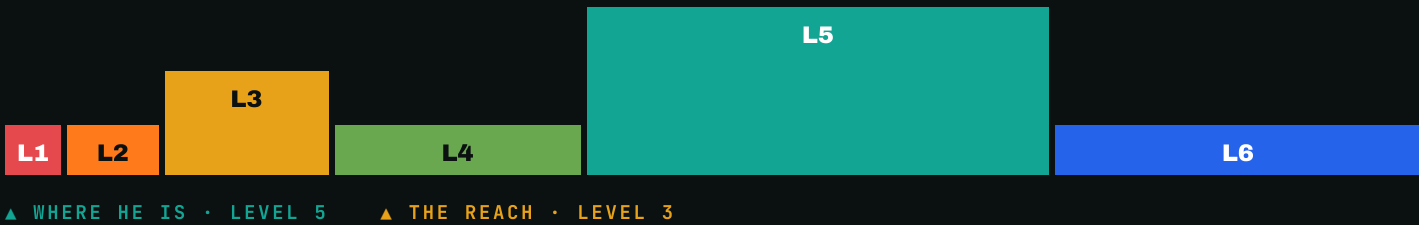


SAMPLE REPORT

The Roadmap



PREPARED FOR

MATEO RIVERA

U12 boys · Montclair, New Jersey · 2026-27 season ahead

Where Mateo plays today, where the ladder goes from here, and the exact clubs, dates and decisions in front of your family this year.

CONTENTS

20 chapters, in 6 parts

Read the first page, then jump. The parts run the way the season does: where he stands, what is near you, what it costs, the plan, the long roads, and the reference at the back.

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HOW TO READ THE EDGE

Every page carries the six level colors down its right edge. The rungs a page is about are printed solid and the rest are ghosted, so you can find the part of the ladder you care about by fanning the pages.



PART ONE

ONE

Where things stand

What the kid plays today, what the six-level ladder is, and which rung he is on. Everything after this part is built on these pages.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS • HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

01 The one-page version

02 Mateo today

03 The ladder, and where he is on it

AT A GLANCE

The one-page version

WHERE MATEO STANDS

Level 5, town travel at Montclair United, and by your read one of the stronger players on the team. The realistic next step to test this cycle is level 4, one rung up. Level 3 is a reach to build toward, not a this-cycle jump.

WHAT TO DO THIS TRYOUT SEASON

Tryout season runs roughly April through June. Take two tryouts: one at a level-4 club close to home, one at a level-3 club. A tryout is free information, not a commitment.

WHAT NOT TO RUSH

The MLS NEXT academy six miles from you is real, and it is not a 12-year-old's next move. Kids arrive there by being scouted at levels 2 and 3, not by mailing in a form. Park it on the radar.

THE FOUR DECISIONS IN FRONT OF YOU

1 Try out at a level-3 or level-4 club this tryout season

DO IT

Two clubs within 3.5 miles hold open U13 tryouts each spring. Worst case, you learn where he stands for free.

2 Keep the Montclair United spot warm meanwhile

DO IT

Staying is a fine plan, and his current club is the fallback that makes trying out risk-free. Tell his coach the truth; coaches handle this every spring.

3 Push for an MLS NEXT academy now

NOT YET

Revisit at U14-U15 if he is excelling at level 2 or 3. The academies watch those leagues, which is the realistic route in.

4 Add paid private training 3x a week

SKIP

At 12, a harder team environment beats more solo reps. Spend the money on the better club season, keep winter basketball.

DO THIS FIRST

Email NJ Stallions Academy and ask whether Mateo can join a U13 training session before their next tryout. Clubs say yes to this more often than you would think, and one training night tells you more than any website.

THE FILE

Mateo today

Montclair United is a town travel club playing in New Jersey Youth Soccer leagues, which sit at level 5 of the six-level ladder. That is where the majority of American club players are, and it is a good place to be at 12. The honest limit of town travel is structural, not about coaching effort: the league cannot offer the game speed or the visibility that levels 3 and above carry.

L5	TRAVEL / SELECT
TOWN TRAVEL, NJYS	
BORN	March 2014
AGE	12
SCHOOL	6th grade, entering 7th
PLAYS FOR	Montclair United SC
TEAM	U12 boys travel
LEAGUE	NJYS travel league
POSITION	Central midfield
PLAYING FOR	4 years, 2nd at this club
WEEKLY LOAD	2 practices + 1 game

KEEP THE SECOND SPORT

Winter basketball is worth protecting. Two sports at 12 is associated with fewer overuse injuries and longer careers in the main sport. Nothing in this plan asks him to drop it.

THE AGE-GROUP MATH, ONCE AND CLEARLY

For the 2026-27 season, age groups move to a school-year window, August 1 to July 31, in place of calendar birth year. Born March 2014, Mateo is in the group of kids born Aug 1, 2013 to Jul 31, 2014, most often labeled U13, though some clubs call the same window U14. The birth-date window is the fixed part; the label is what varies from club to club, so match a team on the dates it covers, not the U-number on the flyer.

WHAT CHANGED FOR HIM

An early-2014 birthday made Mateo one of the oldest under birth-year groups. The Aug 1 window adds kids up to 5 months older, so the built-in edge shrinks. If he looks suddenly average, the curve changed, not the kid.

THE STATE OF PLAY

Every club in motion right now, from your answers. The options pages fold these into the plan.

Wizards Sports Club

level 4-5 • 2.1 mi • one polite email gets the yes or no; silence past a week is an answer too

TRIED OUT • WAITING

NJ Stallions Academy

level 3-5 • 3.3 mi • the tryout-day list on the calendar page applies

TRYOUT BOOKED

THE LADDER

The ladder, and where Mateo is on it

All of American youth soccer fits on six rungs. Most families have never seen them laid out, which is why club marketing works on them.

