



## **Blast 2022-23 Info Deck:**

- **Leagues and League Performance**
- **The “alphabet soup” of soccer**
- **Soccer Marketing 101**
- **Blast Development**
- **College talk & Blast Start-up**

### **Heading into 2022/23:**

We are eagerly awaiting the start of the 2022/23 season. But, also very much looking forward to getting players through try-outs where after, they can take a breath, relax a bit and enjoy the rest of summer break.

We feel it is essential for all considering being part of Blast in 2022/23 to understand why we do what we do and why we have been able to deliver success year after year.

This time of year, there can be apprehension about the upcoming season. Some of this surrounds league play and travel plans and, for others, the level of support for multiple sport athletes. We will cover our beliefs here.

Briefly, while we understand people’s anxiety about league play, the reality is that only 10% of our competitions occur in league. Our events comprise 90% of our competitive opportunity. And, in this 90%, we can plan ideal training cycles between events. So, while league play feels essential, and we always have plans for it, every year, we also have alternate plans if a league is not strong enough to hold our interest.

We prioritize training and always have. As an example, we know our best train-to-game ratios average 6:1 in winter; 4:1 in spring and at least 2:1 in summer. On average, we get a 3:1 training to game ratio by the end of the year.

We also know that insufficient training cycles in winter make unprepared players come spring. And, too many games at the end of a development cycle (summer) is unsafe, with “nagging” injuries and less recovery time for players.

That said, leagues that start in December would not give us the development time we need and likely, compromise

player safety. Plus, winter league demand would eliminate or reduce our winter event availability.

We also find that traveling every other weekend over winter and spring for one game on Saturday and one on Sunday is not an ideal use of funds when an event can deliver 3-5 games and provide better culture development.

One of our club's advantages is our size. Our smaller size allows us to deliver what we do and how we do it consistently. We know our plan is best managed over hundreds of players, not thousands.

We have chosen a path different from other clubs. That path and the players that have truly followed it have found consistent and repeatable success year after year. We have found a development, competitive, and culture-building plan that works for our players. Once established, our players and families make it stronger every year.

#### 1. **The Blast League Plan:**

The Blast is an MYSA Club based on MYSA's affiliation with USYSA that delivers a Promotion-Relegation process for competitive teams from u14 - u18. We feel the "earn-it" philosophy represents the kind of competitive mentality that best prepares athletes for high-level development.

**For 2022/23, we are prepared to compete again at the MYSA Premier I and II levels.** However, just as we plan every year, if MYSA competition is not strong enough, we will implement our "Tournament Only" competitive plan, where we select the events that best suit our competitive objectives.

Click to see our updated: [Tourney Plan for 2022/23](#)

We actually believe our Tournament Only plan is ideal for player development, but have willingly participated in a league that also suits our competitive philosophy. We will do so again for 2023 providing the league is strong enough.

## 2. **Why Not Minnesota's NPL League?**

Blast leadership has collectively been involved in Minnesota soccer for nearly 50 years. We've seen it all and still, thoroughly assess every opportunity that comes forward each year. For us, a Minnesota NPL opportunity is not a good fit at this time. Here is why:

### **(a) Compromises our Developmental Focus:**

From December to April, when NPL league games start, our priority is player development and using selected events to assess and/or adjust our development plan. Focusing on league play when we may not have the numbers or commitments would disrupt our development plan over several months.

### **(b) Unable to Support Multi-Sport Athletes:**

We support multiple sport athletes. But, we do expect them to participate in as many of our winter training and events as possible. Still, a league that starts in December and runs through May makes it very difficult for multi-sport athletes to participate consistently.

### **(c) Not Part of Our Competitive Objective:**

The current US Club-based program (Minnesota NPL league) does not fit our competitive objectives. The Minnesota NPL continues to be back-filled with teams that have not shown a history of Premier level play.

