slums: World Cup Players Who Defied All Odds to Represent Their Countries*, DailyStar Blog (Jun. 14, 2018), <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/real-life/world-cup-2018-rags-riches-16860951>.

<sup>80</sup> *Who Is US Soccer?*, *supra* note 13.

<sup>81</sup> Alli Schulman, *Soccer Participation in the United States*, Sports and Fitness Industry Association Blog (Jun. 14, 2018), <https://sfia.medium.com/soccer-participation-in-the-united-states-92f8393f6469>.

that exposes them to professional coaches and scouting from an early age. The downside to MLS academies is that the athlete's family either has to move to one of the cities that has a MLS academy or invest the time and money traveling to the academy. Otherwise, they have to pay to send their child to play in the local clubs and travel teams which cost a fortune.

Since the MLS academies are not available to everyone, many compete on travel teams, in clubs, or at academies until they are recruited by an MLS residency program or they are recruited to play collegiate soccer. MLS residency programs are an extension of the MLS academy system where kids roughly 12-14 years old move in with a host family or into a group home for the remainder of their high school education to enhance their likelihood of being scouted.<sup>82</sup> The purpose behind the residency program is to provide full-time professional training by MLS personnel. It is a program developed by MLS for the purpose of grooming kids for the professional league. The recruiting system is a catch 22<sup>83</sup> - meaning in order to have a chance to be seen by a scout, players have to be in a club or academy, and in order to be in a club or academy, they have to pay to play. As said before, recruiting in the U.S. and the flawed pay-to-play system are mutually dependent.

#### IV. COLLEGE SOCCER

##### *A. Unbalanced Schedule*

Currently, the United States collegiate soccer system is an insufficient avenue to develop athletes for the professional level. Collegiate soccer schedules cram a year's worth of games into four months.<sup>84</sup> College athletes average three games per week.<sup>85</sup> The University of Maryland's 2018 head soccer coach, Sasho Cirovski,

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<sup>82</sup> Charles Boehm, Audi 1v.1: Residency Programs Broaden the Scope, Depth of MLS Academies, *mlssoccer.com* (Jun. 17, 2020), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/post/2020/06/17/audi-1v1-residency-programs-broaden-scope-depth-mls-academies>.

<sup>83</sup> Catch 22 is a paradoxical system with no escape due to the contradicting rules and regulations.

<sup>84</sup> Tisha Thompson, Is College Soccer Too Much of a Risk for Rising U.S. Talent?, *ESPN* (Mar. 22, 2018), [https://www.espn.com/sports/soccer/story/\\_/id/22869596/2018-world-cup-college-soccer-too-much-risk-rising-us-talent](https://www.espn.com/sports/soccer/story/_/id/22869596/2018-world-cup-college-soccer-too-much-risk-rising-us-talent).

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

referenced to his players' GPS monitoring system and said, "Each game, my players run about the same as a 10K. The cross-country team won't compete for at least a week, maybe two weeks, after a meet. But we're playing three games a week."<sup>86</sup> According to the NCAA, the overall injury rate in men's soccer is 7.7 per 1000 athlete exposures, including games and practices.<sup>87</sup> Cirovski noted that soccer players need at least 72 to 96 hours of recovery.<sup>88</sup> Three games per week, over the span of four months leads to more injuries because of less recovery time. Ironically, the same NCAA Men's Soccer Injury pamphlet advises "rest" as one of the main ways to prevent injuries.<sup>89</sup> College soccer plays a huge physical toll on athletes.

### *B. Not Viable Option for Development*

When given the opportunity to go directly into the pro league or play in college, many choose to go pro. Other than the intense physical demands, college soccer is not a viable option because of the unbalanced schedule. Other than the four-month season, college soccer players are wasting their time. Those who choose to go pro spend all year developing their skills with the supervision of league personnel. In the spring, college athletes are not doing anything but training. The fear of knowing other athletes are conditioning, playing games, and polishing their skills makes college athletes feel behind.<sup>90</sup> Not only is the unbalanced schedule making college athletes injury prone, but also it is making them forgo college all together because of the lack of meaningful development.<sup>91</sup>

## V. THE SOLUTION

The youth and college soccer leagues contribute to the failure of the United States professional soccer system. After twenty-five

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<sup>86</sup> Id.