L1	PRE-PROFESSIONAL	MLS NEXT	Red Bull NY academy, 6.1 mi	2
L2	NATIONAL ELITE	ECNL, NAL, EAL	Kearny Thistle, 5.2 mi	5
L3	COMPETITIVE REGIONAL THE REACH	USYS National League, NPL	NJ Stallions Academy, 3.3 mi	11
L4	STATE & PREMIER	EDP, top state divisions	Wizards SC, 2.1 mi	18
L5	TRAVEL/SELECT MATEO NOW	town travel, NJYS	Montclair United, 0.9 mi	36
L6	RECREATIONAL	town rec, intramural	Montclair rec programs	28

The examples on each rung are not hypothetical. Every one of them is a real club within about 7 miles of your house, from page 6.

WHAT "THE REACH" MEANS, PRECISELY

This placement is structural. It comes from his league level, his standing on a level-5 team, and what clubs near you accept players from that profile each tryout season. It is not a judgment of his touch or his speed, which only a tryout can give you. The realistic move this cycle is one rung, to level 4; treat level 3 as a reach to build toward, not a promise.

PART TWO

TWO

Your options

Every club near you, sorted the way a family has to choose, plus the clubs in the picture mapped and the tryout dates that match this kid.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS • HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

01 Within 7 miles, the whole ladder

02 The realistic moves, compared

03 Montclair United, mapped

04 U13 tryouts near you

THE LANDSCAPE

Within 7 miles, the whole ladder

This is unusual, and worth knowing: families in most of the country drive an hour for what is in your backyard. Every level of the game exists within a 15-minute drive of Montclair. Real clubs, real distances, from the catalog.

RUNGS	CLUB	TOWN	MI	LEAGUES
	Montclair United SC HIS CLUB	Montclair	0.9	NJYS
	Glen Ridge AA	Glen Ridge	1.4	NJYS
	Verona United SC	Verona	1.7	NJYS
	Wizards Sports Club	Cedar Grove	2.1	EDP • NJYS
	Bloomfield SC	Bloomfield	2.3	NJYS
	Black River Athletics	Nutley	2.6	EAL • NJYS
	NJ Stallions Academy	Clifton	3.3	USYS NL • EDP • NJYS
	Clifton United FC	Clifton	3.3	EDP • NJYS
	Jersey Rangers	Woodland Park	4.4	EDP • NJYS
	Kearny Thistle United	Kearny	5.2	NAL • USYS NL • EDP
	NASA Soccer	Totowa	5.5	EDP • NJYS
	Soccer for Life SC	Livingston	5.9	USYS NL • EDP
	Red Bull NY academy SCOUTED ENTRY	Harrison	6.1	MLS NEXT
	Futbol Total Academy	Garfield	6.3	USYS NL • EDP
	Ironbound SC	Newark	6.5	MLS NEXT • NAL • NJYS
	Den of Lions SC	Newark	6.5	USYS NL • EDP

Levels come from league memberships, the way the sport itself defines them. Distance is from ZIP 07042.

WHAT THAT ADDS UP TO

- 5

town travel clubs (level 5) within 2.5 miles, including his
- 5

state premier clubs (level 4) within 5.5 miles
- 4

competitive regional clubs (level 3) within 6.5 miles
- 2

national elite programs (level 2) within 5.5 miles
- 2

MLS NEXT academies (level 1) within 6.5 miles

PART TWO • YOUR OPTIONS

The realistic moves, compared

Sixteen clubs is a list, not a decision. Here is the same landscape sorted the way a family has to choose: stay, step up close to home, make the real jump, or reach. Each club below is on this page for a reason that is spelled out.

THE CLUB	WORKING FOR YOU	WORTH WEIGHING
STAY A real option, not a consolation prize. L5		
Montclair United SC Level 5 • 0.9 mi • NJYS	■ 3 min drive (0.9 mi), inside your stated drive limit ■ a level-5 team he already plays on, with a coach who knows him	— fields teams at level 5 only, so climbing later means changing clubs
Walking distance, a coach who knows him, and friends on the team. If spring tryouts say he is not ready for level 3 yet, another strong year here with more touches is a good plan, not a setback.		
ASK <i>Ask: which U13 team would he make, and how many minutes would he get on it?</i>		
STEPUPCLOSE Level 4, under 10 minutes away. L4		
Wizards Sports Club TRIED OUT • WAITING Level 4-5 • 2.1 mi • EDP, NJYS	■ 6 min drive (2.1 mi), inside your stated drive limit ■ a level-4 team to try out for (EDP) this cycle	— ladder tops out at level 4, so a later level-3 move means changing clubs
The gentlest meaningful step. EDP play raises game speed without changing your family logistics at all. A good fit if you want progress and sanity in the same season.		
ASK <i>Ask which EDP division their U13 boys play in. Divisions inside EDP vary a lot.</i>		
Clifton United FC Level 4-5 • 3.3 mi • EDP, NJYS	■ 8 min drive (3.3 mi), inside your stated drive limit ■ a level-4 team to try out for (EDP) this cycle	— ladder tops out at level 4, so a later level-3 move means changing clubs
Same step as Wizards, slightly farther, and worth a look if the Wizards tryout date conflicts. Having two level-4 options this close means you can choose on coaching, not geography.		
ASK <i>Ask about roster size. A 16-player U13 roster means real minutes; 20 means bench time.</i>		

THE REALISTIC MOVES, CONTINUED

The jump, and the reach

The bigger two moves. Both are still inside your stated drive time, and one of them is already booked.

THE CLUB

WORKING FOR YOU

WORTH WEIGHING

THE REAL JUMP Level 3, where visibility starts.

L3

NJ Stallions Academy TRYOUT BOOKED

Level 3-5 • 3.3 mi • USYS NL, EDP, NJYS

- 8 min drive (3.3 mi), inside your stated drive limit
- a level-3 team to try out for (USYS NL) this cycle
- its level-3 league carries real college recruiting traffic
- teams at levels 3 through 5, so a near-miss lands on a lower team, not the street

- clubs with teams well above a kid’s level tend to carry deep rosters, so minutes are the thing to ask hard about

The headline option in this report. USYS National League play is the level where college programs start paying attention, and it is a 10-minute drive. Their multi-team structure means a tryout can land him on the right team inside the club rather than out the door.

ASK *Ask which team a strong tryout would place him on, and what last year’s U13 top team record was.*

Soccer for Life SC

Level 3-5 • 5.9 mi • USYS NL, EDP

- 13 min drive (5.9 mi), inside your stated drive limit
- a level-3 team to try out for (USYS NL) this cycle
- its level-3 league carries real college recruiting traffic

The same league level as Stallions from the other side of the mountain. Smaller club, which can mean more individual attention and faster promotion between teams.

