



# PARENT HANDBOOK

## Ontario Player Development League (OPDL)

### 2016 GUIDE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF OPDL PLAYERS

September 2015

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# Contents

- Welcome to the Ontario Player Development League ..... 3
- Why Ontario Player Development League? ..... 4
- One cog in a better end-to-end soccer development system..... 5
- What's different about the OPDL? ..... 6
- Selecting an OPDL License Holder & Player Transfers..... 8
- How to Transfer within OPDL ..... 11
- Your Commitment as a Parent ..... 13
- What Will Be Asked Of Your Child ..... 14
- How to Support Your Child's Participation in OPDL ..... 15
- OPDL Costs..... 17
- OPDL Schedule..... 19
- OPDL Game Day..... 20
- Player Evaluations & Trials ..... 24
- OPDL Surveys & Feedback ..... 25
- APPENDIX A..... 26

## Welcome to the Ontario Player Development League

Welcome to the Ontario Player Development League, now in its third season! We are delighted that you will be part of this exciting initiative that raises the bar in the development of youth soccer players in Ontario.

The OPDL is different from other leagues you may have experienced. The commitment for both players and you, as parents, is higher. The OPDL operates differently to what you may be accustomed to in the past.

The OPDL was created and developed with one clear goal - to help Ontario's best young players fulfil their potential, enshrined in the League's new vision statement: To help Ontario soccer's best become their best.

This handbook is designed to help answer the many questions you may have about the OPDL, both now and throughout the season.

We hope you will have an enjoyable and rewarding year of soccer with your child and witness the early development of their high performance career.



## Why Ontario Player Development League?

OPDL was developed by the Ontario Soccer Association over a three year period from 2011 to 2014. It rose from a desire in many Ontario youth soccer clubs to participate in a genuine high performance player development League; One that was athlete-centric, standards-based and focused on high level training and coaching excellence, rather than simply winning and losing.



The Ontario Soccer Association formed a committee of technical experts called the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to investigate our system of player development. 'Come up with a better way to help our best become their best,' OSA President Ron Smale said.

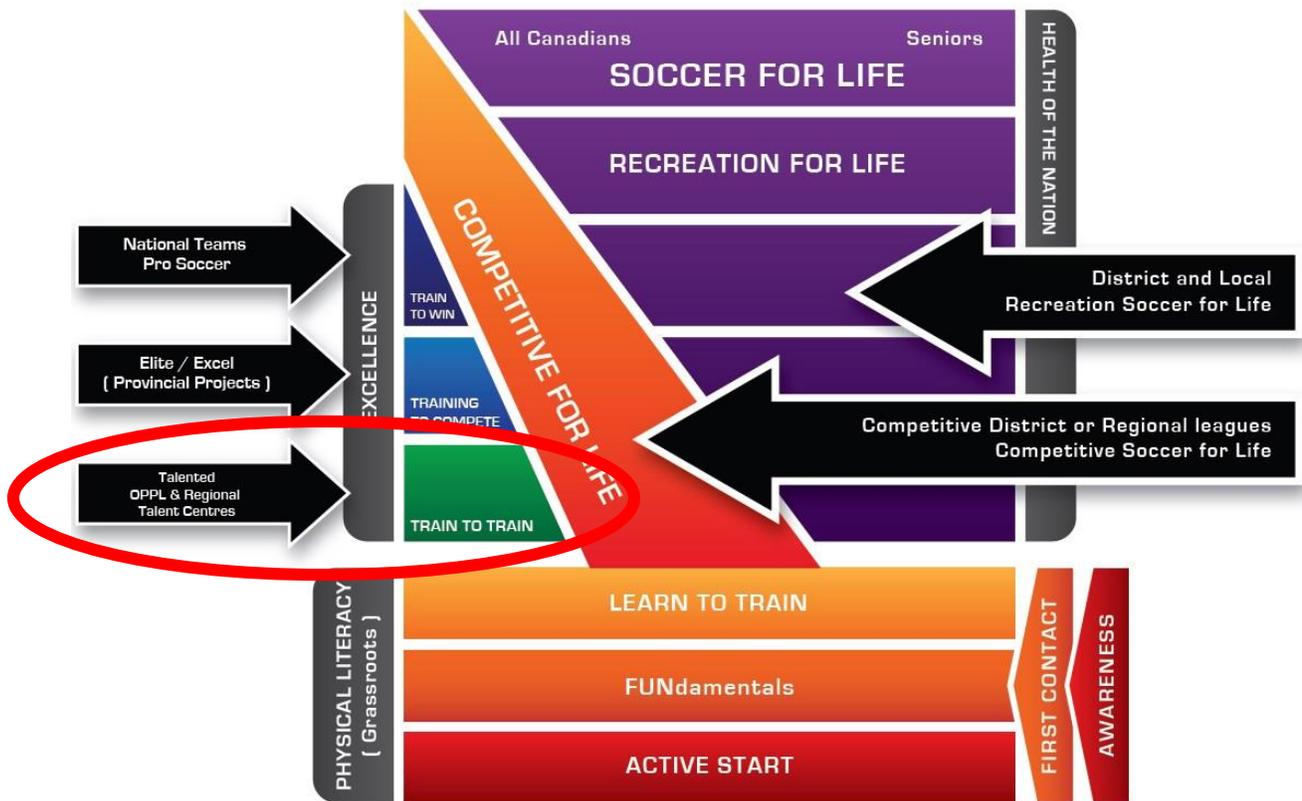
In looking at the old system the Committee spotted some important flaws:

