

ODP Region Trials Camp

The purpose of this document is to help you become more familiar with the Region Trials Camp so that you can make an informed decision on whether to send your child to the camp.

The most important thing for parents to understand is that the ODP Region Trials Camp is different from a typical summer soccer camp. In a typical summer camp, the volume of training is high to maximize technical work and keep players active as much as possible. The ODP camp format is designed to strike a balance between volume and quality. Since ODP camp has a Region Pool selection component, there is a need to prevent player fatigue from adversely impacting their chances for selection. Also, the developmental focus of ODP camp is more tactical than technical and players are better able to absorb and learn tactical concepts when they are fresh.

The objective is to make our players tactically smarter and to help them understand what it takes to be an elite player. We do this via a carefully calibrated combination of games, training sessions and lectures.

What this means is that there is more rest time in ODP camp than in a typical summer camp. ODP level players who aspire to reach the top must learn to manage their rest time and keep themselves as sharp and ready to compete as possible. ODP camp is about quality rather than quantity.

The FAQ's below provide more detailed information to help you understand the camp format and the structure of ODP at the regional level:

- **What is a Region?**

US Youth Soccer split the country into 4 regions for administrative and logistical purposes. The four regions are known as East Region, South Region, Mid-West Region, and West Region. Each region comprises 12-14 states. We are the South Region, comprising FL, SC, NC, GA, TN, AL, MS, LA, STx, NTx, OK, and AR. Each Region has a Region Manager who oversees all the programs within the Region. Each Region also runs the Region ODP. The Region Manager appoints a

Region ODP Administrator and a Region ODP Head Coach who, together, run the ODP at the regional level.

- **What is the purpose of Region Camp?**

The main purpose of Region Camp is to evaluate the players from all the states within our region and select a region pool of players in each age group for further evaluation and competition. All the states send their state teams to camp and play each other in front of the regional staff coaches.

The other purpose of region camp is to expose the players to a higher level of competition and contribute towards their personal development through challenging games and training with high level region staff coaches.

- **When is Region Camp usually held?**

Region Camp is usually held in early July each year. The two genders have their own separate camps, each at a different location. Since there are multiple age groups to evaluate, the camp is organized into 5-day-long sessions, with each session accommodating one or two age groups. At the end of the 5-day camp, a region pool is selected.

- **What is the player selection process at the Region Level?**

At Region Camp, players play against other states each day and are evaluated for selection into the Region Pool in each age group. At the end of camp, a Region Pool of 40-60 players is selected. The Region Pool in some age groups is held over at camp for another 2-3 days to train under the Region Coaches. In the year after camp, Region Teams of 16-18 players will be selected in each age group to participate in National camps, Inter-Regional events, and/or international trips. The National Staff Coaches and MLS coaches attend these events and evaluate players for inclusion into National Pools or MLS academies. Many college coaches also attend ODP events. Please refer to the section on Region Camp below for more

details on camp format and regional selection process.

- **What is the role of the Region Staff?**

The Region Head Coach appoints Age Group Coaches and support staff. Each age group has a Head Coach, a couple of Assistant Coaches, a Keeper Coach and additional staff coaches. At region camp, each staff coach is assigned to work with one or two state teams for the duration of the 5-day session. The region staff coach trains his/her assigned state teams, observes them in games and gets to know all the players by the end of the session. Each night, after the games are played, the region staff meets to discuss the players. Each staff coach announces which players from his own assigned teams impressed him and from this, a preliminary list of potential pool players is created. This process is repeated each night and the list evolves based on players' performances with their states and in the nightly pool games. As the week rolls, some players are dropped and some are added, based on performance. The region staff holds one last meeting after the last game to finalize the pool.

The age group Head Coach does not assign himself to any state teams. The Head Coach is free to move from game to game which allows him to focus on the players recommended by the staff at the nightly meetings.

- **What is the role of the State Coach?**

The State ODP Coach prepares his/her team for region camp. The state coach is also in charge of coaching the state team during the games at region camp. Contrary to popular perception, the state coach has no impact or influence on player selection to the region pool. State Team Coaches might be asked by the region staff for their opinion on certain players, but they are not allowed into the daily region staff meetings where the region pool list is developed. State Team Coaches are not allowed to aggressively promote or 'go to bat' on behalf of a player. The player selection process does not depend on the ability of a state coach to 'sell' his players. It is based strictly on the players' abilities and what the region coaches are looking for in

each position.

- **What player qualities are the Region Staff Looking for?**

A quality first touch is the most important technical indicator of skill. Can the player control the ball with one touch, or does he/she need multiple touches to bring the ball under control? Does the player get away from pressure with first touch or does he/she get into trouble because of a poor touch? This is closely related to the 'speed of play' at the elite level. The better the players, the higher the speed of play. For players to survive at the higher level's speed of play, they must have a good first touch.

The speed of play at the region pool level is much higher than at the state level and requires players to think quicker and control the ball quicker. Since players at this level are physically and mentally sharper, they anticipate and close-down the ball quickly, which means players have to execute their moves in tight areas, often surrounded by multiple opponents who pounce on every poor touch.

