



**To: Riverside Youth Soccer Club (RYSC) Parents**

**Topics: Understanding the Levels of Soccer Clubs  
Considering or Selecting a Premier Club**

**What is the difference between Recreational Soccer, Travel Soccer, and Premier Soccer?** There are basically three levels of soccer clubs. There is recreational soccer (YMCA, Rec Leagues), travel soccer (Riverside Youth Soccer Club), and premier soccer.

**What is recreational soccer?** Think of recreational soccer as “soccer just for fun.” Here you will find beginning level players. Usually there is one game a week and there may or may not be practice. All games are typically played in the community at a central field location with other recreational teams or players. There are no tryouts or teams to be made; everyone is placed on a team. The coaches generally (but not always) have little or no soccer experience. Coaches may have coaching experience with other sports. The goal is to provide a positive experience for all players, regardless of skill level. Examples of recreational soccer would be RYSC’s Little Kickers program for kindergartners to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, the YMCA program, and Madison recreation. Recreational leagues run from age 5 through high school level. The commitment of time and money is low.

**What is Travel Soccer?** Riverside Youth Soccer Club is Travel Soccer. Travel Soccer is designed for higher level players to provide a more competitive environment than recreational soccer. The expectation of travel is to prepare kids to play at the high school varsity level. The coaches will usually have prior soccer coaching experience and have a coaching license. Usually there will be two practices per week and one game. The players on the team are usually from the same community and go to school together. The Travel team will play against teams from outside their community (Riverside vs. Chagrin Falls or Willoughby for example). Away games are usually within 25 minutes of travel time but can be as much as an hour away. Travel teams have tryouts and often do not accept every player. The commitment of time and money is moderate.

**What is Premier Soccer?** Premier Soccer is designed for the highest level of soccer players. The coaches will usually have played soccer in college or professionally and have very high levels of coaching certification. The goal is to provide the most competitive level of soccer possible and prepare the kids to play soccer at the varsity level in high school and in some cases, to play in college. The players are drawn from many different communities. Players are expected to practice at least two to three times per week and on their own nearly every day. They are expected to play year-round (Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer). The coaches generally expect soccer to come first at this level. You will travel to exotic locales (2 hour drives) such as Mansfield, Toledo, New Philadelphia, Sandusky, etc. to play some of your away games each season. You will be expected to have your player at these games. Premier teams have tryouts and do not accept every player. Examples of local Premier clubs would be Cleveland

Soccer Academy (CSA), The Soccer Institute (TSI), and AC Premier. The commitment of time and money is higher than recreation or travel.

**Does my child have to choose one soccer level over another?** No. Many kids play both Travel and Premier level soccer. Riverside Youth Soccer Club fully expects that many of our top players will be members of Premier Clubs and our coaches accommodate these players and their families. RYSC does not compete with Premier Soccer Clubs. Soccer players are able to play on both teams. RYSC Travel provides an opportunity to develop friendships and teamwork with other kids they will play with at Riverside High School. Most times a child who plays Premier will play at Travel level as well. Premier teams usually play their games on Saturday, while Travel teams play on Sunday to accommodate one another.

**My child is one of the better players on their travel team, should they play Premier?** It really depends on the level of commitment your child and your family have to soccer. Some talented kids find Premier soccer too demanding and quit or fall away, while others thrive. Not every kid enjoys Premier soccer, some excellent players play Travel only.

Here are some considerations:

- Does your child love soccer and want to improve?
- Are you able to make the commitment of time and money?
- Is the club you are joining the “right fit” for your child and your family?

**What if my child is “recruited” by a Premier Club? Should I sign on with the first Premier club that approaches me?** Premier Clubs will recruit higher-level travel players. These players are attractive to them since they are already playing at a high level. Premier Clubs want to win and Premier Clubs need paying members to be successful. While it is a great feeling to have your child’s soccer abilities and hard-work recognized, you should consider this an opportunity to look at all of your Premier Club options. And make certain that Premier soccer and the club you are selecting is right for your family.

**If you are considering joining a Premier Club, here is a simple process RYSC recommends to help determine the right fit and avoid problems:**

**Get a list of at least two or three Premier clubs to consider.** Talk to your RYSC Travel Coach, a member of the RYSC Board, or other parents who have kids playing at Premier level. You can also look on the internet. It is better to spend time making certain you are joining the right club, rather than having regret later on. Like the song says, “Breaking up is hard to do!” can be true when leaving a soccer club.

Once you have a list of possible Premier clubs, RYSC recommends evaluating the clubs using the following process:

1. **Find out when the club holds practice, and if possible go and watch a practice without your child.** This can give you insight into coaching style and level of play when the coach doesn't know they are being evaluated. Don't draw too much from this, but it may immediately rule out some clubs.
2. **Schedule a time for your child to participate in a practice.** Ask the coach to provide an evaluation after the practice as well. Most coaches are willing to do this.
3. **Make certain the coach knows you are looking into other clubs.** If they are not comfortable with this and try to pressure you or bad-mouth other clubs, this is a red flag. A great club is interested in meeting your expectations, providing a great experience, and finding the right fit for your child, not just "adding bodies" and collecting fees.
4. **Talk with parents about their experience with the club and coaches while you watch the practice.** If no parents are present, ask the coach for a few names of parents who would be willing to talk with you.
5. **Get details such as training schedules, where games are played (amount of travel), and cost from the Premier club.**
6. **Ask the coach if they discourage or encourage their players to play Travel soccer.** This can give you more insight into the character of the coach based on the coach's answer. Do they "put down" the local Travel program or provide an honest appraisal?
7. **Dig into the details and background of the coaches.** What are the goals of the club? Will the coach follow the age group up or hand off to another coach? Where do they play their games? What experience (coaching and playing) does the coach or coaching staff have? How many teams and players do they have? What is their vision for the club?

Now take a look back and see how your choices stack up. If you still want to move forward, you are now making an educated decision. If none of the clubs meet your expectations, keep looking. This simple process will avoid many of the mistakes that soccer players and their families make in selecting a Premier club.

Take your time and make the decision based on your child and your family's best interest. Hope to see you at Riverside Youth Soccer Club!