ASK *Ask how many U13 boys teams they will field and who coaches the top one.*

THE REACH Level 2. Attend one tryout, learn where the bar is.

L2

Black River Athletics

Level 2-5 • 2.6 mi • EAL, NJYS

- 7 min drive (2.6 mi), inside your stated drive limit
- a level-5 team to try out for this cycle, with a ladder to level 2 (EAL) inside the same club
- its level-2 league carries real college recruiting traffic

- clubs with teams well above a kid’s level tend to carry deep rosters, so minutes are the thing to ask hard about
- its level-2 league sits in a pricier cost tier; get the all-in number in writing

Elite Academy League is national-elite ball ten minutes from your door. The honest odds of a town-travel player making the EAL roster in any given tryout season are low, and the tryout is still worth attending: you will see exactly what level 2 looks like at U13, and their lower teams are a real path.

ASK *Ask whether players who miss the EAL roster are offered spots on their EDP or NJYS teams.*

Kearny Thistle United FC

Level 2-5 • 5.2 mi • NAL, USYS NL, EDP

- 12 min drive (5.2 mi), inside your stated drive limit
- teams at every level from 2 to 4, so a near-miss lands on the level-3 team
- its level-2 league carries real college recruiting traffic

- clubs with teams well above a kid’s level tend to carry deep rosters, so minutes are the thing to ask hard about

A National Academy League program with teams at three levels below it. Clubs structured like this are forgiving places to aim high: a near-miss lands on the level-3 team, not on the street.

ASK *Ask the same ladder question. Their answer tells you how they treat developing players.*

PART TWO • YOUR OPTIONS

Tall ladder or short ladder

Some clubs on this page run teams far above Mateo's level; others top out a rung or two up. Neither is automatically the better home. A tall ladder means the next level lives inside the same club: the move up is an internal tryout, not a club switch, and recruiters already watch its top teams. The cost is depth. Big clubs carry big rosters, and a kid in the middle of a deep pool can sit more and touch the ball less. A club that tops out closer to his level usually means more minutes, a bigger role and often a shorter drive, and the cost runs the other way: climbing past its top team later means changing clubs, with new tryouts and new politics. At this age minutes win most ties. The question that settles it, club by club, is on every card above: which team would he actually make, and how much would he play.

RUNGS EACH CLUB FIELDS	L 1	L 2	L 3	L 4	L 5	L 6
Montclair United SC						
Wizards Sports Club						
Clifton United FC						
NJ Stallions Academy						
Soccer for Life SC						
Black River Athletics						
Kearny Thistle United FC						

HOW TO COMPARE THEM YOURSELF

Ask each club the question on its card, then the minutes question: which team would Mateo actually make, and how much would he play. Ask to guest-train with that exact team, and watch one of its practices, not the top team's. Look that team up on its league's standings page to see the level for yourself. Get the all-in yearly cost in writing before any offer. The parent playbook page holds the ten questions that sort clubs fast.

ON THE RADAR, NOT ON THE LIST

Red Bull NY (MLS NEXT, 6.1 mi) and Ironbound SC (MLS NEXT, 6.5 mi) run the two level-1 academies near you. Neither belongs on a U13 tryout plan for a level-5 player, and both matter to your long game: their scouts watch USYS NL, NAL and EAL matches within driving distance. Playing well at level 2 or 3 IS the application. Page 13 covers what an academy invitation would change.

YOUR CLUB

Montclair United, mapped

A club is not one level. Here is the whole structure around Mateo: every league the club fields teams in, where the internal ladder tops out, and what the league table says.

FOUNDED

1978

FIELDS TEAMS FOR

BOYS AND GIRLS

LEAGUES

L5

NJYS
where the top teams play

In this report because this is Mateo’s club today.

THE CLUB’S OWN LADDER, PROGRAM BY PROGRAM

As Montclair United Soccer Club lists them on its own site

FOUNDATION

Kinderkickers	U4–U6	Recreational introduction → Recreation league at Grade 1
Recreation League	Grades 1–9	In-town Saturday league → Travel program at U9 (optional)

PERFORMANCE

Travel Teams MATEO IS HERE	U9–U19	11v11 · competitive fall/spring + tournaments → High school soccer
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SUPPLEMENTAL

Summer Skills Classes	All ages	Summer sessions
TOPSoccer	All abilities	Recreational

THE TEAM IS AT THE CLUB’S CEILING

Mateo’s level (5) is already the highest Montclair United fields. Development can absolutely continue here, and the next LEVEL, when it’s time, means a different club. That is what the options pages are for.

CHECK IT YOURSELF

Montclair United 2014B on the table

The league lists the team in the B12 North division with a record of 6-3-1. That is a competitive division placement: games that can go either way, which is where development lives.

U12/U13 TEAMS WE FOUND THIS SEASON

Montclair United 2014B Blue	COACH M. Alvarez	B12 North NJYS
Montclair United 2014B White	COACH NOT LISTED	B12 Central NJYS

TRACK YOUR TEAM YOURSELF

Clubs almost never link this, but the league posts standings all season. Check it any week:

- 1 Open [ncsanj.com/standings.cfm](https://www.ncsanj.com/standings.cfm)
- 2 Find the “NCSA Games Standings” dropdown
- 3 Pick the B12 division the team plays in
- 4 Look for “Montclair United” in the table

<https://www.ncsanj.com/standings.cfm>

FROM THE CLUB’S OWN NEWS PAGE

“Montclair United is proud to announce that our 2014 boys premier team has been accepted into EDP Soccer for the 2026-27 season.”

<https://www.montclairsoccer.com/news>

PART TWO • YOUR OPTIONS

U13 boys tryouts near you

Spring tryout season is when clubs form their fall rosters, roughly April through June. These are the sessions that match a 2014 boy at the clubs from the last two pages.

