



Things to consider before playing your child up in age group.

With the new birth year changes coming to soccer there will be a lot of coaches, parents, and kids considering playing kids up an age bracket so their kids can stay on the same team. As a coach and as a parent, I'm certainly not against a kid playing up, if it's under the right circumstances. Unfortunately, it's not simple; every child and circumstance is different and every child needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

I can certainly understand the desire to play up from a child's perspective. They've made friends and want to keep playing with them. Especially if you're playing in the Rec level where having fun is just as important as growing in the game. That's one of the primary reasons why Broken Arrow Soccer Club has decided to allow teams to stay together, if they chose to do so and to allow play ups. (NOTE: Playing Up is not automatic. Please refer to BASC's guidelines on what's required for a child to play up in age.) However, it's also important to remember a child can have fun on different teams too. They'll also tend to have more fun if they're being successful on the field. So before you decide to play a child up, there are some critical questions to ask and consider. To help in making that decision, I've developed a few questions you need to ask that will hopefully guide you in determining if it's a good idea for this particular child.

Question #1: Why are we considering playing up?

If the answer to that is the child is very competitive in their age bracket now and we want to see further development, then playing up may be a good fit. If the answer is just because he was on that team last year or because he/she has friends on that team, then please reconsider and think carefully. Yes, they have probably made friends on that team. But guess what, they will make friends on a new team too! Children are resilient, they may hesitate and be reluctant at first, but usually within a few weeks they'll make new friends.

Question #2: Is it safe for this child to compete at this age level?

The primary thing to consider is safety and it varies greatly depending on the size and athletic ability of the child and the age groups you're looking at. In general, a lot of it depends on when the various genders hit their growth spurts. Of course, there are always kids that are bigger or faster and some are smaller or slower within every age group. That's going to exist even if your child plays within their true age group. So for this, we have to use something closer to the average. For example, let's look at a 3 year age gap which should be about the most of any

child playing up. There is typically not that much size difference between a (U16) 15 year old girl and an (U19) 18 year old girl. In that situation, the “average” size difference really isn’t that significant. The 18 year old may have a slight advantage, but a 15 year old could effectively, and more importantly safely, compete against an 18 year old, especially if they are already above average skill in their age group. However, there is typically a significant difference between a 12 year old boy and a 15 year old boy. I would be hard pressed to consider playing a 12 year old (U13) up two levels to U15 where they would have to compete against 14 and 15 year olds in a U16 league. I’m not saying it can’t happen, but the child would most likely need to be above average in both skills and physical stature to be able to effectively compete. On average, the size and strength differences for that age difference are enough that I’d have to worry about the 12 year old getting hurt. Soccer is a physical sport. While we do try to prevent injuries, contact does happen, kids collide and, occasionally, someone gets hurt. In physics, the larger mass is going to come out on top most of the time. The physical size and development differences can be even more significant at the younger ages.

Question #3: Does this child have the skill set and maturity to compete at this level?

While I think it’s important to challenge kids to develop, it also has to be at a level they can find some success. Playing a child up an age level where they struggle to compete doesn’t help them. If they are constantly losing possession of the ball or can’t keep up with older kids, not only will the coach and their teammates get frustrated, so will the child. They’ll actually digress in their skills and just start clearing or kicking it away so they’re not the one responsible for losing possession or giving up a goal. In those cases, the child will develop more and enjoy the sport of soccer more if they are competing against kids closer to their physical and mental abilities. (I say mental because it does come into play. The concepts you can teach a 9 year old are more advanced than what you teach a 7 year old. We’re also not talking advanced tactics. But U7 & U8 should be more focused on basic fundamentals. U9 & U10 is starting to work team shape.)

Whatever the decisions, I encourage you to keep playing soccer. It’s a great sport that can help kids grow just as much off the pitch as they do on.

Randy Atherton

BASC President / BASC Dynamos Coach