



# U-XX Boys/Girls Challenge Team Soccer Parent Orientation

2008 – 2009 Season

Coach **FirstName LastName**

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- ☎ XXX-XXXX (C)
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Assistant Coach **FirstName LastName**

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## WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM?

Starkville Soccer Association's Challenge Program (a.k.a. Division II, DII) is the intermediate level between Recreation (a.k.a. Division III, or REC) and Select soccer (a.k.a. Division I, DI). Challenge soccer brings a more competitive edge to active play. Practices still focus on fundamentals and overall skill development, particularly in the younger age groups. But, the intensity level is raised because players who participate in Challenge generally are aggressive, usually possess some playing skills, and would like more from the game than REC soccer can offer. Challenge also takes on the added responsibility of travel, more tournaments, and has a longer season. The Challenge program gives players who love and excel at the REC level a chance to play soccer in a more competitive environment.

## WHAT ARE SSA'S GOALS IN THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM?

1. To develop as many players as possible, regardless of skill level.
2. To compete in DII tournaments, particularly President's Cup and the State Games of Mississippi.
3. To offer a FUN and challenging extra season to those that enjoy the game of soccer.

**BOTTOM LINE:** although competitiveness and playing to win is emphasized in Challenge, winning at all costs is not the goal. If we develop players over the year, winning will hopefully come naturally.

## WHAT DO THE PLAYERS GET OUT OF CHALLENGE?

Challenge players should improve noticeably during the season versus their REC counterparts, if for no other reason than the increased practice time. Parents will particularly notice the change while watching the REC games as the Challenge players separate themselves from the pack. Challenge players typically learn that they cannot do it on their own as they might have done in the U6 and U8 age groups. Challenge players develop teamwork, communication, and the thought process needed to control and move the ball effectively down the field, and to put the ball in the goal.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR A TALENTED PLAYER TO PLAY IN CHALLENGE?

When a talented player encounters enhanced competition, there is automatic improvement due to the increased speed of Challenge games. Every player will benefit from the extra exercise, more structured practices, and healthy competition provided by the Challenge program. Soccer at the REC level does not always provide the enhanced competition needed to challenge a player's ability. At the Challenge level, players participate against others with equal, if not better soccer skills. This higher level of competition emphasizes how soccer is played as a team.

## IS MY CHILD GOOD ENOUGH TO PLAY CHALLENGE?

The Challenge program is all-inclusive: there are no tryouts. Every player that is able to put forth the money necessary to join the team will be allowed to participate in practices, scrimmages, and friendlies. However, tournament participation (discussed below in more detail) will be at the discretion of the team's coaches in consultation with SSA, and every player may not be able to participate in tournaments.

As in any sport, some athletes will be more skilled than others. Coaches understand that not every player develops at the same speed, and that is why the program is inclusive. SSA's Challenge program wants players who are willing to put forth the extra effort to improve and develop.

Since Challenge includes players of varying skill levels, there will invariably be players who keep a team from reaching its maximum potential. Even in the older age groups, these kids still have several years to develop and mature. The player who you think poorly of now may be the same player who wins their High School's state championship and goes on to play college, Olympics, World-Cup...

**BOTTOM LINE:** we include all players because you never know who has yet to blossom.

## HOW MUCH DOES CHALLENGE TYPICALLY COST?

Overall cost primarily depends on how many tournaments the teams enter.

Known costs:

- ☉ Yearly Challenge registration fee & player pass (photo ID): ~\$35
  - ☉ Uniform fee: ~\$75 (typically includes two jerseys [white & color] and extra socks)
- The above nominal fees are all that is required to participate in Challenge practices & scrimmages.

Estimated costs for optional, but recommended items:

- ☉ "Light" Underarmor shirt: ~\$40
- ☉ "Heavy" Underarmor shirt & pants (for cold weather): ~\$100
- ☉ Wool winter head cap: ~\$10
- ☉ Soccer bag: ~\$25

Estimated costs for friendlies, tourneys, and other typical items:

- ☉ Referee fees for home friendlies: ~\$5 per friendly (probably 1 friendly / month)
- ☉ Tournament registration fees: ~\$30 per tourney (typically 6 - 8 tourneys / year)
- ☉ Tent for players at tournaments & friendlies: ~\$10 (apply to other team fees if not used)
- ☉ Travel expenses (gas, lodging, meals, etc.) for out-of-town tournaments & friendlies:

Travel expenses vary widely depending on personal circumstances, but are estimated to average \$400 per tournament for Fri./Sat. night hotel accommodations & meals for a family of four.