SPRING SESSION 1

5 SESSIONS

Wizards Sports Club	6:30-8:00 pm	Panther Park turf, Cedar Grove	walk-up ok	OPEN
NJ Stallions Academy	6:00-7:30 pm	Main Memorial Park, Clifton	register in advance	OPEN
Soccer for Life SC	6:00-7:30 pm	Livingston turf complex	register in advance	OPEN
Kearny Thistle United	9:00-10:30 am	Harvey Field, Kearny	register in advance	OPEN
Black River Athletics	6:00-7:30 pm	Nutley sports complex	register in advance	OPEN

SPRING SESSION 2

1 SESSION

NJ Stallions Academy	6:00-7:30 pm	Main Memorial Park, Clifton	second session	OPEN
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SPRING EVALUATION

1 SESSION

Montclair United SC	6:00-7:30 pm	Fortunato Field, Montclair	current players auto-registered	HIS CLUB
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CHECKED WEEKLY DURING TRYOUT SEASON • Representative sample for this demo booklet, shaped exactly like the verified rows in our calendar. In a live report every row links to the club's own posting and carries the date we last checked it.

WHAT A U13 TRYOUT LOOKS LIKE

Expect 60 to 90 minutes: warm-up, small-sided games, maybe a scrimmage. Coaches sort kids into groups quickly and watch decisions more than tricks. A quiet kid who passes well and moves into space reads better than a loud one who dribbles into traffic.

Decisions come fast, usually by email within a week, sometimes a verbal offer on the spot. Offers at this age often come with a 48-to-72-hour deadline. That is a pressure tactic every club uses. It is okay to ask for a few more days, and okay to say no.

Plan the calendar so his current club's evaluation comes last. By then you will know what else is on the table.

TRYOUT-DAYLIST

- ☐ Ball, water, both light and dark shirts
- ☐ Arrive 20 minutes early, registered online the night before
- ☐ Tell him one thing only: play simple, talk on the field
- ☐ Parents stay off the touchline and let the coaches run it
- ☐ Afterward, ask him if he had fun before you ask anything else

L5 PART TWO • YOUR OPTIONS

THREE

What it costs

The money and the hours, priced rung by rung.
General guidance from national patterns, labeled as
such on every page that uses it.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS • HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

01 What changes if he moves up

02 The money and the time

PART THREE • WHAT IT COSTS

What changes if he moves up

A move from town travel to a level-4 club is not a bigger version of the same season. It is a different family contract. Here is the same week, before and after.

HIS SEASON NOW • TOWN TRAVEL (LEVEL 5)	THE SAME WEEK	A SEASON AT LEVEL 4
2 evenings a week, in town	PRACTICES	3 evenings a week, 10-25 min drive
~10 league games, county radius	GAMES	15-25 games, metro-area league
Mix of pro trainers and parent volunteers	COACHING	Licensed paid staff, winter training expected
Fall and spring, winter optional	SEASON	Fall through spring, winter training expected
\$1,500 to \$3,000	ANNUAL COST	\$3,000 to \$6,000
Game ends, day is yours	FAMILY WEEKENDS	Some farther game days
Centerpiece of the team	HIS ROLE	Earning minutes against stronger kids

GENERAL GUIDANCE • NATIONAL PATTERNS, NOT QUOTES FROM THESE CLUBS

WHAT EACH RUNG CHANGES

One line per move, for reference as he climbs. The money page prices each level in full.

Rec → travel (6→5)	Tryouts begin, rosters cut, season commitment is real
Travel → premier (5→4)	Paid coaching standard, winter training expected
Premier → regional (4→3)	College visibility starts, showcase tournaments appear
Regional → elite (3→2)	National calendar, recruiting traffic, some HS soccer conflicts
Elite → academy (2→1)	By invitation. Pro pathway rules, HS soccer usually ends

THE PART CLUBS DO NOT PUT ON THE WEBSITE

The jump in cost buys league access and coaching hours. It does not buy minutes. A kid who starts every game at level 5 can sit at level 3, and a season on the bench at 12 develops less than a season in the middle of everything one rung down. When you talk to clubs, the question that matters is not "can he make the roster" but "will he play".

PART THREE • WHAT IT COSTS

The money and the time, plainly

Registration is the visible number. The right column is what families report it grows into.

WHAT A YEAR REALLY COSTS AT EACH LEVEL

GENERAL GUIDANCE • TYPICAL US RANGES FOR 2026, NOT QUOTES

L6	Recreational cleats outgrown twice a year	\$100-350	\$100-500
L5	Travel / Select uniform kit, 1-2 local tournaments	\$700-1,500	\$1,500-3,000
L4	State & Premier winter indoor league, more gas than you expect	\$1,800-3,500	\$3,000-6,000
L3	Competitive Regional tournament weekends: the second hotel night costs more than the entry fee	\$2,800-5,000	\$4,000-7,000
L2	National Elite showcase flights, college-visit trips later	\$4,500-7,500	\$6,000-10,000
L1	Pre-Professional funded pro academies cost nothing in fees; paid pre-pro programs are the priciest tier	often \$0	\$0 to \$12,000+

Level 1 deserves its own sentence: pro-club academies like Red Bull NY are typically fully funded. Free is real there. Selection is the cost.

THE WEEK, IN HOURS

Counting practices, games and the driving that nobody counts.

Level 5 now	5-6 hrs/wk	
	2 practices, 1 game, short drives	
Level 3-4 next year	8-10 hrs/wk	
	3 practices, 1-2 games, 20-25 min each way	
Level 2 someday	10-14 hrs/wk	
	plus 4-6 travel weekends a season	

ONE QUESTION TO SETTLE AS A FAMILY FIRST

The move to level 3 costs roughly one restaurant dinner a week and most of one weekend a month. Families who decide that on purpose at tryout time are glad in November. Families who discover it in November are not. If you have a second kid with their own Saturdays, count that too.

