

Georgia Soccer, as a State Association under US Youth Soccer, is thrilled to be a part of bringing this new and exciting opportunity to our members!

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**CONTACT:** US Youth Soccer Communications at [communications@usyouthsoccer.org](mailto:communications@usyouthsoccer.org) or 1-800-4SOCCER



**Major League Soccer and US Youth Soccer Enter Groundbreaking Strategic Partnership in a Milestone Moment for Domestic Player Development**

**FRISCO, Texas (May 15, 2020)** — US Youth Soccer (USYS) is pleased to announce that it has agreed to a strategic partnership with Major League Soccer (MLS) in a groundbreaking alliance bolstering player development in the United States.

USYS is the largest youth sport organization in the country and has been a leader in the development of youth soccer for decades. With nearly 3 million registered players nationwide, USYS offers an unmatched range of soccer programming, resources, and leadership. Since launching the MLS club academy initiative in 2007, Major League Soccer has demonstrated unprecedented commitment to the development of top-level professional players in the United States and Canada, including an investment of more than \$70 million last season alone. This investment has produced more than 250 homegrown players that have become professional and national team players.

The MLS club academy coaches have the highest international licensing in the country and MLS continually introduces innovative ways to train and develop both coaches and players. From grassroots to competitive, USYS and MLS collaboration efforts will provide unique player opportunities, build a lifelong love for the game, and allow all players to find their path through the sport of soccer. With an ability to reach into every community in the country, the shared USYS and MLS goals will focus on:

- Improving U.S. domestic youth player identification and selection processes
- Building a more integrated pathway to advanced opportunities for both boys and girls
- Creating a more inclusive and accessible pathway for a more diverse player pool
- Reducing pay-to-play barriers and other access challenges for elite players
- Expanding MLS outreach and opportunities through an expansive network of coaches and scouts
- Building multi-tiered relationships that strengthen the U.S. talent pool

- Supporting the MLS nationwide through player, club, & fan engagement designed to drive growth, participation and generations of new fans

USYS also looks forward to collaborating with the new MLS elite youth competition platform which will include more than 8,000 players throughout the U.S. and Canada and will consist of elite year-round competition, as well as player identification initiatives, coaching education opportunities, and additional programming to create the premier player development environment.

“We are very proud that USYS and its 55 member States Associations have decided to make MLS their league of choice,” said Gordon Bengtson, Senior Director of Player Development. “The State Associations are a crucial component to creating more meaningful connections to the professional levels while supporting the overall growth of the game. This is particularly important in communities that have not historically had access to elite development environments or professional pathways. This is a first step towards our goal of making the size and diversity of our country, our biggest strength.”

“This is not a short-term vision, but rather one in which we realize the opportunity to truly connect the whole system of soccer in our country. For too long the professional and youth systems have been working relatively independent of each other and with this MLS partnership, we start down the path of true collaboration. This will not only expand resources to grow the game at the grassroots level, but also reveal to players and families that there is a clear pathway to any level of soccer they want to achieve,” said US Youth Soccer CEO Skip Gilbert.

“We are excited to partner with Major League Soccer on this truly national initiative. By combining our resources and expertise, we have created a unified pathway that helps all youth soccer players reach their true potential. We are thankful to everyone at MLS and US Youth Soccer who made this possible, including MLS Commissioner Don Garber, Gordon Bengtson, Fred Lipka, the USYS Organizational Growth Committee and our friends at Collective Global. We look forward to working with MLS to transform the American soccer landscape,” said Dr. Peter Zopfi, Chairman, US Youth Soccer.