- The best players weren't necessarily playing with or against each other frequently enough.
- There was no real player development accountability for clubs, who were instead rewarded for winning games and punished for losing them (through league relegation).
- Players would continuously migrate to a 'winning team' to remain in a top league, sometimes to the detriment of their development as a player.
- There were little-to-no high level coaching standards or requirements in youth soccer leagues.
- There was no cohesion in player development programming from club to club, with each club or team independently 'doing their own thing'.
- There was no clear pathway of leagues to scouting and showcasing opportunities.
- Provincial team programs were not connected to youth soccer leagues and would remove players from their club environments, creating a less than ideal structure.
- The leagues offered very little administrative management of league operations, with much of this work falling on the clubs or teams participating.

Out of these observations, OPDL was born. Ontario's first standards-based youth soccer league, built to tackle these problems in the system, raise the level of training and development for players and coaches and give Ontario's top young players the opportunity to fully unleash their potential.

## One cog in a better end-to-end soccer development system

OPDL is just one piece of a large, transformative process we are undergoing that modernizes Ontario soccer, bringing it in line with how top soccer nations in the world develop their young players. Called Long Term Player Development (LTPD), it stretches from making the game more enjoyable for very young children, into focusing on skills development in formative years, through to fun again for older recreational players.



LTPD also helps highly talented youth players, those who have the ability to develop into top players and possibly represent their country or play professionally.

This part of the LTPD framework is largely represented by the OPDL, an environment where the top players can not only play against each other more often, but also train at the higher level that is needed to unlock their full potential. It is primarily at the OPDL where players will initially be scouted for higher soccer opportunities, including provincial/national team selection and university scholarships.



## What's different about the OPDL?

OPDL isn't just a soccer league. In fact, competition is a relatively small part of it. The League moves the focus from solely trying to win a game at all costs, to win a trophy or to avoid relegation to developing players through a structured blend of high performance training and age-appropriate game play. In OPDL, you will see mandatory heightened training with sport science and sport medicine components, complimenting regular weekly game play against other top players, from May to October.



OPDL is also intrinsically linked to The OSA's High Performance programs. OSA Talented Pathway (provincial and regional) technical staff will be actively involved in working with License Holders to develop OPDL players. You will see them actively monitoring players' development at Interleague games. And at older ages, you will spot other scouting personnel, including national team personnel. It means your child doesn't have to worry about performing at a 'one off' try-out or winning a key promotion game. Once they are in, they are in as long as selected by their OPDL License Holder.

Here are some of the key differences you will see in OPDL, and may have noticed already:

### Organisations enter OPDL, not teams

OPDL accepts organisations into the League in their entirety, based on their ability to develop top youth talent. It means accountability is driven in soccer organisations that wish to develop top youth soccer players to maintain the high standards of excellence that is needed. Once an organization is accepted into the OPDL, all of their eligible teams may participate.