Another important attribute is what we call 'quick feet', i.e. the ability to change direction on a dime and shift weight from one foot to the other and evade challenges with quick foot movements. This is, in the long run, an indicator of soccer specific athleticism which is more important than sheer size. As players mature at varying rates, size eventually evens out. But someone with 'quick feet' will always have an advantage and is more likely to develop into an 'explosive' player, which is so vital at the elite level.

Athleticism becomes more important at the highest level once players mature physically. It is no longer possible to just rely on superior skill without some speed and strength, since all the players are highly skilled. The better athletes ally their physical attributes to their skill to rise to the top.

Lastly, 'soccer smarts' is also evaluated at the region level. Decisions on the ball and off the ball are scrutinized. Being able to 'read the game' and understand what kind of pass is needed, how to keep the ball under pressure, where to position oneself, how to help the team maintain a good team shape in attack and in defense, when to support

the ball from behind and when to make runs ahead of the ball. All of these problem-solving abilities separate the region level player from the state level player.

- **What is the Region Camp format?**

Boys and girls camp vary slightly, but players typically arrive and check in the afternoon of the first day. On the boys' side, the state coaches run their own practice on the first evening, after which everyone attends the Opening Ceremonies and dinner. On the girls' side, the Opening Ceremonies are followed by practice sessions run by the region staff. The second, third, and fourth days are similar in format, with one practice session and one game per day. The practices are run by the region staff coach. The fifth and final day typically has a game in the morning, after which the region pools are announced, and the state teams depart around lunch time.

A typical full day has the following schedule:

6-8am	Breakfast
8 or 9:30am	Game
12-1pm	lunch
2pm	lecture or player evaluation
5 or 6:30pm	state team practice
4-8pm	dinner
8pm	pool training/game
10pm	lights out

On most evenings, 'region pool' games are used, where players who excelled in the morning's state vs state games are pulled from their states and organized into teams and play a game watched by all the region staff. These pool games are important for the selection process as they pit the best players in camp against each other to see who can handle the speed of play and belong at the next level.

- **How many games and practices take place at Region Camp?**

The key objective in region camp is to maintain a good balance between work and rest, to make sure the players can show their best

when it matters. For that reason, players have one game and one practice per day on full days (day 2 to day 4) and one practice or one game on half days (days 1 and 5). Players who are selected to play in pool games sit out their state team practice on that day to avoid fatigue-induced performance since there is so much at stake.

The summer heat and humidity combined with the higher intensity and speed of play at region camp require enough rest periods between activities. Region camp is not like a standard college summer camp or a club tournament, where players are on the field for long periods playing or working on technique. Region camp is a test of ability, not a marathon of games. It's about quality rather than quantity.

A fact often ignored is that games at region camp require a higher expenditure of energy than regular club games or scrimmages. The higher the skill level, the longer the ball is in play, the less time for recovery, the more intense the sprints and more wear and tear on the body. Games at the elite level require more rest and recovery. In lower level play, the ball takes longer to get from one area of the field to another and the ball is out of bounds more often due to inferior skill. This allows players to rest more and catch their breath while the ball is away from their area. Games against weaker opponents are also less physically demanding since the ball stays in the same half for long periods.

In the past, Region camp used to last six days and involved more games. Camp duration and number of games were eventually reduced because mental and physical fatigue became an issue. The camp has evolved into a format that features less field sessions and more lectures and presentations to reduce down-time and educate the players on the needs and requirements of elite athletes.

- **What benefits do players who are not selected to Region Pools get from Region Camp?**

Region camp has many other benefits for all the players. It is a chance for players to challenge themselves and gauge themselves against the best in the region. Good players thrive on playing against quality opponents and region camp provides a high level of competition.

Experts tell us that for elite athletes to reach their potential, they need to play around 30-40 quality games per year where they are pushed by equal or superior opponents. ODP activities and region camp provide additional quality competition to supplement the club competitions.

ODP's focus is on players' tactical development and problem-solving skills. The ODP playing style and curriculum follows the recommendation of US Soccer and mirrors that used by all the top international youth academies. The ODP strives to prepare players for the international game.

Region camp can be an inspiring experience. Many players, who are used to be the best in their club team, get a rude awakening at region camp. They get exposed to the very best and become motivated to work harder and make the region pool the next time. For some players, region camp is a humbling experience. They come home highly motivated and with a new perspective. Player development is a long process, a journey affected by many factors and experiences, some positive and some negative. It's hard to measure the impact each experience has on a player and hard to account for the intangibles. But many top American players look back on their experience at an ODP region camp as one of the defining moments in their growth.

Region camp exposes all the players to college and national staff coaches as well as MLS scouts. The ODP and MLS are working closely together to enhance the player identification process. A growing number of ODP players joined MLS academies after being identified at ODP camp by MLS scouts. College coaches regard ODP participation and attendance in region camp as an indication of the players' ability and ambition.

The opportunity to represent your state is another benefit. Pride in accomplishment, meeting players and coaches from other states, and learning a little about oneself and coping with adversity are some of the intangibles as well. If the players who 'lift a trophy' are considered the only beneficiaries of an event, everyone else would be missing the point.