### **(d) Set up for Larger Clubs with Disposable Funds**

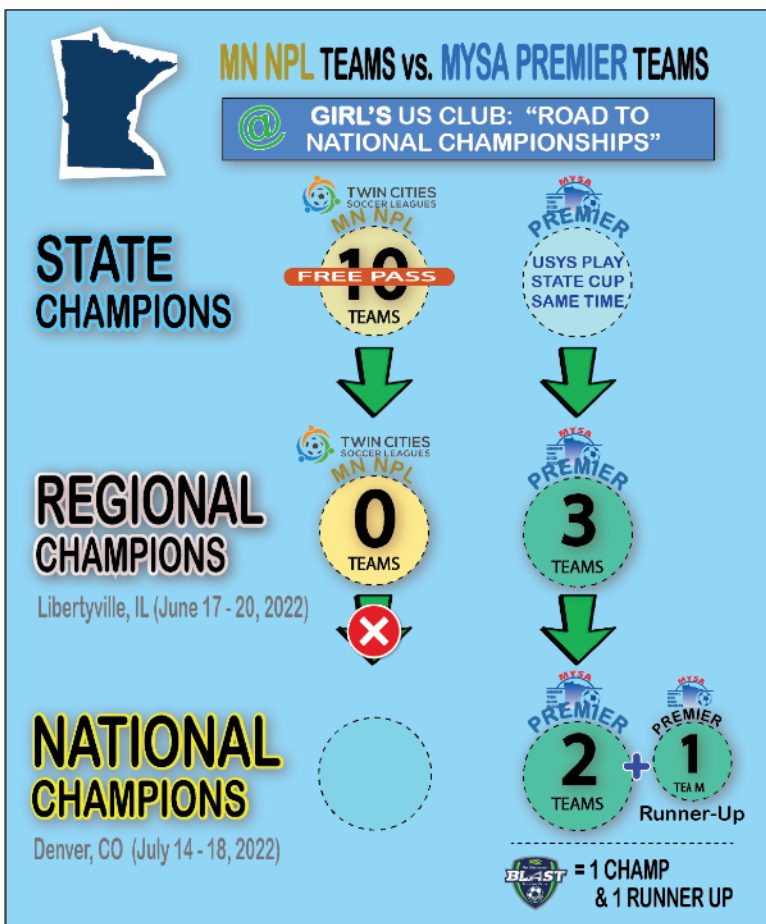
We are skeptical of a model where clubs can select the level of play based on the size of their club and the amount they are willing to pay. We have not found that the size of a club or the higher the cost for the program translates to stronger competition or greater success.

### **(e) Minnesota NPL Lacking History of Success.**

Our belief around the size and higher cost is not translating to success. This is not just a feeling we have. We have tracked the data for several years now.

It is worth noting that very few of MN NPL's larger clubs want the Blast in the MN NPL league. This despite Blast delivering regional and national success; this despite Blast being part of the original 5 member clubs to start Minnesota's first US Club league.

The facts are that the current NPL in Minnesota is not developing teams that are showing success at a National or Regional Level. Some quick facts from the recent 2021-22 Post-Season:



- 6 NPL Girls teams from Minnesota's NPL skipped NPL Regionals and went directly to NPL Nationals.  
*None of the 6 Minnesota NPL Girl's teams advanced out of their pool at NPL Nationals. (Exclusive to NPL teams)*
- 12 Minnesota NPL teams went to US Club Regionals after winning their NPL event in Minnesota;  
*None of the Minnesota NPL teams advanced out of US Club Premier division pool at US Club Regionals.*
- 10 Minnesota NPL girls teams were sent directly to US Club Nationals, (skipping US Club Regionals) to play in the US Club Nationals highest "Super Group" division in Denver.  
*None of these Minnesota NPL teams made it out of their "Super Group" pool. (See graphic above)*