### No promotion or relegation

In OPDL, there is no promotion or relegation. Teams remain in OPDL as long as their organization retains an OPDL license. This ensures, the on-field performance of the team does not interfere with the development of the players. The players are now not pressured to “win a game at any cost” in order to avoid relegation from the League.

### Minimum coaching standards

Head Coaches must hold at minimum a CSA National B coaching license (or equivalent) for the U14 age groups and above and at minimum an OSA Provincial B License for U13 age group. At U13 age group, OSA Regional High Performance Staff will assist the development of OPDL Coaches, supporting implementation of the OPDL technical philosophy.

Furthermore, all Assistant Coaches must be a certified “Provincial C” or equivalent. This ensures all coaching staff on OPDL teams have an assessed coaching qualification. Female teams must also have a female coach at minimum. This promotes opportunities for top female coaches, who understand the nuances of coaching the female game.



### Minimum training standards

OPDL imposes minimum standards in the training programs. OPDL License Holders must provide a year-round training program with appropriate periodization (different training at different times of the year with managed calendar breaks) with a minimum of three training sessions a week. License Holders must also have a proper sport science program directed by a qualified provider managing the physiological development of the players. It will cover fitness, strength and conditioning, injury prevention, nutrition and lifestyle management. This way, OPDL players will develop as fully-rounded athletes, not just talented players.

### Competition play at high quality venues with high technical oversight

Quality standards also extend to competition play in the OPDL. Unlike most other leagues, OPDL games are played at high quality venues that must be pre-approved by the OPDL, allowing players to compete in the best game environment possible. In-Conference rounds are held on a home-and-away basis at approved OPDL venues. Interleague rounds are held that involve teams playing teams in their opposite conference. For these rounds, top neutral central venues are selected, allowing the Ontario Soccer Association to supervise of the development of OPDL players and scout them for regional or provincial opportunities. This also allows OPDL players to familiarize themselves with top sports facilities and high performance sports programs based at some venues.

### High quality game day experience

OPDL provides a high degree of onsite event support to competition. This includes assigning and paying for Match Officials, medical personnel and onsite event coordinators. Interleague rounds are fully operated by the OPDL, meaning License Holders have no commitments on game day except to focus on their players. OPDL aims to provide a consistently high quality experience not only for players, but for parents as well.

### A longer competition season

OPDL is longer than traditional leagues. Spanning 20 weeks in 2016 from May to October, with training required to be resumed from January to April. It creates a year-round, turn-key training and development program for Ontario's top players, rather than a seasonal program. Players develop faster and more opportunity is provided for them to develop high level soccer careers.

### A year-round, periodized training calendar

OPDL License Holders are required to train their OPDL players year round. However, this doesn't mean there are no breaks. Planned training breaks are written into the annual training calendar to allow players to rest, recoup and spend time with their families and friends. Large breaks occur in December and July, with other breaks scheduled on long weekends to allow players to avail of these holidays.



## Selecting an OPDL License Holder & Player Transfers

OPDL clubs are selected every two years and hold a license to operate in the League for a two year period. Acquiring an OPDL license is tough. Organisations have to show quality in all areas; not just their programs and coaches, but their facilities, planning, even their financial position. You can be confident that any OPDL club you choose is of a high quality.

That's not to say every organization is identical. License Holders have the freedom to design their programs, appoint their coaching staff, and set their fees as they see fit, as long as they meet the minimum standards required by the OPDL.

To reduce unnecessary player migration, once committed to a License Holder, your child will not be permitted to move organisations until the end of the OPDL season. Once you and your child make a decision and you're committed to a License Holder, you will be required to sign a "Player Commitment Letter" with them that binds your child to that License Holders for the year (unless voluntarily released). So when choosing an organization, ask questions and do your research. Once you join, you are committed for the year and cannot change your mind and move to another OPDL License Holders without express permission of the OPDL. Take the time to ensure you get it right. Remember, the goal is to give your child the best possible training and development opportunities in a stable, supportive environment. So to start with, employ these basic rules:

### Target the OPDL license holder closest to you

The training requirements for OPDL players are demanding. You should do what you can to join a program that is as close to you as possible. Travel requirements on the weekends can be onerous at times, so try to minimize further training-related travel commitments for you and your child by choosing a License Holder that is closer to you.

