

# MLS NEXT EXPLAINED

## BY LUIS ROBLES



### What is MLS Next?

MLS NEXT is the elite platform for youth development in North America – currently with 151 member clubs and over 16,000 players – and this expansion will provide opportunities for thousands of additional players and coaches, allowing member clubs greater flexibility to align team travel and scheduling, optimize player pools, and more effectively allocate club resources.

### What is MLS Next Tier 2?

The expanded tier of MLS NEXT will be managed by leading league operators across the youth landscape with a strong commitment to player development. The operators will follow mandated program guidelines and technical standards set by MLS NEXT to ensure a high-quality product.

### What events do MLS Next Tier 2 teams compete in?

In the expanded tier of MLS NEXT, clubs will participate in one of eight regional tournaments each season in addition to the option for eligible age groups to attend MLS NEXT Fest in December. The regional tournaments will serve as qualifying for a championship event at MLS NEXT Cup later in 2026. These events will be marquee talent identification opportunities for college, professional, and national team scouts to evaluate players.

### Will MLS Next Tier 2 players be permitted to play high school?

Yes. Players competing in the new tier will also be eligible to play high school soccer.

### How are teams formed?

Teams are formed through a variety of ways. Throughout the year the club will be identifying players we feel are MLS NEXT Tier 2 level. Teams will also be formed through Tryout Invites as well as through Open Tryouts.

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### When does the season take place?

The MLS NEXT Tier 2 Season will be played from August - June for the 13U and 14U teams. For the 15U-19U teams, mainly from November - June.

### How many days per week do MLS Next Tier 2 team train?

Players in this program will train 4x a week. The 13U and 14U teams will train August - June, while the 15U-19U teams will train from late November - June.

### What is required for a club to be accepted into MLS Next?

It is a rigorous process to gain acceptance into the MLS Next youth soccer ecosystem. A major part of an MLS Next club is adherence to the standards set forth by the league. You can see those standards here: [MLS Next Technical Standards](#) and [MLS Next Rules and Regulations](#)

### Is there the potential for promotion to MLS Next Tier 1?

Yes. Clubs interested in promotion to MLS Next Tier 1 will be vetted on an annual basis. Determining factors will be adherence to the league's Technical Standards, player development model & methodology, promotion of players to collegiate and profession levels, as well as performance on the field.

### Why did Forward Madison FC join MLS Next Tier 2?

MLS Next Tier 2 brings a pathway to the highest levels of youth soccer in the United States. The technical standards and the emphasis on player development is a key to improving the overall landscape of youth soccer in our community. This is a player centric model that puts player development first.

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### League Play:

FMFC Youth Academy will participate in the North Division. Teams can expect to play a minimum of 18 league games, multiple games at the MLS Next regional event, and multiple games at National MLS Next Events. An estimated 26-32 matches will be played each year.

### North Division:

Bavarian United SC 2 (WI)  
Elmbrook United (WI)  
Forward Madison FC (WI)  
WIUFC (WI)  
SC Wave 2 (WI)  
Lakeville SC (MN)  
Minneapolis United SC (MN)  
Saint Paul Blackhawks (MN)  
Tonka Fusion Elite (MN)  
Manitou FC (MN)

### Regional Opponents - Great Lakes:

Beadling SC  
Chicago FC United  
Chicago Fire Youth SC  
Club Ohio  
Cincinnati United Premier SC  
Galaxy Soccer Club  
Indy Eleven  
Javanon FC  
Lexington SC  
Michigan Bucks Academy  
Michigan Futbol Academy  
Michigan Jaguars  
Michigan Jaguars United FC  
Michigan Stars Elite  
Michigan Tigers FC  
Michigan Wolves FC  
St. Louis Scott Gallagher Illinois  
Sockers FC Chicago  
Vardar Soccer Club

### National Events:

MLS Next Tier 2 teams will have the option to participate in multiple national events throughout the year. Tier 2 events will coincide with Tier 1 events, ensuring that our players will get maximum exposure for College and professional scouts.

### How Much Travel is involved?

MLS Next Tier 2 was created with an eye towards limiting the travel strain on families. League travel will take place between Wisconsin and Minnesota. You can anticipate 3-5 "Away" weekends to Minnesota in both the Fall (U13 and U14) and Spring, as well as 2-3 "Away" games in Wisconsin. We will host 3-5 "Home" weekends for league play in both the Fall (U13 and U14) and Spring. There will be 1 regional tournament (location TBD) and 1-2 National Events (determined on a team by team basis).

All MLS Next Tier 2 teams will travel and compete together for league play. For those teams that opt to attend the national events, teams will attend together. U13 & U14 teams will begin this fall

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### How many players will be on an FMFC Academy roster?

The club plans to carry 18-20 players per roster. Playing time is at the forefront of our decision making process in roster construction. There are multiple avenues for players to “move” between teams throughout the season including “late-developers” who if approved are available to play with the age group below their own. Players are also permitted to play up an age group with the understanding that a player will not play more that 90 minutes on a given game date.

### What does MLS Next Tier 2 provide players?

FMFC Academy, as a member of MLS Next, will provide players with high level technical standards along with qualified coaches who meet certain licensing requirements. The player development model with our academy, as set forth by MLS Next, allows players to train in an environment that holds players to standards to the highest degree. The competition model also allows for players to be exposed to events that are scouted by hundreds of college and professional scouts.

### How can FMFC and MLS Next 2 help players be recruited for college?

First and foremost, our development model will instill the foundation and principles that college coaches look for in their recruiting. Our experienced staff has been on the recruiting end both collegiately and professionally. Taking that knowledge and structuring a player development plan around it will help players learn and understand what scouts are looking for in their play. It is one thing to attend a showcase event; but another thing to be prepared and have the tools to get noticed at a showcase event.

FMFC also has a College Recruiting Advisor that will work with families to create a recruiting plan.

### How does being a part of Forward Madison FC’s Academy and MLS Next Tier 2 benefit your player?

Our coaching staff has created a development model based on experiences playing, coaching and recruiting at the professional and collegiate levels. We will provide a training environment that the holds standards necessary to help players learn and grow.