

Player Dedication Policy

More Specific Guidance for Coaches, Players & Parents

In the past, coaches were on their own when setting expectations concerning player dedication to a team. Past guidance from the Wellesley United Soccer Club (WUSC) on the subject was only aspirational, so each coach could explicitly or implicitly communicate and enforce game and practice attendance policies as he or she saw fit. While the club does not expect an exclusive commitment to soccer, success at the stratified level (D1 and D2) requires a significant commitment from both players and coaches. In addition, team continuity and chemistry are keys to an enjoyable season for all teams-D1, D2 and D3. All players suffer when a few cannot consistently attend games or practices.

Players with conflicting after school activities are more the norm than the exception these days. As a result, WUSC believes it necessary to provide specific guidance about (a) club expectations on player commitment to a WUSC team, and (b) how a coach should handle certain deviations from this expectation. In order to better address common situations coaches face and provide a consistent and fair experience for all players involved, WUSC has outlined the specific game and practice attendance expectations below. It is important to note the WUSC positions these as guidelines to help coaches, not a straightjacket to restrict them. A coach retains the flexibility to manage these issues as he/she sees fit as long as a coach does not set rules more restrictive than the ones outlined below.

Game Attendance

Guideline: WUSC expects all players to take their game commitments seriously. While WUSC recognizes and respects that legitimate conflicts arise; players on all teams should be able to attend all regularly scheduled games. Should game participation fall below 80%, and the conflicts are due to players prioritizing optional activities, then the coach has some latitude to take action.

- **Recourse:** Should a player miss a game due to a conflict with another optional activity like another team commitment, a coach can restrict playing time during the game following the infraction so that those who did attend can have more time on the field. This does not allow a coach to bench a player for an entire game, but playing greater than 25% but less than 50% of the game is justified if the prior game absence was not as a result of illness, injury, family emergency, religious observances or specific school commitments.

Should a player miss more than 20% of the games in a season (e.g., miss 3 games out of a 10 game season), and the primary driver of the absences stems from a player choosing to prioritize another worthwhile activity over soccer, a coach can request a D1 be moved down to D2 or D2

player be moved down to a balanced team for the following season-thus making room for a player whose dedication & skill warrants placement on the team. Of course, the type of conflict is an important consideration: Illness, injury or family emergency should not count when evaluating if the standard is met. Religious observances, and specific school commitments should be viewed as acceptable relative to optional activities that a parent or child prioritizes over a soccer game (e.g., family vacation, club sports). Missing 2-3 games for legitimate religious or school matters should not automatically trigger removal from the team the subsequent season.

- **Implementation Process:** A coach can restrict playing time at his/her discretion without age group coordinator involvement. Should a coach conclude that lack of dedication over a season warrant moving a player off a stratified team at the end of the season, the coach should first discuss the frequency and cause(s) of a player's game conflicts with the age group coordinator. After the coordinator discusses these matters with the parent or guardian of the child, the coordinator and coach can enforce the removal from the current team at the team pick meeting for the upcoming season.
- **Special Cases:** There are certain cases WUSC wanted to address for clarity sake.
 - *Moving a D1 Player to D2 vs a Balanced Team:* Should a D1 player experience game conflicts that warrants movement off the team, the player can be moved to the D2 team if after fully informing the D2 coach of the source and frequency of the prior season game conflicts, a) the D2 coach selects the player for the D2 roster with age group coordinator approval, and b) a qualified and dedicated D2 player is not forced down to a balanced team as a result of this decision. Should a D1 player be moved down to the D2 team, the D1 and D2 coaches should move a D2 player up to the D1 team as a replacement.
 - *Spring vs Fall Conflicts:* Conflicts are most severe in the Spring season (e.g., baseball, lacrosse). Even so, the player with Spring conflicts should move off the D1 or D2 team in the Fall as a result of failing to live up to the stated WUSC dedication policy the previous Spring.
 - *Playing Stratified for the Fall Season Only:* Some players tryout and make a stratified team for the Fall then chose not to play in the Spring due to other priorities. While ideally a team would stay together for an entire year (Fall and Spring season), not all players are ready to make soccer a year-round commitment. Players who do not register for the Spring season are implicitly admitting that expected game and practice attendance will be difficult. WUSC believes Fall-only participation is acceptable below U-14. This provides an opportunity for a participant on a balanced team to play at the stratified level for a season, and it avoids the draconian alternative-forcing a capable soccer player to play on a balanced team just because of conflicting Spring priorities. Unfortunately, since tryouts occur in the Spring for the subsequent Fall season, it is difficult to allow players to opt out of Fall soccer and then play on a stratified team in the Spring.
 - *Makeup Games:* Makeup games are scheduled ad hoc and therefore present a real challenge for a parent to resolve in favor of soccer every time given other equally important priorities. Coaches cannot always schedule makeup games at a time convenient for all players. As a result, when determining if the 80% game

attendance threshold is met, a coach should not include makeup games scheduled outside normal team game windows.