### Target organisations your child has played at before

Does the organisation where your child has played their early soccer career holds an OPDL license? If so, focus on this organization as a priority. You will know the set-up and the coaching staff will know your child. If they are successfully selected, integration of your child's development pathway will be easier than if they join a new organization.

### Don't select a license holder based on price alone

Obviously, you must consider costs and budget in your selection process, but make sure you look at the program detail alongside it. For the fee being charged, exactly what do you get? There may be differences between License Holders. Some may have more coaching staff, a more intensive training program or other benefits that drive a higher fee. Whichever License Holder you choose, you'll receive a high standard. But remember that a higher price may result in more program benefits than others.



### **Avoid selecting an organization based on an individual coach**

Review coaching personnel, but select a License Holder based on the entirety of their program offering, not one individual coach. Your child may have had a strong experience with a certain coach in the past. But inevitably, coaches will move in and out of OPDL License Holders over time. Don't feel you have to follow them to where they have gone!

OPDL License Holders are required to retain highly qualified coaching staff in their OPDL programs to maintain their license. Remember, to be successful your child will have to play under many coaches with different coaching styles. No doubt your child's new coach will be of a high quality and it is an important part of their development that they learn to play under them.

### **Don't choose a License Holder based on other players playing in the team**

OPDL is about developing athletes, not teams. It's easy to want to remain part of a team that has been successful in the past, soccer is a team sport. The friendships and camaraderie that goes with it are hard to let go. However, your child will receive the same quality of training and development regardless of who else is on their roster. So keep your focus on the quality of the organization's program offering. If you're serious about their development, it is far more important than your child's teammates.

### **Don't try to trade organisations off against each other**

Once your child is selected, a License Holder will reasonably expect a commitment in return from you as soon as possible. The practice of trying out at multiple organisations, securing multiple squad offers and attempting to use this as leverage for preferential terms is discouraged by the OPDL. Not only is it unfair to License Holders, it creates instability for players and distrust between organisations and parents. Remember, you are about to entrust the License Holder with the welfare of your child. Pitting organisations unreasonably against each other will not be appreciated by OPDL License Holders, nor supported. So identify OPDL License Holders that make sense for you and, if offered a place, accept and commit to the one that best suits your child's development.

### **What Questions Should I Ask When Evaluating An OPDL Club?**

As a guide, here are a few questions that you might want to consider when talking to a License Holder:

- Why has the organization decided to acquire an OPDL license?
- What is the organization's player development philosophy?
- What experience does the Technical Director have developing high level youth soccer players?
- What are the coaching backgrounds of your OPDL Head Coaches?
- Have the organization's OPDL team management submitted clear CPIC certification?
- What experience does the organization's sport science provider have working with youth soccer players?
- What is the organisation's injury management and rehabilitation protocol?



- How will the Head Coach monitor/measure their players' development?
- What reports or updates will players' parents be given on the development of their child?
- What does the License Holder expect of me, as a player's parent?
- What commitment does the program expect of its players?
- Where do the organization's OPDL squads train indoors over winter?
- Will the License Holder issue a budget to parents for program costs for OPDL for the year?
- How will the team travel to and from central venues and what is expected of parents?
- What other costs will I be exposed to when participating in the OPDL?
- Does the organization offers an athlete assistance program to cover cases of financial hardship?



## How to Transfer within OPDL

### End-Of-Season Transfers & Trials

OPDL does not encourage you to move your child from one OPDL License Holder to another without an extremely compelling reason or an irresolvable problem. After October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, you are free to renew your commitment with your existing organization or seek other opportunities with other License Holders.

If you do wish to move, OPDL License Holders will hold trials in the Fall for player selection for the following year. You can bring your child to these if you wish. Specific dates and times of trials are at the License Holder's discretion, so check with the organisations you are interested in the early Fall.