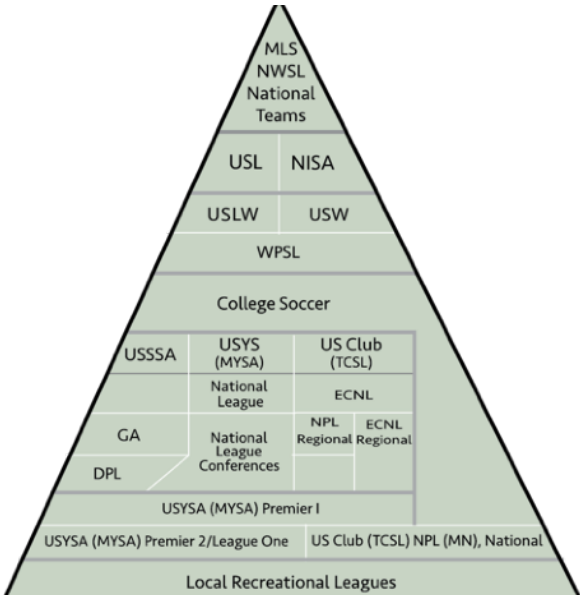
- 3 MYSA Girls Premier teams competed in the same “Super Group” division at US Club Regionals.  
*All 3 MYSA (MN) Girls Teams advanced to US Club “Super Group” National event in Denver.*
- All 3 MYSA Girls played in the same “Super Group” at US Club Nationals in Denver; as did the MN NPL teams.  
*All 3 MYSA (MN) Girls Teams advanced to a US Club “Super Group” Final at National in Denver.*
- 2 of the 3 teams in the US Club “Super Group” National Championships were Blast teams:
  - \* Blast u17’s played Legends FC (OH) and won the Championship 3-1.
  - \* Blast u18 played u19 Salvo (MN) and Blast took 2nd, losing 0-1.

It is concerning that not one of the 10 Minnesota NPL teams advanced out of the higher “Super Group” division or even the lower “Premier” division pools at NPL Regionals, US Club Regionals; or US Club Nationals.

However, all 3 Minnesota MYSA teams (2 of them Blast teams) that earned their way through Regionals to play at US Club Nationals, advanced out of the higher “Super Group” division’s at Nationals and went on to win a championship or take 2nd place.

**3. US Soccer Pyramid of Alphabet Soup:**

The US Soccer Federation is the governing body for soccer in the United States. The graphic “pyramid” below shows the various US Soccer levels and tiers:



**Local competitive leagues** are usually **governed by their respective US Soccer State Associations, which are in turn governed by USYS.**

Here are the regional and national league options available through US Soccer:

**(a) National League (USYS)**

Like most local competitive leagues, the **National League ultimately falls under USYS.** The National League has 13 regional Conferences. Teams *earn their way into their Conferences based on success in competitive opportunities within their respective US Youth Soccer State Associations.*

Unique to USYS is a Promotion-Relegation system among Divisions based on end of season results. Unlike individual Conferences where travel is regional, the locations for National League events involve national travel that often begin late fall or early winter.

**(b) ECNL (US Club):**

Elite Clubs National League is also sanctioned by US Club Soccer. There are currently 12 regionally based conferences. Like the NPL, the ECNL is a club commitment and each club must maintain fairly high standards with respect to facilities and coaching.

**(c) NPL (National Premier League US Club):**

The National Premier League falls within US Club Soccer. There are 20 *somewhat regional* member leagues in the NPL. The NPL is a *club commitment*. In other words, if a club wants to participate in the NPL, they must put a team in at every age group.

This is different than the National League in which individual teams qualify. There are certain fairly low minimum standards that must be maintained to qualify as a member club.

**NPL - Minnesota (National Premier League - US Club)**

The NPL has allowed certain states to create their own "National" League in which their own states teams compete against their own local teams.

MN NPL is different than the USYS Premier leagues, in that it does not have the promotion-relegation standards; and MN NPL is a club commitment, whereas USYS leagues are team commitments. In these MN NPL leagues, teams and or clubs select the levels they choose to play in and their decisions are approved by a for-profit director, or chosen members of delegate clubs.