Keep in mind, the more your child practices and plays in friendlies, the better both your child as well as the overall team will be near the end of the season when the major tournaments are scheduled. If the goal is player development, then participating in friendlies (& tourneys if the opportunity arises) is very important. The game is still, and will always be, the best teacher.

## WHAT ARE THE TOURNAMENT DATES IN CHALLENGE?

- ☉ **November 8-9, Tupelo, MISS.**  
Coaches Cup: primarily a REC tournament, but a DII bracket is sometimes formed for Challenge teams. REC teams take precedent, however, and DII players must play with their REC teams if the latter chooses to participate.
- ☉ **January 17-18, Starkville, MISS.**  
Frostbite Challenge: U10/U12/U14
- ☉ **February 14-15, Clinton, MISS.**  
Magnolia Cup: DII teams at U10; Select (DI) at U11 and above.
- ☉ **February 21-22, Memphis, TENN.**  
Mid-South FC Classic: DII teams at U10; Select (DI) at U11 and above.
- ☉ **April 24-26, Friday, Starkville, MISS.**  
Errea Spring Shootout: Challenge and Select Teams, along with U8 Jamboree.
- ☉ **May 16-17, Jackson, MISS.**  
Mississippi Soccer Assoc. President's Cup (Challenge Championship): this is the premier DII tournament each season.
- ☉ **June 6-7, TBD, MISS. (supposed to be in Starkville, but not yet confirmed)**  
North District Qualifier for State Games of Mississippi: DII, or, all-star REC teams.

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### ☺ **June 20-21, Meridian, MISS.**

State Games of Mississippi: must qualify for this tournament by being one of the top four teams from the North District Qualifier.

Mark these events on your calendars now, and avoid scheduling vacations, trips, etc. during these tourney weekends. It is a shame for a player to work hard all season and then miss the opportunity to shine in tournament play. Although unlikely, other DII tournaments could be announced which are not known at this time.

In addition to the above Challenge tournaments, numerous REC tournaments also occur throughout the season. The following dates are typically reserved for REC team scheduling: March 28 & 29, Tupelo Spring Classic, Tupelo, MS., April 18 & 19, North District Qualifier for State REC Championship, location TBD; May 2 & 3, Kohl's Cup State REC Championship, Clinton, MS.

### **WHAT WILL TYPICAL CHALLENGE PRACTICES BE LIKE?**

In some ways, Challenge practices will look similar to REC practices, because many players still need to master fundamental soccer skills. Drills in Challenge will hopefully be fun activities which teach proper techniques for dribbling, passing, trapping, heading, and shooting with power, while at the same time challenging the players technically, physically, and mentally. Many drills will be used repeatedly throughout the season since thousands of repetitions are oftentimes necessary to master an athletic skill.

Some advanced skills and strategies will be introduced in Challenge practices, including special dribbling techniques, body faking (feints), advanced sheparding & shielding techniques, one-touch passing, passing to open space, give-n-go, and field switching, just to name a few. Scrimmages (or scrimmage-type skills games) will occur at every practice, and play will be stopped frequently to help players learn field positioning, tactics, running without the ball, proper spacing, etc. The concept of "triangles" and "diamonds" will be used for moving the ball down the field, and emphasis will be placed on controlling the ball instead of resorting to "kickball".

Challenge players should be receptive to being coached and prepared for constructive feedback.

### **WHAT IS THE POLICY FOR PLAYING OR PRACTICING IN ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS?**

Challenge players must learn to practice, scrimmage, and play friendlies in more adverse weather conditions than typically found in REC. Scheduled practices will ALWAYS take place except for the following conditions:

- ☺ Air temperatures <40° F. This does NOT include wind-chills.
- ☺ Thunderstorms & lightning.
- ☺ Hard rain. We will practice in light drizzle / fog / mist.

The coaches will not call or send out emails regarding potential weather-related practice cancellations. Please use your best judgment if rain or thunderstorms are in the area. Also, keep in mind that just because you as a parent are cold on the sidelines, that does not necessarily mean your child playing on the field will be cold.