To attend a trial, however, you must have the Technical Director of your existing License Holder issue an "OPDL Open Trial Permission Form", to ensure transparency in player movements amongst OPDL License Holders. Note that an OPDL organization is not permitted to trial an existing OPDL player without presentation of a signed "OPDL Open Trial Permission form" from their existing organization. There are guidelines for OPDL License Holders to follow when hosting trials, but the selection of players from trials is entirely at their discretion. Moreover, they are not obliged to select players from the trial process.

Once the OPDL Player Commitment expires on December 31<sup>st</sup>, a "Transfer Window" opens until April 15<sup>th</sup>, when OPDL License Holders must submit their player rosters for the year. During this time, you are free to approach any OPDL License Holder you wish with regard to your child joining their program. Note, however, that OPDL License Holders are not permitted to directly solicit you or your child at any time, and if you experience instances of this, they should be reported to the OPDL immediately.

If you do plan to move your child, aim to do so as soon as possible, as training restarts in January of the following year and License Holders will be moving to secure their team rosters as soon as possible in the New Year or possibly earlier.

### Mid-Season Transfers

Although mid-season transfers of players from one OPDL License Holder to another are as a rule not permitted, exceptions can be made in certain mitigating circumstances. This relates to situations where a player is forced to leave a club for reasons outside of their direct control (eg, a family relocating). Under these circumstances, the transfer may be allowed, but must be approved by the OPDL.

You will be entitled to a pro-rated refund any fees you have paid from the License Holder you are departing, but will be expected to pay pro-rated fees to the License Holder you are joining for the remainder of the season. Any outstanding fees with your existing License Holder must be settled before the transfer is approved.

If you wish to join an OPDL License Holder mid-season and your child is not currently with an OPDL License Holder, you may do so freely if the License Holder has space on their roster and your child is duly selected.



## OPDL Sub Roster

OPDL License Holders are permitted to carry a “sub-roster” of players. These players can be called on at any time during the season at the discretion of the OPDL License Holder to fill roster gaps that may occur during the season through injury or unavailability. These players must be named at the beginning of the OPDL season and can be adjusted at the July mid-season break in accordance with OPDL rules. Players in the “sub-roster” are permitted to participate in other soccer programs and/or League competition through their OPDL organization when not 'called up'.

Training arrangements for “sub-roster” players are at the discretion of the OPDL License Holder. However, if your child is named to a “sub-roster”, it is likely that the training program required of them will be similar or even identical to the main roster players, so be prepared for that commitment and ensure you ask and are clear before committing.

Contributory team fees that are applicable to “sub-roster” players are also at the discretion of the OPDL License Holder, and may vary from one to another based on their own policies and the training program that these players will be required to commit to.



## Your Commitment as a Parent

As a parent of an emerging high performance athlete, the commitment asked from you is in many ways as high as that of the player. By its very nature, high performance sport is tough. It tends to be inconvenient, uncomfortable and expensive. But the rewards for the pursuit of excellence are great!

The ability of an athlete and their support group to withstand these pressures and challenges helps define their success. No athlete makes it at this level without a strong commitment to do so, fuelled by an insatiable passion to succeed, and a dependable support group.



As you commence this new journey with your child, it is important that you are as committed to the process as your child is. Take the time needed to discuss OPDL and what it means with your organization, coach, spouse, your child and other parents in the program. Enter into OPDL with a full understanding of the challenges it will present and a commitment to meet them. Do so, and the experience will be exciting and uniquely rewarding for both you and your child.

Here are some of the core commitments you are adhering to when you join an OPDL program:

- **A year-round soccer training program** that will limit (but no means eliminate) your opportunities for family vacations and other trips away. Your child will be expected to routinely attend all training sessions unless for an unavoidable reason.
- **Bringing your child to and from training at least three nights a week.** This may be more depending on your OPDL License Holder's training program and the nature of the training at various times of the year.
- **Soccer games every weekend for 20 weeks**, from May until October. Your OPDL License Holder will probably have pre-season exhibition games as well in April or March.
- **Significant travel to and from OPDL games**, some of which will be out-of-town and may require overnighting for you and your child.
- **Soccer-related costs that could be as much as \$5,000 per year**, depending on your OPDL License Holder's program and fees.