MN NPL has arranged for teams to bypass regionals and go straight to nationals if they place high enough in NPL (state) leagues.

4. **Blast's take on "League play":**

(a) **Fan of "Earn-It" Mentality for older ages:**

The Blast fully supports the "earn it" (aka promotion-relegation) philosophy to competition that exists at MYSA. We feel this most accurately defines competitive clubs and teams as opposed to clubs being able to buy their way into levels of their choosing. We feel these types of decisions are ultimately based on a club's size and the annual revenues they collect and in no way resembles a club's quality of play.

(b) **Not a fan of a leagues requiring club commitment.**

It is unlikely that a club can field strong teams at every age level. It is more likely that a club will have strong teams at certain ages and that these teams would provide strong national level competition.

The unseen pitfall in the club requirement is that other clubs investing significant travel expenses only to discover a club does not have a strong team to challenge them, will likely seek to avoid these expensive journeys in the future.

In some respects, that is how MN NPL was created. Clubs from other states, not wanting to travel to Minnesota, allowed Minnesota to create its own, internal level of "national" (NPL) competition. However, the "national" competition is only for its Minnesota based clubs; thus MN NPL.

(c) **Not a significant part of our Development:**

For us, with league making up only 10% of our overall competitive play and within it, roughly 50% being highly competitive, we are confident by selecting appropriate events and training for them accordingly, we can continue to increase our overall competitive challenge.

Every year, if the league we compete in looks competitive, we will pursue it as we've done in the past. If it is not, we have plans for valuable competitive play opportunities outside of the league.

(d) **Why directors choosing less competitive play:**

It is significant when none of the 10 MN NPL teams given free "passes" to US Club Nationals advance out of pool play, and the 3 MYSA (MN) teams who actually won at Regionals and earned their way to Nationals, all played in a Final at Nationals.

Based on that alone, one would think growth in a less competitive MN NPL league would be slower. But, that has not been the case. The number of MN NPL clubs has grown over the past few years. Meanwhile, the number of MYSA teams that have delivered regional and national success has shrunk. This should be of significant concern for the future of Minnesota youth soccer.

5. **The Marketing of Soccer Leagues:**

As you can see, the club soccer marketing campaign has only increased over the past five years. Across the country, clubs toss out monikers like ECNL, GA, NLP, and the new state or regional NPL's creating "alphabet soup" confusion that leaves parents uncertain about their child's "best" options.

We avoid all these letters as much as possible and focus on select our competition and the development around it carefully. From a Blast perspective, our "marketing" angle is simple, PREPARE PLAYERS:

- (a) Prepare all players' technical skills so they can compete in higher-level competitive play;



- (b) Prepare our youngest players to focus on possession metrics (counts) and ignore “winning” or scores to achieve the possessional metrics we need for development.
- (c) Prepare our “mid-age” players to begin to acclimate for “winning” by using the technical skills and possessional metrics we are developing, knowing it will be successful.
- (d) Prepare our oldest players to expect high-level possessional play that focuses on “winning” and achievement.

## 6. **Decisions Driven on Development:**

We make decisions here that focus on the development of players. We know team success is a byproduct of successful player development. Quick facts:

- The Blast has put in the most number of true ‘Premier’ level teams than any other Minnesota club over the past 5 years.
- The Blast is one of the smallest clubs in Minnesota, with just under 300 members.
- 90% of Blast teams have performed in the top 10% of their leagues. Currently, 80% of our teams aged 14 - 19 are Premier I or Premier II teams.
- The Blast has earned two National Championships and one runner-up in the past two years.

## 7. **Blast Developmental Objectives:**

From u8 - u10: We balance fun and engagement with a hint of technical discipline, so players begin to acclimate to the concept of being developed vs. simply participating. We do not travel or attempt to expose them to “high level” play at these ages. History reveals that kids being pushed too hard this young will quit.