Practice Attendance

Guideline: Practice is an important part of the program for both individual skill development and improved team play. Practices where fewer than 2/3rds of the players attend is a challenging situation for a coach and detrimental to the development of those players consistently attending practice. As such, WUSC expects all D1, D2 and Balanced Team players to attend 80% of all regularly scheduled practices. Coaches are encouraged to announce practice schedules as early as practicable before the beginning of the season to allow parents time to try to schedule around potential conflicts.

- **Recourse:** Should any player miss practice the week before a game and the primary driver of the absences stems from a player choosing to prioritize another worthwhile activity over soccer, a coach can, at his or her discretion, restrict playing time for the upcoming game (e.g., 25% of a game vs the target minimum of 50%) so that those more dedicated can have more time on the field. Should a player's practice attendance become so poor that the team is suffering, a coach can suggest that the player be moved off a stratified team at the end of the season.
- **Implementation Process:** A coach can restrict playing time at his/her discretion without age group coordinator involvement. Should a player's practice attendance become so poor that the team is suffering, a coach discuss this with the age group coordinator highlighting the frequency and cause(s) of a player's practice conflicts. After the coordinator discusses these matters with the child's parent or guardian, the coordinator and coach can enforce the removal from the current team at the subsequent team pick meeting for the upcoming season.
- **Special Cases:** The source of a practice conflict does matter:
 - Illness, injury, family emergency, religious observances, and specific school commitments are acceptable reasons to miss practices.
 - Players also playing for the Wellesley Middle School team (8th grade) or have private school weekday sports commitments are not required to make team practices to limit overuse injuries and potential burnout.
 - If a coach selects a practice time that conflicts with events a parent cannot readily reschedule in favor of soccer, then parent and coach should attempt to trade off between soccer and the conflicting activity during the season.

If a player is making every reasonable attempt to attend practices playing time should not be curtailed and the player should not be removed from the team at the end of the season.

Tournament Participation-Expectations

Guideline: WUSC expects D1 and D2 teams to participate in the WUSC sponsored Memorial Day Tournament in the spring of 4th grade and in at least one tournament across the Fall & Spring season for Grades 5 and up. While there are several tournament weekends during our normal soccer season (e.g., Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day), MYSA guidelines prioritize club soccer over town soccer for Memorial Day. WUSC will stand by this policy for all grades except 4th grade where WUSC sponsors its own tournament. MYSA guidelines deem Labor Day as open for either club or town with the express suggestion that players tradeoff from year to year should conflicts arise; and Columbus Day is reserved for town soccer. Therefore, should a D1 or D2 team register for a Columbus Day tournament, it is expected that the player will participate with his/her town soccer team. If a D1 or D2 team registers for a Labor Day tournament in lieu of Columbus Day, any player on a club team with a conflict must coordinate well in advance with his/her WUSC coach as to which team each player will represent.

- **Recourse:** An entire **tournament equates to a single regular season game:** While WUSC recognizes and respects that legitimate conflicts arise; players on D1 and D2 should be able to attend at least one tournament per Fall/Spring season. Should a player chose to participate in another voluntary activity and not participate in the a Labor Day or Columbus Day tournament it should be considered as a single game absence for purposes of determining whether a player is meeting WUSC commitment guidelines over the course of the season. Should a player miss a tournament due to a conflict with another optional activity like another team commitment, a coach can restrict playing time during the game following the infraction so that those who did attend can have more time on the field. This does not allow a coach to bench a player for an entire game, but playing greater than 25% but less than 50% of the game is justified.

Should a player miss more than 20% of the games in a season (e.g., miss the tournament + 2 regular season games out of a 10 game season), and the primary driver of the absences stems from a player choosing to prioritize another worthwhile activity over soccer, a coach can request a D1 be moved down to D2 or D2 player be moved down to a balanced team for the following season-thus making room for a player whose dedication & skill warrants placement on the team. Of course, the type of conflict is an important consideration: see exceptions to this rule in the approved commitment policy.

- **Implementation Process:** Same as game absences above.