Playing scheduled friendlies in adverse weather is usually a game-day (or game-time) decision made collectively by the coaches of the respective teams.

Tournament games WILL take place regardless of air temperatures, rain, sleet, or snow. Lightning is about the only condition which will postpone or cancel games (excessive rain causing sodden field conditions can also cause tournaments to be cancelled).

## HOW WILL CHALLENGE TEAMS BE FORMED FOR TOURNAMENTS?

It is the desire of SSA that all registered Challenge players be allowed to play in tournaments, and that teams are formed such that all players have close to 50% playing time whenever possible. However, several factors can collectively affect whether a player (or team) is able to participate in tournament games, such as: i) overall player headcount, ii) availability of licensed coaches, iii) availability of players for a particular tournament, and iv) team size restrictions imposed by the tournaments or MSA.

Because of these factors, player participation in tournaments can not be guaranteed. Selection of players for team formation for any given tournament is left to the sole discretion of the team's coaches.

**COACHES:** this is where you should state how you intend to form your teams for the tournaments throughout the season. How you form your teams should be based on the factors mentioned above at the time you decide to have your parent meeting. The Challenge Coordinator is available for consultation about team formation if you need assistance or advice. If you are not sure what you intend to do about team formation at this time, but have ideas about what you would like to do, then again, state your ideas here in this section of the document, but qualify them by stating they are subject to change. If you have absolutely no idea what you intend to do about team formation at the time of your parent meeting, then clearly state that as such in this section of the document, and then when you do decide, document what you intend to do for the parents. As coaches, we need to be upfront with the parents about our intentions for team formation in order to try to be proactive in preventing controversy.

**COACHES:** If multiple teams can be formed from a pool of available players, then you must also decide if the players will be equally divided talent-wise, or, if the players will be divided into competitive & developmental teams (a.k.a. A & B teams, respectively). If you intend to form A & B teams, then you also need to clearly establish how the players will be named to the competitive team (i.e. try-outs, older vs. younger age split, etc.), and state that here in this section of the document for the parents. If you are not sure at the time of your parent meeting if you will be dividing equally or having A & B teams, then describe the two approaches in this section of the document for the parents, and keep them informed of your intentions when you do decide. Again, the idea is to be as upfront and transparent as possible about how the teams will be formed so parental controversy is hopefully kept to a minimum. For the older age groups (U12 and above), this same information should be communicated to the players as well.

**Parents:** as stated above, the goal of the Challenge program is to develop players in a fun but competitive environment. All you should ask of your child is that they try their hardest and put forth their best effort when they step onto the field. If your child is not selected by the coaches to play on the tournament team (or competitive A team as the case may be), then you should not construe this as a failure on the part of your child. Keep in mind your child has years to develop and mature into a better player, and may make a tournament team in the future if not turned off by parental pressure.

## WHAT SHOULD PARENTS OF CHALLENGE PLAYERS EXPECT?

If there is one thing learned from years of coaching experience, it is that managing the expectations of the parents (and players for that matter) may be as important as coaching the players. Here is some of what you can expect:

- ☉ Expect to play friendlies vs. other regional Challenge teams throughout the season. This could include Columbus, Oxford, Greenwood, Meridian, and Jackson-area teams. This could also include playing against other SSA age/gender Challenge teams (e.g. U10 boys vs. U10 girls, U10 girls vs. U12 girls, etc.) – sometimes, the girls beat the boys, and sometimes the younger kids beat the older kids. Typically, Challenge teams from other cities take turns traveling to each other's location a few weeks or months apart.
- ☉ Expect each player will get to play approximately equal time in each friendly. And, each player on a tournament team will get to play approximately 50% of each game. No one will be a "bench warmer", regardless of the impact they have on the overall performance of the team. Note that

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50% play time does not mean equal play time. Some players, particularly if a competitive A team is formed, may play more than 50% of the game if they possess the stamina and skills to help the team be competitive.

- ☛ Expect to see individual players, as well as the teams as a whole, improve & develop over the course of the season.

Parents whose only expectation is winning may be disappointed. The coaches cannot, of course, guarantee the teams will win, or even be competitive when playing other Challenge teams. Parents should not expect these things either, and should not pressure the kids to win. The coaches will always approach games with a winning attitude, and will play to win. Ultimately though, winning only matters when you are getting paid to play. As long as the kids play their hardest and don't give up, everyone should be satisfied no matter what the outcome.