As their parent, your child will look to you as a source of primary support as they make this important transition to the lifestyle of a high performance athlete.

It will be daunting for you, but you are not alone! Look to your License Holder for support, as well other parents in your child's program and other family members and friends.



## What Will Be Asked Of Your Child

Once your child joins an OPDL program, there will be a level of commitment expected of them by their organization. This extends beyond playing in games and training, it extends to how your child conducts themselves as an athlete when alone, with regard to things like nutrition and lifestyle management.

It's part of developing the attitude and mental fortitude of a high performance athlete. And whilst the commitment is ultimately up to the player, you as their parent and/or guardian play an important role in helping them with the life changes that go with this.

Amongst other things, here is what your child will be committing to when joining an OPDL License Holder:

1. A commitment to the entire training program for the full calendar year.
2. Attendance at all training sessions, except for good reason such as sickness or injury.
3. Attendance at all off-field sport science sessions, including nutrition and lifestyle counselling sessions, gym work and tactical/analysis sessions.
4. Attendance at all team meetings prescribed by the team Head Coach.
5. Attendance at all OPDL games, including pre-season exhibitions or tournaments.
6. Commitment to any personalized training, injury prevention or injury management work.
7. Commitment to any performance testing and/or evaluations performed by the License Holder.
8. Adherence to the License Holder's overall policies and codes of conduct.
9. Adherence to the OPDL's player code of conduct.

There are also other important mental commitments that you should be aware of, as your child experiences a new and more intensive level of soccer programming. These include:

- Mentally focusing on training more than winning or losing games.
- Mental, as well as physical fatigue from a heightened training.
- Commitment required to integrated sport science programming and off-field training.
- Self-discipline required regarding proper nutrition and lifestyle management in the face of pressure from peers and friends who are not athletes.
- The impact of a more limited social life and less free time compared to friends and siblings.
- Fatigue from significant travel, particularly on the weekend.
- Mental fortitude needed to rehabilitate from injury, if it occurs.
- Mentally recovering from defeat, rejection or other developmental setbacks.
- Balancing the pressures of school with athletic commitments.
- Managing a drop in motivation, boredom or self-doubt.

All in all, the commitment your child should be prepared for is substantial. To meet it, they'll need support from you, a strong desire to succeed and a burning passion to learn to play high level soccer.



## How to Support Your Child's Participation in OPDL

Whilst the commitment OPDL participation requires may seem daunting, it is by no means impossible. And the reward will be clear when you see the development and improvement of your child's playing skills and their growth as a person outside of sport.

As mentioned, your child's success will depend on the degree of support that you as a parent/guardian can give. Fundamentally, this relates to your emotional support of your child, as well as practical support in ensuring they arrive at and are picked up from training on time and are properly prepared and cared for at OPDL games, alongside your OPDL License Holder's efforts.



Make sure you ask your Head Coach what you can do to properly support your child throughout the year. Ask for advice on what you should focus on at particular times in the program and why (eg. ensure you know what you should focus on during OPDL breaks and long weekends).

### As well as that, you may want to consider the following:

- Attend training sessions when you can, understand your child's training regime and what they are focussing on.
- Discuss training session on their completion with your child, focusing on learning outcomes and positive points.
- Meet with your Head Coach at times prescribed by the OPDL License Holder and understand what you can do to help support your child's development.
- Take your child out to the park or street and kick a ball around with them! Get them to show you what they have learned - they will be keen to do so. Have fun doing it! The more casual practice they get, the faster they will develop.
- If your child suffers a setback or are disappointed, remind them that development is long term and that we don't learn without making mistakes. Failure is where our best work is done!
- If your child starts to lack motivation or commitment, remind them what they are aiming for
- Maintain a calendar of your child's training program and mark their progression through it. Visual images of progress are an important motivational tool for all high performance athletes.
- Encourage your child to start a training diary. Many top athletes do. Sometimes private reflection in writing can be a usual motivational tool, particularly for adolescents.
- If you can, accompany your child to OPDL games. Show as much support for them as a spectator as possible. Remember that negative remarks to opposing players, coaches, parents or the match officials will only embarrass and stress your child.
- When a formal evaluation is given of your child, make sure you understand it. Speak to the Head Coach if necessary to ensure that you do. When discussing it with your child, reinforce the positives and development goals outlined.