PART FOUR

FOUR

The plan

The next twelve months in order, the years after that in outline, and the one rule change every club family is living through right now.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS • HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

01 The next 12 months

02 The long view: 12 to 18

03 The age-group change, decoded

PART FOUR • THE PLAN

The next 12 months, by season

TRYOUT SEASON • SPRING

TRYOUT WINDOW

- 01 Email NJ Stallions about a guest training night before their tryout (template below)
- 02 First tryout: Wizards or Stallions, early in the spring window
- 03 Second tryout at a different level, so you are comparing offers rather than guessing
- 04 Montclair United evaluation last, with full information in hand
- 05 Decide within a week of the final tryout. Tell every club that gave him a look, including the noes

SUMMER • AFTER TRYOUTS

COMMIT AND REST

- 01 Sign with one club. Get the real all-in cost in writing before the deposit
- 02 Two genuinely off weeks. No training. This is development, not slack
- 03 A week of soccer camp if he asks for it, none if he does not

FALL • FIRST SEASON AT NEW LEVEL

FIRST SEASON AT THE NEW LEVEL

- 01 Expect a hard first 6 weeks if he moved up. Stronger kids, faster ball. Normal
- 02 Watch minutes, not results. Under half the minutes by week 6 is a conversation with the coach, not a crisis
- 03 One question after each game: what was fun out there?

WINTER

BASKETBALL SEASON

- 01 Basketball is the plan, futsal once a week if he wants the ball at his feet
- 02 Skip the hard-sell winter soccer leagues. The break is doing work

SPRING • FOLLOWING YEAR

SPRING SEASON + READ THE YEAR

- 01 Spring tells you if the level fits: is he influencing games by mid-season?
- 02 Late spring: this same decision, one rung higher, with a year of real information

■ THE EMAIL THAT OPENS DOORS

"Hi coach, my son Mateo is a 2014 central midfielder, currently with Montclair United's travel team. We're looking at U13 options for fall and would love for him to join a training session before your tryout if you allow guests. Thank you."

Three sentences. Send it to the age-group coach, not the info@ address, if the website lists one.

CHANGE THE PLAN IF

He stops wanting to go. The plan serves the kid, never the reverse

He is dominating at the new level by spring. Ask about the club's higher team before next tryout season

He is buried on the bench past week 6 and the coach has no path for him. The level-4 clubs from page 7 are the right-sized correction

PART FOUR • THE PLAN

The long view: 12 to 18

You do not need a six-year plan. You need to know which years contain real decisions, so the others can just be soccer.

U13-NOW	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18
7TH	8TH	9TH	10TH	11TH	12TH
YEAR	WHAT MATTERS		THE DECISION		
U13-NOW	Find the right level, play a ton		The club decision this tryout season. That is the whole list		
U14	First year the leagues above really separate		High school soccer vs academy rules, decided this year (next page)		
U15	Showcase tournaments begin to mean something		If college is live: first showcases, start the school list. Film nothing before this		
U16	After sophomore year: college coaches may contact him (the NCAA contact date)		Emails to coaches, transcript matters now. ID camps for schools he likes, not the mass-market ones		
U17	The real recruiting year		Campus visits, honest fit conversations, offers		
U18	Commit and finish		Sign, then play the season for fun. He has earned it		

Notice that nothing on this table before 9th grade involves a camera, a recruiter, or a personal brand. Anyone selling you those for a 12-year-old is selling to you, not to him.

THE RULES OF THE ROAD

The age-group change, decoded

After a decade of calendar-year age groups, US youth soccer is switching how teams are formed. If your kid has been in the game a while, the labels you knew are about to stop matching the kids on the field. Here is the whole change, from the official decisions.

IN THIS REPORT BECAUSE EVERY CLUB FAMILY IS LIVING THROUGH THE 2026-27 AGE-GROUP CHANGE.

- 01

The cutoff moves from January 1 to August 1.

Starting with the 2026-27 season, US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer and AYSO form age groups by an August 1 to July 31 window, aligning teams with school grades. 2025-26 stays on birth year.
- 02

Most big leagues follow; MLS NEXT’s top division doesn’t.

ECNL (boys and girls), Girls Academy, USYS National League and NPL adopt the school-year window. MLS NEXT’s top division keeps the calendar birth year; its Academy Division switches.
- 03

The same kids can carry two different labels.

Some clubs name the new group after its oldest members, others after the school-grade cohort. Both names describe the same birth-date window, which is why one club says a kid “repeats” a U-number and another says they moved up. Always check the birth-date window, not the label.
- 04

Teams don’t have to break up.

The national decision sets the registration window; team formation stays with clubs and leagues. Many clubs let existing rosters stay together where the league allows it. Whether yours will is a club question, not a rule.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR MATEO

Born March 2014, Mateo keeps his school-grade cohort: kids born Aug 1, 2013 to Jul 31, 2014. The label may read U13 or U14 depending on the club’s naming, and a posting that says “2014 boys” may now mean two different rosters. Check the birth-date window on the fall team before reading anything into the U-number.

WHAT GETS BETTER

Teammates match school grade: same classmates, same graduation year, fewer “trapped players” cut off from their grade group

8th and 12th graders stop aging out of their friends’ teams mid-school-career

Recruiting timelines line up with grade, which is how college coaches already think

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

One-time shuffle: rosters built on birth year get split or re-formed, and a kid can lose teammates through no decision of your own

Aug-Dec kids switch from oldest-in-group to a new mix; relative-age advantages reset

During the transition the same group is called different U-numbers by different clubs, so labels mislead for a year or two

A kid chasing the MLS NEXT track lives in BOTH systems at once: birth year there, school year everywhere else

ASK MONTCLAIR UNITED SC

- Which window is the fall team built on: Aug 1 school year or calendar birth year?

What do you call Mateo’s new group, and what birth dates does it actually span?
- Is the current roster staying together, and if not, how are you re-forming teams?

If we ever look at MLS NEXT, how do you handle the kid playing across two systems?

PART FIVE

FIVE

The long roads

High school, college and pro, each with its real numbers attached. A twelve-year-old decides none of this yet. Read it now anyway, because the sales pitches arrive years before the decisions do.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS • HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

- 01 High school soccer
- 02 The college road
- 03 The pro road, told straight
- 04 College, honestly

PART FIVE • THE LONG ROADS

High school soccer, and the rule to know early

In this report because Mateo enters 7th grade. This decision lands in 8th.

In two years Mateo picks a high school path, and one league rule shapes it, laid out in the table below. Montclair High has a strong program, and playing for your school is a real and underrated experience: Friday lights, classmates in the stands, a varsity letter.