<sup>87</sup> NCAA Men's Soccer Injuries, NCAA Informational Brochure, [https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/NCAA\\_M\\_Soccer\\_Injuries\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/NCAA_M_Soccer_Injuries_WEB.pdf) (last visited Nov. 20, 2020).

<sup>88</sup> Sigal, *supra* note 68.

<sup>89</sup> Why Is There No Promotion and Relegation in the United States?, *supra* note 66.

<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *supra* note 86.

<sup>91</sup> Id.



years of development, the United States professional soccer league should be world-renowned. Yet, U.S. Men's National Team failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup after losing to a country much smaller, and much less developed than the United States.

This paper outlined three significant problems that continue to cripple the success of soccer in the United States: the anticompetitive single-entity model that prevents successful tactics, like promotion and relegation from being implemented; and the lack of diversity and inclusion in both the youth leagues and recruiting system; and the unbalanced collegiate schedule that causes more harm than good. American professional soccer can be just as good as other countries, if not better, by implementing promotion and relegation, adding more MLS academies that guarantee quality coaches and scout exposure, and expanding collegiate game schedules. If implemented, these three main solutions that could yield success for the United States both domestically and internationally.

#### *A. Implement Promotion and Relegation*

In order for U.S. professional soccer to have long-lasting success, the MLS' anticompetitive policies need revision now. The USSF should implement promotion and relegation, like the rest of the European soccer community. Once a team is created in the MLS system, it remains there, regardless of the team's poor performance. Right now, there is no penalty for ranking last over multiple years, or a reward for elite performance. Promotion and relegation solves the problems the closed-league system has fostered. If the USSF does not implement some type of promotion and relegation system, then FIFA should exert their authority and save the U.S. soccer system by forcing the USSF to do so.

Promotion and relegation works because it creates a culture of competitiveness and inclusivity within the entire U.S. soccer system. Players will have an incentive to work harder in order to advance to better, more lucrative divisions. Increased opportunities for exposure would assist with player development at all levels. The intensity of competition, likelihood of success, and likelihood of failure would keep each player, coach, investor-operator, and fan locked in and invested in their team. MLS Commissioner, Don Garber, might be against promotion and

relegation,<sup>92</sup> but others like former Miami Football Club CEO, Sean Flynn, advocate for promotion and relegation.<sup>93</sup> Flynn stated that by implementing the same competitive system that the rest of the world follows “America will be open, resulting in better teams through all divisions, compelling storylines to increase fan excitement and greater financial success for everyone involved in this beautiful game.”<sup>94</sup>

The USSF should give MLS teams five years notice prior to implementing promotion and relegation. Five years is enough time to mobilize the market. The Division I league, MLS, should be split into different sub leagues, such as MLS1, MLS2, and MLS3 - and the same goes for Division II and Division III. The restructuring of teams within their division creates more competition. Hypothetically, imagine demoting the Golden Gate Warriors to the G League as the repercussions for being ranked last in the NBA. Likewise, imagine the Fort Wayne Mad Ants being promoted from G League to the NBA. In this illustration, the Golden Gate Warriors are now the best team in Division II basketball and the Mad Ants are now hypothetically the worst team in Division I. Demoted teams will have motivation to work harder to earn their spots back or their team as a whole might crumble. Promotion and relegation punishes teams for not doing well and prevents teams from “tanking.”<sup>95</sup> Deterring teams from tanking and adding incentive for winning puts emotion back in the game - which is something MLS has been missing.

Promotion and relegation packs emotion into every match. In Europe, fans live and die by their teams because the championship is anyone’s game. In theory, the lowest ranked team could be the next professional team. England’s Premier league, often noted as the most competitive league in the world, is a prime

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<sup>92</sup> Jeff Carlisle, Garber Q&A: MLS Commissioner Talks U.S. Failure, Pro/Rel, Expansion, and More, ESPN (Dec. 9, 2017), <https://www.espn.com/soccer/major-league-soccer/19/blog/post/3303189/garber-qanda-mls-commissioner-talks-us-failure-pro-rel-expansion-more>.

