

Playing Up in Age Categories

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Athletes can often play up one age category without many challenges or limitations. However, thought and discussion should occur between the club, athlete, and family to determine the best environment for the athlete. There can be significant disparity if an athlete plays up two age categories. Therefore, a more substantial analysis must occur if this situation is being considered. Understanding the situation and circumstance an athlete will have when playing up is significant. Here are a few areas to contemplate when discussing which age group is developmentally more appropriate:

- Technical and tactical skills
- Leadership skills
- Mental skills
- Physical abilities
- Emotional skills
- Cognitive aptitude

Additional factors to consider which group would be more suitable:

1. Social aspect: do they have peers on a team? Where do they fit in best? What is their comfort level?
2. What role will the athlete have on a team?
3. What playing position(s) would they have?
4. Are there differing coaching styles? Is the athlete more receptive to one over the other?
5. What are the different divisions/levels of competition they'd be playing against?
6. Do athletes have to travel more distances to play on a particular team? This can be a significant circumstance for families.

What experience would benefit the athlete more and would this be best met playing at their own age group, one above, or two age classes above. What options are in the region to meet the athlete's developmental needs?

Clubs may need to combine athletes from different age categories to have enough players to form a team in their region. While this is understandable, consideration should still be given to what's best for individual athletes when there are alternatives in their area. Clubs should consider the athlete first and put them in a position where they can best grow, develop, and succeed based on their situation, circumstances, and opportunities.

Everyone should have open and honest discussions about these factors before committing.