

Why PGYSA Must Maintain a Large Development Team Pool Until U14

With Progressive Development, Progressive Travel, and Research-Supported Participation Realities

PGYSA's youth pathway is based on a long-term, player-centred model: development before selection, and a commitment to inclusive development. As children grow, mature, and change at different rates, and because our northern region experiences unique mobility and participation patterns, it is essential that we maintain a large, inclusive Development Team pool from U9 through U14.

This model aligns with a progressive development pathway and a progressive travel model, ensuring that players grow with the game at a pace appropriate to their age, family life, and readiness.

1. Progressive Development & Progressive Travel (Light travel, high inclusion)

Player-centred, development-aligned, financially responsible.

- U9 marks the first step into Development Teams and travel. It is designed to be accessible, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate. It is not a high-travel, high-pressure environment.

Recommendation:

- Participate in the Slurpee Cup as the primary out-of-town event.
- All remaining competition & travel stays within Northern BC (Prince George, Quesnel, Williams Lake, Smithers, Fort St. John, etc.).

Rationale:

- Age-appropriate travel load.
- Provides a meaningful "first tournaments" experience without overburdening families.
- Strengthens regional relationships.
- Keeps the focus on learning with less time in cars and more time with the ball and the coaches.

U10: A Transitional Step (Still lighter travel than older groups)

- U10 is not meant to resemble the travel of U11+.
- The expectations and capacity are still growing. It is a small step forward from U9.

Recommendation:

- All travel competitions remain within British Columbia (Northern BC + Interior + Lower Mainland as appropriate).
- No out-of-province tournaments at U10.

Rationale:

- Ensures age-appropriate competitive balance.
- Reduces financial/time burdens on families.
- Aligns with BC Soccer's developmental standards.
- Builds toward U11/U12 without rushing the process.

U11–U14: Gradual Increase in Travel and Training Complexity

From U11 to U14, players gradually experience:

- More structured competition.
- Broader travel within BC.
- More tactical complexity.
- Gradually increase expectation of personal readiness.

2. Why the Development Pool Must Stay Large Until U14

A. Because We Cannot Identify “Top Players” Before U14

Talent identification between ages 8–14 is extremely unreliable due to:

- Inconsistent biological maturation.
- Fluctuating confidence and growing need for respect and status.
- Uneven technical and decision-making development that can often even out over time.
- Social change and identity formation.
- Multi-sport and non-sport commitments.

Early selection harms more players than it helps. Large pools protect late bloomers and support long-term pathways.

B. High Attrition is a Predictable Reality

Here is the research-supported truth:

- Research done by UK Sport England, the United States Soccer Federation, Canada Soccer, and Sport for Life reports that each age cohort loses approximately **25–40%** of its players between **U10 and U14**.

This attrition is caused by:

- Family relocation.
- Multi-sport participation.
- Financial or other travel pressures.
- Changes in social belonging (respect and status)..
- Confidence fluctuations.
- Developmental differences.

Because this drop-off is predictable, PGYSA must intentionally maintain a large development pool in the younger ages to ensure sustainable 11v11 teams, intact age groups, and long-term club stability.

C. Larger Pools → Better Training Environments

High numbers allow coaches to run:

- 7v7 / 8v8 / 9v9 within training sessions.
- Positional and diamond-application games.
- Football fitness games (the best fitness is built by playing the game with gradually increasing quality and quantity of actions).
- Differentiated groupings based on readiness (House-Travel & Travel).

Players learn more, faster, and with more enjoyment. Small pools create predictable, limited training environments that constrain growth.

D. A Large Player Pool Requires, and Builds a Large Coaching Pool

To ensure quality and manageability, the club must invest intentionally in:

- Developing more coaches.
- Supporting new and returning coaches.
- Building shared references within a consistent curriculum.
- Encouraging certification pathways.
- Mentoring coaches within the club.

Coach development supports and guides player development.

A large coaching pool allows us to:

- Split groups appropriately.
- Keep large numbers manageable.
- Ensure every player receives meaningful instruction.
- Maintain alignment across age groups.

E. A Large Pool Philosophy Discourages Premature Tiering and Protects Culture

U9–U14 should not involve heavy selection or early cuts.

A large pool enables:

- flexible grouping based on readiness.
- slow and fair progression.
- protection of psychological safety.
- evaluation over years, not isolated sessions.
- emphasis on learning, not ranking.

This model aligns with:

- Canada Soccer Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) standards.
- Sport for Life - Learn To Train / Train to Train.
- Global academy best practice.

3. Summary: Why This Model Matters

Maintaining a large Development Team pool until U14 with progressive development and progressive travel growth ensures:

1. U9 travel remains light, local, and fun.
2. U10 remains transitional, still lighter than older groups.
3. U11–U14 build gradually toward meaningful competitive play.
4. Late bloomers stay in the system.
5. We protect against the 25–40% attrition documented across youth sport.
6. Training environments remain rich and developmentally appropriate.
7. Coaches grow alongside players, ensuring sustainability.
8. U15+ teams have real depth and viability.
9. The club maintains long-term health, consistency, and community engagement.

This approach is not optional, *it is the responsible, research-supported model that ensures long-term success for our players, coaches, and club.*