<sup>93</sup> ESPN.com Staff, Miami FC Taking Promotion-Relegation Fight to Court of Arbitration for Sport, ESPN (Aug. 3, 2017), <http://www.espnfc.com/miami-fc/story/3171424/miami-fc-taking-promotion-relegation-fight-to-court-of-arbitration-for-sport>.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> Allen T. Paxton, Note: Trust the Process: How the NBA Can Combat Its “Tanking” Problem in Court, 104, *Iowa L. Rev.* 1551 (2019).

example that promotion and relegation creates a system that recognizes resilience and performance.<sup>96</sup> In 2016, Leicester City went from being the Premier League joke (ranked 14 of 20 in 2015) to league champions.<sup>97</sup> Every goal, every recruit, every dollar spent developing a team matters in a promotion and relegation system.

Promotion and relegation is key to creating a sustainable long-term professional league. Substantial change takes substantial time. Implementing this new system will not occur overnight, nor within the next year. If promotion and relegation occurred in the 2022 season, the likelihood of teams suffering financially or worse, bankruptcy, is likely. The application of a new system could have crippling financial effects if enforced too quickly because teams would not have the resources and revenue needed to compete.<sup>98</sup> It is foreseeable that players will become more valuable commodities due to their performances, so the cost to keep them will increase.<sup>99</sup> Investor-operators receive guaranteed profits<sup>100</sup> from the current system, so promotion and relegation might seem too risky for them. Complacency is not the answer though.

In an effort to mitigate concerns, the USSF should adopt tactics used by the European system. For example, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) created the Financial Fairplay Regulations to prevent professional football clubs from spending more than they earn throughout the season.<sup>101</sup> Adopting the price capping regulations would regulate club owners and ensure economic stability. The movement of teams throughout leagues will result in net benefits by increasing league attendance over time, motivate ownership of teams, and assist with player

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<sup>96</sup> Premier League Explained, premierleague.com, <https://www.premierleague.com/premier-league-explained> (last visited Nov. 30, 2020).

<sup>97</sup> Lu Calzada, Sports Across the Pond: An Intro Guide to European Soccer, loyolaphoenix.com (Sept. 9, 2020), <http://loyolaphoenix.com/2020/09/sports-across-the-pond-an-intro-guide-to-european-soccer/>.

<sup>98</sup> Velarde, *supra* note 23, at 972.

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> Stefan Szymanski, So What Is The MLS Business Model? Soccernomics-agency.com (Apr. 23, 2015), <https://www.soccernomics-agency.com/?p=692>.

<sup>101</sup> Financial Fair Play: All You Need to Know, UEFA.com (Jun. 30, 2015), <https://www.uefa.com/news/0253-0d7f34cc6783-5ebf120a4764-1000—financial-fair-play-all-you-need-to-know/?referrer=%2Fcommunity%2Fnews%2Fnewsid%3D2064391>.

development.<sup>102</sup> The closed-league system aims to maximize owners' profitability and protect a league's financial sustainability at the expense of product quality and competitive risk.<sup>103</sup>

MLS is a franchise, meaning that teams contribute to the overall success of the league as a whole. In the early days of MLS, the success of the league was important because but for a few wealthy investors willing to take a chance on a new sports system, there would be no MLS. At its inception, MLS heavily depended on investors to support the league, but twenty-five years have passed, and MLS has a firm foundation. Although the implementation of promotion and relegation might mean the end to some poorly run mediocre teams, growing pains are inevitable. U.S. Soccer fans cannot face another heartbreak like they did in 2017.<sup>104</sup>

### *B. End Pay-to-Play System*

Soccer is supposed to be a game for everyone, but the current United States system has too many barriers for entry. Affordability is key. If the USSF wants to deepen the talent pool and cultivate more athletes, they have to start at the issue of the youth soccer federation: the pay-to-play system. Lowering the prices or subsidizing registration for children and coaches would help but will not be enough. Terminating the Developmental Academy was a step in the right direction. However, clubs not affiliated with the Developmental Academy were not affected by the termination so they can carry on business as normal.