From age u11 to u12: We increase “volume” slightly, still recognizing soccer must be engaging and enjoyable. But, knowing players will benefit most from some technical skill development. Therefore, we expose players to some level of “in-over-your-head” experiences only to help them discover they are fully capable of surviving and thriving from being challenged.

From ages u13 and u14: We know that we have introduced higher development expectations than most programs. Things like player duties, regimented travel responsibilities, and communication expectations have become commonplace. We know these things not only help them as players but as people.

At age 15: We transition from pure development to striving for success in our competitive events. We continue developing players technically and tactically through age 18.

#### 8. **College Outlook:**

As players start to become interested in collegiate possibilities, we continue to prioritize development that ties directly to “life” knowing a collegiate program may range from being an overwhelming part of a player's life to having marginal impact on their college experience.

- Over 80% of Minnesota soccer players that play college soccer, do so less than 400 miles from home.
- Most MN soccer players playing in college play at a D3 (75%), D2 (20%), or D1 level (>5%).
- Of the D1 players, only 25% finish all four years with roughly 30% of those quitting entirely before Year 2.
- Of the D2 players, 60% finish all four years; while 65% of D3 players finish their college soccer careers.
- A sizable number of players will not play college soccer, or quit playing college soccer at some point along their college path. We hope the development skills we've helped instill are valuable to them outside of soccer.
- You will not see us promote players who entered a college soccer program any more or less than we would a player receiving an academic scholarship. To us, they are one in the same.

#### 9. **Blast Collegiate Development Goals:**

We fully accept and support our players who have no interest in playing college soccer. However, for those interested in college soccer, our goals are simple:

- Provide development (training) necessary for players to compete at any college level. But when they get there, we want them to PLAY, not sit a bench.
- Use our soccer experience to provide the Discipline and Responsibility skills necessary for players to be competitive off a soccer field (classroom, job). Help them understand how solid efforts and positive attitudes can motivate teammates, co-workers, partners and friends.
- Remind players it is up to them to engage with college coaches. As coaches, we don't pave your college futures or "get you a scholarship". It is up to players achieve these goals. They do the work.
- We will still hold our players that want to play college soccer who are "juggling a lot" to uphold their commitment to soccer and their Blast teammates. We hold them accountable because we know any college program will do the same.
- We are certain whatever competitive path we choose will provide opportunity for players interested in college soccer to be challenged as they continue to develop their skills in order to be most attractive to programs they feel best fit their academic expectations first, and their athletic dreams second.

#### 10. **Rough Blast Season Timeline:**

Our youngest players not in high school; along with our older players not playing high school soccer, will start training in late August; some in early September.

Fall Competition and our events will start mid September and run through mid to late October.

Our younger teams will go on break while older teams train as high school season end (mid to late October) to prepare for SGSL event in early November. High school players in the State final will likely not be able to attend.

All players will be on break through November. We ask they actually put away their shoes, unpack their bags and truly rest. Take a break. Paint a picture, read some books. *(Yes, we know you hate stopping! ;)*

In December, we begin with some light training. For older teams potentially doing a January trip, we will have more regimented training.

Training amps up in January and February where we begin preparing for our event season (see [Tourney Plan for 2022/23](#) for estimated events).

After that, the training will be focused around our events and competitive season, depending on several factors such as teams event commitments any other development plans we have.

We hope this has outlined at least some of the things you knew, maybe thought you knew, or even wondered about the Blast program.

There are other things people will want to know. Those that know us, know we are as open as it gets about this club and our plans for development. So please, ask away and we will get you answers.

We wholeheartedly value our families and all the players that have been part of the Blast development plan. It's not easy, but who these players become and the results they achieve show the rewards of hard work.

We also welcome those who have never been part of our program with open arms. Change comes hard, but know we believe very much in what we have to offer and are highly confident in our ability to help players find success.

Thank you.

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