

20.00 TOPSoccer Outreach Program

20.01 About TOPSoccer

U.S. Youth Soccer TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a community-based training and team placement program for young athletes with disabilities, organized by youth soccer association volunteers. The program is designed to bring the opportunity of learning and playing soccer to any boy or girl, who has a mental or physical disability. Our goal is to enable the thousands of young athletes with disabilities to become valued and successful members of the U.S. Youth Soccer family.

20.02 How Do I Participate?

Contact your local U.S. Youth Soccer State Association office to find out more about getting involved with a local U.S. Youth Soccer TOPSoccer program. Or, contact your respective U.S. Youth Soccer TOPSoccer Committee member by using the email addresses listed below.

In Oklahoma, contact the OSA office at (800) 347-3590 or email at oksoccer@oksoccer.com if you wish for information on setting up a TOPSoccer program in your community/club/league.

20.03 Getting Started

First identify the need in your area: For what type of disabilities do you need to plan and are you able to fulfill these needs? Second, check for any restrictions placed on the facility you plan to use: Are they equipped to handle athletes with physical disabilities? Also, be sure to check with your soccer insurance carrier for liability coverage. Next, consider contacting established programs for helpful information, such as U.S. Youth Soccer, The Special Olympics, United Cerebral Palsy, Shiners and local school districts and universities. Create a list of people that are able to assist you and use your State Association and Regional TOPSoccer Representative as resources for your local program. Lastly, plan your advertisements and spread the word!

20.04 Creating Your Program

TOPSoccer is unique in that each program is different and is created around the needs of the participants. Additionally, TOPSoccer athletes are placed on teams according to ability and not age. The length of the program is usually around 6-8 weeks but is ultimately determined by the organizer. Playing rules are also open for modification and should be created to fit the specific needs of the participants. You can use the U.S. Youth Soccer Under 6, Under 8 or Under 10 as guidelines. There are a variety of options to choose from, such as small-sided games (i.e. 3v3, 4v4, 8v8, etc.), full-sided games (11v11), unified teams with an equal ratio of challenged athletes to non-challenged athletes, indoor or outdoor programs, camps or skills training only. The main focus should be to ensure that the experience is meaningful for the participating athletes, and one in which they feel they have made a contribution. Above all keep it simple and keep it fun!

20.05 Placement and Registration of Athletes

Registration procedures should be the same as those used for regular league teams and should include a section for medical history. Placement is determined by ability and not by age. Athletes with Down-Syndrome should be required to have current x-ray. If the x-ray is positive it should be strongly recommended that they do not take part in team play for their safety. Assessment test should be made available upon request and in some cases medical waivers may be required.

20.06 Recruiting Coaches

Contact local universities, schools and soccer clubs for volunteers. The State Director of Coaching for Oklahoma, Matt Fansher, is also a good resource for coaches. No special training is required, however it is available through U.S. Youth Soccer, Oklahoma Soccer Association sponsored coaching courses and through Special Olympics.

20.07 Cost Involved

Costs vary depending upon the registration fees, insurance fees, uniforms and equipment costs. Costs should be kept low and affordable to all possible participants, to assist with expenses there are grants available through U.S. Youth Soccer. Also, there are philanthropic entities, such as Shriner's can offer assistance for the program and donations can be sought from local companies and corporations.

20.08 Helpful Hints

Use color-coded goals and nets, have scrimmage vests available, have a ball for each athlete, and most of all HAVE FUN!

Contact person for Region III:

Jose Fernandez: tscentraldistrict_jlfernandez@msn.com