The pay-to-play system is a web of clubs and leagues that think they are doing what is best for the good of soccer in America. In reality, these clubs and leagues are profiting off of selling the dream of going pro to families that can afford to buy into the scheme. The pay-to-play system should be slowly phased out by implementing cost-effective leagues. After the termination of the Development Academy, MLS academies announced the expansion

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<sup>102</sup> Velarde, *supra* note 23. (citing Bus. Grp., Deloitte, Professional Club Soccer in the USA: An Analysis of Promotion and Relegation (2016)), [<https://perma.cc/8KSW-GV8P>].

<sup>103</sup> Velarde, *supra* note 23, at 974.

<sup>104</sup> ESPN.com Staff, *supra* note 1.

of nineteen different teams within their program.<sup>105</sup> This is fantastic news but there should be nineteen MLS sponsored academies in cities like Dallas, Houston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. alone. MLS academies should be popping up in every region of the United States, with multiple leagues in densely populated areas. The addition of cheaper youth development leagues moves the ball one step closer to abolishing the outrageous pay-to-play system.

### 1. The Coach Task Force

With the addition of more MLS sponsored leagues comes the need for more MLS-trained coaches. Coaches can make or break a new development program. MLS should create a coaching task force specifically designed to train, develop, and provide resources for volunteers to become “MLS certified” annually. The Coach Task Force would be the fifth extension to the current four-tiered governing platform of the MLS Player Development Division.<sup>106</sup> The Task Force would host in-depth training conferences across the nation sponsored by MLS personnel. If MLS wants to truly act on their mission of providing cost-effective development platform that promotes “collaboration, innovation and input with representation from MLS academies and other elite youth academies” then creating more free academies that train and educate coaches under MLS supervision is the key to long-lasting success that will root out costly development programs.

### 2. The Scout Guarantee

Although the fan base might be growing, the overall talent produced by MLS has not improved. The pay-to-play system is a huge barrier for many kids. After competing in the youth leagues, players experience more recruiting barriers if they hope to make it to the professional leagues or play on the collegiate level. Unlike other traditional American sports, scouts do not show up to high school games or take a look at the community park - they recruit

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<sup>105</sup> Tom Bogert, Major League Soccer Adds 19 Clubs to Elite Player Development Platform, mlssoccer.com (Aug. 4, 2020), <https://www.mlssoccer.com/post/2020/08/04/mls-adds-19-clubs-elite-player-development-platform>

<sup>106</sup> Id.

exclusively from organized clubs or academy league matches. Players essentially have to pay to get a scout's attention. The select few recruited for college soccer experience extremely condensed seasons that leaves them vulnerable to injuries and less skilled compared to those that filtered directly into the professional system.

The above-mentioned addition of MLS academies all over the United States would solve the recruiting problem as well. U.S. Soccer recruiters have to step away from the suburban, million-dollar soccer complex and take a page from basketball recruiters. "There's a robust network of recruiters who still go to cramped high school gyms and neighborhood playgrounds teeming with skilled players."<sup>107</sup> Low-income boys are 50% more likely to participate in basketball than in soccer.<sup>108</sup> There are affordable options for playing basketball and being noticed, unlike in soccer.

The implementation of more MLS sponsored academies creates an inclusive environment that does not discriminate against one socioeconomic group. More players equal a better likelihood of unearthing hidden talent, like Tim Howard. If MLS academies were to provide a "scout guarantee" for their league, then players would have the incentive to leave their expensive, high-end development academies to play in the free MLS academy with the guarantee that a recruiter would be present at some point during the season. Under this guarantee, MLS scouts would have to come to a certain number of games per season. Forcing the scouts to show up to the MLS academy game removes the twenty-year tunnel vision and gives recruiters a chance to see raw talent from kids that were formerly not on their radar due to pay-to-play discrimination. Families and athletes will not leave the comfort of their million-dollar facilities with top-rated coaching just to join a free MLS academy if there is no incentive.