- Never be critical of your child's coach, their program or other players on the team in front of your child. This will only undermine your child's confidence in their coach, the program itself and ultimately their ability to develop properly.
- Unless unavoidable, remain committed to your OPDL License Holder. Avoid moving to another organization if your child does not meet all their development goals. Moving them may, in fact, make their problems worse as players do not develop well when constantly moved into new training environments.
- Regardless of their performance and development, make sure you create a celebration event for your child at the end of the OPDL season. At the very least, they will have committed to a training program and game schedule like never before seen in Ontario soccer. That in its own right will be a reason to celebrate! There is no doubt that by the end of it, they will have become a better soccer player, stronger athlete and better-rounded person as a result!



## OPDL Costs

There is no denying that OPDL demands a substantial time and cost commitment from players' parents. The League significantly raises the bar on the intensity of routine training (including the addition of mandatory sport science), qualifications of coaches and length of League season. So costs naturally rise to meet this much expanded youth high performance soccer program.



Whilst these costs may seem daunting compared to costs of other soccer

Leagues and programs, they are consistent with high performance programming in other sports. At this level of development, annual costs for gymnastics are often around \$7,000 for parents of young high performance gymnasts. High performance youth baseball can cost parents anything from \$5,000 to \$12,000. And hockey is extremely cost intensive, often costing parents \$10,000 per year or more at an equivalent performance level.

OPDL License Holders are free to charge their OPDL programs to you at whatever annual fee they deem necessary. They are also free to establish whatever payment schedule they deem appropriate and this may mean full payment of the annual fee at the beginning of the year.

OPDL charges an annual league fee per team (14-18 players). The 2016 League Fee will be announced by late 2015. Your child's portion of this will be included in the fee charged by your License Holder. OPDL league fees cover the costs of League operation which includes all central venue game field costs, match officials costs and other game day costs such as event staff, medical staff and OPDL technical staff. In other Leagues, these costs would be paid for separately by teams and appear as line items on the team budget. OPDL includes them as part of the League fee.

When assessing the cost of OPDL, you should be clear from your organization what is covered in your program fee and what is not. For example, many License Holders will include playing and training kit in their fee. Some may expect you to manage travel costs outside of the program fee. Others may offer group team travel, if this is the case, you should ensure you are aware if an extra fee applies. For significant out-of-town travel, your team may need to stay overnight at the game location, which will have further cost implications.

When assessing costs, make sure you are clear on the following items and understand that other items not listed below may exist:

- Core coaching costs
- Additional specialist coaching
- Sport science / sport medicine provider
- First aid and medical supplies
- Training field costs
- Indoor training facility costs
- Training equipment (balls, cones, etc)
- Playing and training kit & boots
- Added team apparel & equipment
- Pre-season exhibitions & tournaments
- Travel costs to/from training
- Travel costs to/from OPDL games
- Accommodation & meals at games
- Hydration, snacks and other incidentals



## Athlete Assistance Program

OPDL runs a program that offers financial assistance to players where financial barriers prevent them from participating in the OPDL, when they would otherwise be able to. Applications are submitted by OPDL License Holders to the OPDL and successful applicants receive a grant towards the player's OPDL costs. Amount for the 2016 program will be published by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

OPDL License Holders may offer further assistance programs on top of the OPDL Athlete Assistance Program to help manage the other costs OPDL players are subject to. These programs are at the discretion of each organization and you should enquire as to the availability of financial assistance and what is needed to qualify for it.

Athlete Assistance applications are submitted by OPDL License Holders to the OPDL for consideration during the off-season from December until March. If you believe you qualify for assistance, please contact your License Holder for further details.