The trade is not athletic prestige vs sentiment. Plenty of college players, including D1 players, played high school ball alongside level-2 and level-3 club soccer. The trade is schedule: club seasons at level 2-3 run through fall, and New Jersey high school soccer is a fall sport, so the two negotiate. Clubs at those levels are used to it.

THE RULE, BY LEVEL

DECISION LANDS • 8TH GRADE

LEVEL 1 • MLS NEXT ACADEMIES	GENERALLY NO The top academies bar outside play. An invitation means giving up the school season
LEVELS 2-3 • NATIONAL + REGIONAL LEAGUES	YES, NEGOTIATED Club seasons run through fall, and NJ high school soccer is a fall sport. Clubs at these levels are used to sharing
LEVELS 4-6 • STATE, TRAVEL, REC	YES No conflict. Many kids play both

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT NOW

Nothing, except know it is coming. If an academy invitation ever arrives, this is the page to reread, because it would mean giving up the high school season.

PART FIVE • THE LONG ROADS

The college road, with numbers attached

In this report because your family said "play as high as he can". College is the realistic top of that road.

~10% of US high-school soccer players reach a college roster, all divisions combined (NCAA, NAIA and junior college)

About one in ten can sound slim until you see how many doors that is. Roughly 1,600 men's college programs field rosters every fall, most of them nowhere near a TV camera, many of them excellent educations.

DIVISION	PROGRAMS	THE MONEY	THE TRUTH
NCAAD1	~205 men's programs	Partial aid is the norm and full rides are rare; a 2025 settlement is swapping the old 9.9 scholarship cap for ~28-player rosters	The visible 1%. Needs level 2-3 club play plus real recruiting work
NCAAD2	~265 programs	up to 9 scholarships, also split	Strong soccer, saner schedules, more merit-aid math
NCAAD3	~415 programs	no athletic money, often generous academic aid	The biggest door by far. Level 3-4 club players land here every year
NAIA + JUCO	~700 programs	varies widely	Real soccer, real second chances, transfer paths up

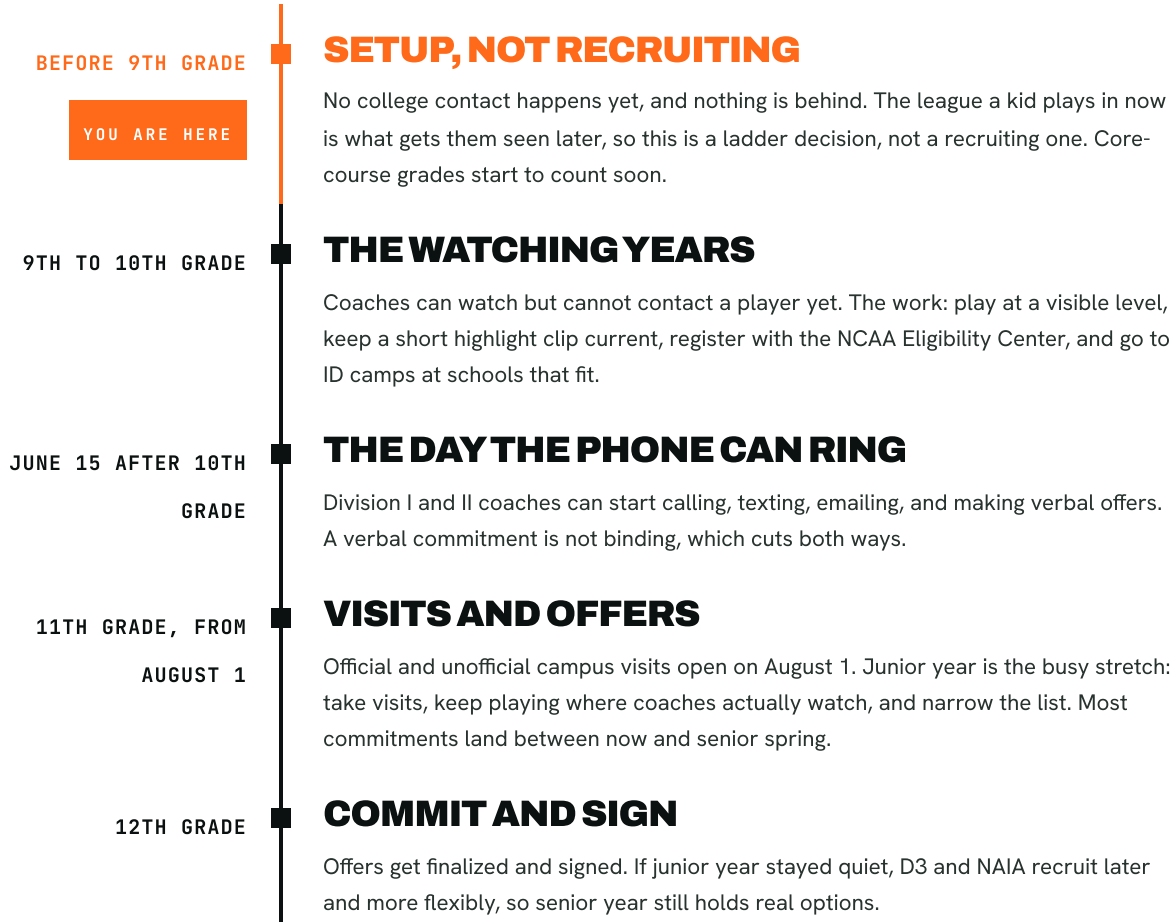
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE CLUB DECISION

College coaches do not scout level-5 town leagues. Of the leagues available at clubs near you, USYS National League and EAL carry high recruiting visibility and NAL carries solid visibility. That is the concrete link between page 7 and this page: the level-3 move is also the college-road move, three years before any recruiter calls.

One reframe for the spreadsheet: a partial D1 scholarship averages a few thousand dollars a year. Strong grades plus D3 merit aid routinely beats it. The reason to chase the higher level is the soccer and the doors, not the tuition math.

CONTINUED

The recruiting clock



PART FIVE • THE LONG ROADS

The pro road, told straight

In this report for context. Two MLS NEXT academies sit within 7 miles, so the question will come up at your sidelines.