The "scout guarantee" is a win-win for the pay-to-play and recruitment problem. The guarantee to have MLS certified scouts come watch throughout the season incentivizes playing in the MLS academies while slowly taking revenue away from expensive leagues. The addition of each MLS academy that provides quality coaching and the guarantee to be recruited slowly pulls the rug

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<sup>107</sup> Rick Eckstein, *supra* note 68.

<sup>108</sup> Douglas Hartmann, *Midnight Basketball* (2016).

out from under costly development academies. Expanding the scope for recruiting by making the game cheaper allows for more kids to have the opportunity to be seen and picked up by college or professional teams.

### *C. Expand College Schedule*

The current collegiate soccer system is not a viable option for players wanting to continue developing their skills with the hopes of being drafted into the professional leagues. No league in the world packs roughly twenty games into a four-month schedule. Adding an additional two weeks to the schedule would give players adequate recovery time - one week at the end of the current schedule and one week at the end. Alternatively, the college schedule could be cut in half allowing for a fall season and a spring season. The crammed schedule does not allow for adequate recovery time, which leads to more injuries, and the opportunity for development diminishes due to the stress and physical strain on the athletes. In order to mitigate these problems, and entice players to choose college soccer, expanding the schedule would make a difference in the overall development. More developed players means a larger pool of athletes to recruit from for MLS.

## CONCLUSION

Only after all of these changes are made will the United States soccer system yield success on both the domestic and international playing field. The current system creates a barrier for success by placing limits on youth leagues, college schedules, and competition within the professional leagues. The anticompetitive characteristics deeply ingrained in the U.S. soccer system are keeping professional soccer leagues from being a force to be reckoned with on the international playing field. U.S. soccer problems stem from flawed programs in youth, college, and professional divisions.

The current youth development programs root out an entire socioeconomic class and allow countless players to fall through the cracks due to the pay-to-play system. As a result of the flawed pay-to-play system, recruiters go to the premier youth

development programs, which happen to be the clubs with the highest price tag. Players are forced to buy their way in the system, if possible, with the hopes playing in front of scouts. Dozens of MLS academies should be integrated into every state, city, and community possible. MLS academies should have annual conferences that train and provide resources for volunteers that wish to coach in the new MLS academies. The “Scout Guarantee” would also make MLS recruiters pay attention and notice more diverse players. The addition of more MLS academies that have both the Coach Task Force and Scout Guarantee creates more inclusive, diverse soccer communities.

Promotion and relegation should be implemented soon. The USSF must follow the system the rest of the soccer community follows. Demotion of teams’ incentives investor-operators, league personnel, and players to make every game count. As seen in England, the implementation of a system that follows promotion and relegation packs emotion into every season because the championship is truly anyone’s game. Once teams are created in the MLS, they remain there regardless of poor performances; this has to change.

The current collegiate schedule is not a viable option for players to continue developing their skills. Playing over two games a week with little to no recovery time increases susceptibility to injuries and de-incentivizes players to play college soccer. Expanding the system, either by two weeks or creating a fall/spring season with reduced games per season gives players sufficient recovery time. Each of these solutions must be implemented together if the United States soccer system wants to be a force to be reckoned with on the international playing field.

Being a fan of United States Soccer is like riding a roller coaster. U.S. Soccer fans experience the highest of highs while watching the talent of the women’s team take world cup victories, only to experience the lowest of lows after watching the men’s team get sucker punched by a country 1918 times smaller than the United States.<sup>109</sup> Change must occur within each level of

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<sup>109</sup> Trinidad and Tobago is About 1,918 Times Smaller than United States. Country Size Comparison, <https://www.mylifeelsewhere.com/country-size-comparison/trinidad-and->



soccer (youth, collegiate, and professional) to ensure the past does not repeat itself. In order to deepen the talent pool, the current pay-to-play system should be replaced with a cheaper, MLS-sponsored academies that allow anyone with a ball to play the game.<sup>110</sup>

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tobago/united states#:~:text=Trinidad%20and%20Tobago%20is%20about,the%20size%20of%20United%20States (last visited Nov. 18, 2020).

<sup>110</sup> The “pay-to-play” structure of American soccer means that wealthy parents spend thousands of dollars on leagues and training programs to propel their kids to the top while those that cannot afford the game are left behind through economic inequity.