### WHO ARE THE CHALLENGE COACHES?

SSA Challenge Coaches are approved by the SSA Board as well as certified through the Mississippi Soccer Association, have attended coaching clinics, have tournament experience, and are capable of dealing with the emotional and physical aspects of the game (e.g. injuries, tantrums, fighting, etc.).

Head Coach **FirstName LastName** playing & coaching experience:

- ☛ Played approx. X years in youth soccer
- ☛ X years REC head coach U8 in MS (SSA)
- ☛ X years REC head coach U10 in MS (SSA)
- ☛ Mississippi Level 2 coaching certification
- ☛ 2006-07 U10 girls Challenge asst. coach

Asst. Coach **FirstName LastName** playing & coaching experience:

- ☛ Played approx. X years in youth soccer
- ☛ X years REC head coach U8 in MS (SSA)
- ☛ X years REC head coach U10 in MS (SSA)
- ☛ Mississippi Level 2 coaching certification
- ☛ 2006-07 U10 girls Challenge asst. coach

Other unofficial coaching assistants (if any): **FirstName LastName #1, FirstName LastName #2**

Assistant team managers: **Asst. Mgr. FirstName LastName #1, Asst. Mgr. FirstName LastName #2**

### FINAL THOUGHTS AND OTHER TIDBITS FROM THE COACHES...

**COACHES:** this section, along with the bullet items below, is here for you to add any specific info you may have as it pertains to your particular team or situation. Any of the bullet items below which are highlighted in yellow can be deleted if they do not pertain to your situation (if they are not highlighted, leave them in this document for the parents to see). If you have a coaching philosophy, this is the place to put it in writing. If you think of something which would be good to include in the parent orientation manual for all age/gender groups and for future Challenge teams, please forward it back to the Challenge Coordinator for review.

- ☛ Parents must maintain health insurance coverage throughout the season on their child. Please notify the coach & team manager immediately if you lose coverage. MSA has secondary insurance, but not primary. All injuries resulting from participation are the responsibility of the parent.
- ☛ Each team formed from the player pool will need two (2) designated goalies. Goalies will play at least half of the games & friendlies in goal – this includes practice scrimmages. Depending on circumstances, goalies may possibly play other field positions as well, but this is at the discretion of the coaches. If needed, goalies will receive special training outside of normal practice time. Goalies are normally taller players, and the coaches will ask for volunteers first. If we do not get two

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volunteers per team, the coaches will be forced to designate goalies based on who we believe will be best suited for the position. We cannot have “goalie by committee” as is often done in REC. Please support us if your child is picked to be a goalie.

- ☺ Parents are not allowed to shout verbal instructions or attempt to coach their child or other players during the games. Coaching from the parent-side of the field is illegal, and in the extreme the referees can eject you from the fields. In any event, the players likely cannot hear you, and even if they can, it often just confuses them. Even if you get away with it, unless you are experienced in coaching soccer, you may very well be instructing your child to do the wrong thing. Shouts of encouragement are, of course, always OK.
- ☺ Players, parents and associated family members, coaches, and everyone else associated with the team and SSA are expected to exhibit good sportsmanship at all times. The coaches will not tolerate poor sportsmanship between our own players, nor will we tolerate poor sportsmanship if our players exhibit it towards players from another team.
- ☺ The coaches will attempt to always create a fun & relaxed atmosphere, both at practices, and during games. It has been well documented that the primary reason for kids dropping out of soccer (as well as other sports) is not having fun, whether at practices or games. Players that are relaxed and having fun are less likely to make mistakes, and fewer mistakes will make the team more competitive which improves our chances of winning.
- ☺ Soccer is not an individual sport. Because of this, the players will either win as a team, or they will lose as a team. No one player will win or lose games. At the Challenge level, players must make the transition from thinking they can do it all themselves, to playing together as a team. Soccer teams which are competitive pass the ball effectively – soccer teams with players who “hog the ball” thinking they can do it all themselves usually lose.

Everything we do as coaches is for your kids. You may not always see eye-to-eye and agree with us, but we will always have your child's best interests at heart. We thank you in advance for your support, and look forward to a wonderful season working with your kids.

Head Coach FirstName LastName  
Asst. Coach FirstName LastName