<0.1% of youth club players ever sign a professional contract

U13 TO U15

Scouted into a level-1 academy

MLS NEXT scouts watch the level 2-3 leagues named on page 7. There is no application and no fee

LATE TEENS

A homegrown contract, or MLS NEXT Pro

Clubs sign players from their own academy first. This is the main US route

AFTER COLLEGE

The MLS draft and open trials

College soccer stays a real, later entry point, and many pros took it

The American pro path runs almost entirely through the level-1 academies, in the three steps below. Red Bull NY, six miles from you, has produced exactly this arc and their scouts watch the leagues named on page 7.

What it means for a 12-year-old: nothing to do. There is no form to fill, no fee to pay, no camp that buys the outcome. Academies find players who dominate at levels 2 and 3. The plan in this booklet, play at the highest level where he gets real minutes, is the same plan whether the ceiling turns out to be varsity captain, D3 starter, or something wilder.

One warning, since the question comes up at sidelines: any program charging thousands and marketing itself with the word "pro pathway" is describing your money's pathway. The funded academies do not advertise for players.

COLLEGE, HONESTLY

How many places there actually are

NJ • BOYS • CLASS OF 2032

AS OF 2026-07 • ROSTER DATA 2024-25

DIVISION	MEN'S PROGRAMS	COUNT	MEDIAN SQUAD
NCAA D1		210	31 players
NCAA D2		203	35 players
NCAA D3		410	33 players
NAIA		184	37 players
NJCAA		224	26 players

1,231

men's college soccer programs in total, across all five divisions

28

players is the Division I roster cap at schools that opted in to the House settlement

NJ COMMITS, BY THE YOUTH LEVEL THEY PLAYED

2241 TRACKED

L1		790	WHERE HE PLAYS
L2		213	
L3		1208	
L4		25	
L5		5	

CONTINUED

The dates and the money

JUNE 15, 2030

Division I coaches cannot contact your kid before June 15 after sophomore year ¹

Before that date a D1 soccer coach may not call, text, DM, or email your player, and may not make an offer. A "recruiting interest" email that arrives in 8th or 9th grade is camp marketing, not recruiting. Division II uses the same June 15 date; Division III schools set their own, looser contact rules.

AUGUST 1, 2030

Official and unofficial visits with coach contact start August 1 before junior year ²

From August 1 before junior year, a D1 program can host your player on an official visit (the school pays) and talk recruiting during unofficial visits. Campus tours before then are fine, but the coaching staff cannot be part of them in a recruiting sense.

THE START OF SENIOR YEAR, FALL 2031

16 core courses, and 10 of them locked in before senior year ³

D1 eligibility takes 16 NCAA-approved core courses with a 2.3 core GPA. Ten of the 16 (seven in English, math, or science) must be finished before the start of senior year, and those ten grades are locked. Division II requires the same 16 cores at a 2.2 GPA, without the ten-course lock.

WHAT THE MONEY ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

The roster cap is 28, for both men and women ⁴

D1 schools that opted in to the House settlement carry at most 28 players on a soccer roster, men's and women's alike, starting 2025-26. The old scholarship caps are gone at those schools: they may now fund anyone on the roster, though almost none fund all 28. You may see 32 quoted on recruiting-service sites; the settlement table says 28.

Soccer scholarships are partial, almost always ⁵

Soccer is an equivalency sport: a coach splits a scholarship budget across the roster, so most offers cover a slice of costs, not a full ride. Division II caps the budget at 9 equivalents for men and 9.9 for women; NAIA at 12 and 12. A "full scholarship" conversation in soccer should make you ask exactly what percentage is on the table, in writing.

Division III gives no athletic scholarships, and it is the biggest division ⁶

D3 programs award no athletic money at all; families combine academic merit and need-based aid instead, which at many private D3 schools ends up larger than a partial D1 offer. D3 also fields more soccer programs than any other division, so it is where most college soccer actually happens.

SOURCES • AS OF 2026-07

- ¹ NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete – ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/guide-college-bound-student-athlete
- ² NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete (visit rules) – ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/guide-college-bound-student-athlete
- ³ NCAA Eligibility Center, Division I and II academic requirements – eligibilitycenter.org
- ⁴ House v. NCAA settlement roster-limit table (Soccer: 28 M / 28 W); NCAA D1 Q&A, June 2025
- ⁵ NCAA DII bylaws (financial aid limits); NAIA scholarship limits by sport – naia.org
- ⁶ NCAA Division III financial aid rules – ncaa.org/sports/division-iii

PART SIX

SIX

The field guide

The reference half: what the extras cost, the ten questions that sort clubs fast, what this report could not know, and where every fact in it came from.



WIDTH IS THE SHARE OF REGISTERED PLAYERS · HEIGHT IS THE RUNG

-
- 01 Beyond the club
 - 02 The parent playbook
 - 03 What this report could not know
 - 04 Glossary + sources
-

GENERAL GUIDANCE • TYPICAL US COSTS FOR 2026, NOT QUOTES

Beyond the club season

Somewhere around U10 the flyers start: ODP tryouts, college ID camps, private trainers, futsal leagues. None of them replaces the club season, and a couple genuinely add to it at the right age. Here is each one, what it runs, and when it starts making sense for Mateo.

WHAT IT IS

FUTSAL AND WINTER INDOOR

Small-sided soccer on a hard court, five a side with a low-bounce ball. A kid touches the ball far more often than in a full 11v11 game.

The cheapest skill work in the sport. If the club doesn't run a winter program, most town futsal leagues take individual signups.

WHAT IT RUNS

\$100-300 a season

NOW, AT ANY AGE

ODP (OLYMPIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM)

State-association tryouts that feed a state training pool, with camps and interstate events. US Club Soccer runs a smaller invitation-only version called id2.

Real coaching against strong kids at a modest price. Its old role as the college scouting path has mostly moved to the league ladder, so treat it as training, not a ticket.

\$200-500 a cycle

NOW. MOST STATES RUN POOLS FROM AROUND U12

COLLEGE ID CAMPS

A camp on a college campus, run by that program's own coaching staff.

Worth money at a school Mateo could actually attend, ideally after emailing the coach so someone is watching for him. The mass-market multi-school versions mostly sell hope.

\$100-400 a day or weekend

FROM U15, TWO SEASONS AWAY

PRIVATE AND SMALL-GROUP TRAINING

One coach with one kid or a few, working a specific gap: first touch, weak foot, goalkeeping.

It amplifies a motivated kid and does nothing for a dragged one. The tell is who asks for the session. If Mateo asks, try it.

\$50-120 an hour

ANY AGE, IN SMALL DOSES

THE BEST SUPPLEMENT IS STILL FREE

Pickup with mixed ages, and a ball against a wall for twenty minutes. Watching a full match and following one player instead of the ball teaches more game sense than most paid sessions. None of it shows up on an invoice.

ONE RULE BEFORE SPENDING

Extras add to a season; they never replace one. If the budget forces a choice between a private trainer and the right team with real minutes, take the team. Game minutes are the training nothing else supplies.

TEN QUESTIONS THAT SORT CLUBS FAST

The parent playbook

01 Which team would he make, and how many minutes would he realistically get?

Minutes are development. Rosters are marketing

02 What is the all-in annual cost, including uniforms, tournaments and travel?

The registration fee is usually 60-70% of the truth

03 Who exactly coaches the U13 team, and can we watch them coach a session?

You are buying coaching hours. Inspect them

04 How many players are you taking at U13, and how many are returning?

18 returning players means the tryout is theater

05 What happens to kids who develop late? Do players move between your teams midyear?

Tells you if the club develops players or sorts them once

06 Which league and division will the team play in next season?

You can check the answer against this report

07 What is the refund policy if he is injured in September?

You will be glad you asked once in his career

08 How do you handle playing-time conversations with parents?

A club with no answer has angry-parking-lot conversations instead

09 Do your U13 players also play other sports? Is that a problem?

Listen for respect or for a sales pitch against basketball

10 May we talk to two current team parents?

Clubs proud of their parents say yes instantly

RED FLAGS, FROM FAMILIES WHO LEARNED THEM

■ Guaranteed exposure, college placement percentages, or the word "pathway" priced in thousands

■ An offer that expires in 24 hours. Real clubs give you the week

■ Fees that only appear after the offer

■ A coach who talks only to the kids and never to you, or only to you and never to the kids

■ Roster of 20+ at U13. Count the kids at the tryout

THE SIDELINE CONTRACT

One thing the data cannot do is keep this fun, and fun is the engine of everything in this booklet. Kids who own the game stay in it; kids whose parents own it quit at 13. The whole contract fits in two lines: before the game say "have fun, play hard". After it say "I loved watching you out there". Save the tactics talk for the car ride only if he starts it.

THINGS TO FIND OUT

What this report could not know

Here's what we couldn't pin down for Mateo, each with the fastest way to find it out. Closing the first two changes the club decision most.

☐ How good is he, really?

HOW Two tryouts at two different levels during tryout season. That is the whole test, it is free, and it closes when rosters fill.

ANSWER

THIS TRYOUT
SEASON

☐ His current coach's honest read

HOW Fifteen minutes, not at a game. Ask: "would level 3 stretch him or sink him next year?" Coaches at town clubs answer this more honestly than anyone in the system.

ANSWER

BEFORE TRYOUT
SEASON OPENS

☐ NJ Stallions' real all-in U13 cost

HOW Our catalog knows league cost tiers, not club fee sheets. Ask for the number in writing at the tryout.

ANSWER

AT TRYOUT

☐ Which EDP division Wizards' U13 team plays in

HOW One email. Divisions inside level-4 leagues range from near-level-3 to near-level-5.

ANSWER

2 DAYS

☐ Whether he wants this

HOW Ask him directly, without selling: "want to try out at a couple of bigger clubs, or stay with your guys another year?" Both answers are good news. Twelve-year-olds know.

ANSWER

TONIGHT

GLOSSARY AND SOURCES

The words this report used

BIRTH-YEAR AGE GROUPS

Teams are built by calendar birth year. 2014-born kids are U13 in the 2026-27 season, regardless of grade

NJYS

New Jersey Youth Soccer, the state association. Its travel leagues are level 5

EDP

Eastern Development Program, a multi-state league operator. Its divisions sit around level 4

USYS NL

US Youth Soccer National League. Level 3, with high college visibility

NAL / EAL

National Academy League and Elite Academy League. Level 2 national competitions

MLS NEXT

The pro-academy league run by Major League Soccer. Level 1. Entry is by scouting

SHOWCASE

A tournament whose real product is the college coaches on the sideline. Matters from U15

ID CLINIC

A club-run session for evaluating prospective players, often a soft tryout

GUEST TRAINING

Practicing with a team you do not belong to. The single best low-stakes evaluation tool

HOMEGROWN CONTRACT

An MLS deal for a player from the club’s own academy

EQUIVALENCY SCHOLARSHIPS

NCAA soccer money is split across rosters. Full rides are the exception

PAY-TO-PLAY

The US model where families fund club soccer. The reason this report has a money page

WHERE THIS REPORT’S FACTS COME FROM

WHAT	FROM WHERE	FRESHNESS
Club levels, leagues, distances	Soccer Untangled catalog: 4,070 clubs, 36 leagues, built from league and club postings	UPDATED REGULARLY
Tryout dates	Club postings, verified against the page they appeared on (sample rows in this demo)	CHECKED WEEKLY
League cost tiers + college exposure	League-level catalog metadata	UPDATED REGULARLY
Cost ranges, time estimates, odds	General guidance: national patterns from published surveys and league data, labeled on each page	CURRENT SEASON
Mateo’s profile	Your intake answers	TELL US WHEN THINGS CHANGE

— Nothing in this report is paid placement. No club can buy its way onto page 7.

Youth soccer is a maze, and mazes feel designed to make you anxious. The facts in this booklet point the other way: your kid plays, he is surrounded by options, the next step is close to home and costs one email to explore. Whatever tryout season decides, in ten years he will not remember the league acronym. He will remember that he played, and that you were there.

THREE THINGS, IN ORDER

- 1** Send the guest-training email this week
- 2** Book two tryouts early in the spring window
- 3** Talk money as a family before the first offer arrives