## OPDL Schedule

In 2016, OPDL will run every weekend from Saturday May 7th to Sunday October 30th, with rest breaks on long weekends and a mid-season break from July 30th to August 12th. Games are played consistently on the weekends for three fundamental reasons:

1. Athletes are conditioned to a routine of training and game play that is expected in high performance soccer.
2. The training of all OPDL teams in all OPDL organisations can be coordinated and delivered to a consistently high quality
3. All players can be consistently monitored and evaluated, giving all players the best opportunity for regional and provincial selection over the entire season, not just one try-out or showcase.



In 2016, the U13 games are played on Saturday and the U14 and U15 games are played on Sunday due to facilities availability. The Interleague rounds are played over the course of a full weekend and are important evaluation dates in the OPDL calendar.

### OPDL Venue Details

Central venues are located across different cities in Ontario. The list of Central Venues along with venues used by each License Holder to host their home venue will be released by OPDL by April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

### Events outside the OPDL Schedule

An OPDL player must place OPDL soccer activities as priority over other soccer programming, with the exception of participation in Provincial Screening, Provincial Projects Weekends, CSA Regional Excel Centres, national team programs or official trial or development opportunities as deemed appropriate by the OPDL.

To ensure events do not conflict with periodization and/or OPDL activities, exhibition games, showcases or tournaments must be pre-approved by the OPDL. Approval to such events is done in writing by The OSA. If you have any questions/concerns over the status of a particular event, please review approval with the Technical Director of your License Holder or contact the OSA.



## OPDL Game Day

### Before The Game

On the day of your OPDL game, you will be required to transport your child to and from the game's venue, or the License Holder may offer to do this on your behalf as part of a team initiative. OPDL teams must be at the competition venue a full hour before game kick-off, so make sure you are aware of the travel plans from your License Holder and leave plenty of time to arrive on time, particularly for early starts. Game starting times are usually 9am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm and 5pm, although there are occasions where different start times may be required.



### Accommodation

There may be times when you will need overnight accommodation at the location of the venue. Your team management should notify you when and where accommodation will be required and on which night. OPDL has issued accommodation options to OPDL License Holders for its central venues, some of which offer excellent preferential rates for OPDL teams. If your team is not booking accommodation, they will be able to issue this hotel information for you to make your reservations.

### On Arrival

On arrival at the venue, your team management will be advised of spectator facilities and amenities, which will vary from venue to venue. Some venues have full concessions and permanent spectator seating. Some have less amenities, but your team will be notified in advance so you know what to bring with you on the day to make your OPDL game day experience an enjoyable one. Please note that under venue rules the following are not permitted at any OPDL venue:

- ✘ pets of any kind
- ✘ glass bottles or containers
- ✘ alcohol or tobacco
- ✘ food inside the field area

Many venues have change rooms, but some do not. In these instances, your child will be required to arrive at the venue in full playing uniform. If change rooms are available, your child will go with the rest of their team to prepare for their game, which will include full warm-up. During this time, you should have as little contact with your child as possible, as pre-game routine and preparation is part of the development of a high performance athlete that OPDL will be trying to instil in your child.

### Spectator Areas

The OPDL will notify your team of the spectator area, which will be located on the opposite side of the field to the team benches and technical areas (spectators are not permitted on this side of the field). Most



venues are equipped with either permanent or temporary seating or bleachers. Where they are not, your team will be notified in advance so you can bring your own portable seating if you require it.

### Food and Drink

You are welcome to bring food and non-alcoholic refreshments to be consumed during the game. Most venues will have concessions for your purchase of food and refreshments if you require it. Please ensure that you do not leave any litter or garbage and make sure you dispose of it in litter bins at the venue or bring it with you when you vacate the venue.

### Banners and Signs

Your support of your child and their team is actively encouraged and you are welcome to bring banners and signs of support as such. Signage that exhibits offensive remarks of any kind are not permitted, nor are signs or banners exhibiting corporate logos or advertising messages. Your team is permitted to bring one sponsor banner, to be hung near the team bench.

### Technical Personnel

OPDL technical personnel will be in attendance at all central venues, observing OPDL games and the development of OPDL players. Their role will be to work with the technical staff at OPDL License Holders and assist with the development of their OPDL players.



They will also be assessing players for selection into provincial talent development events. From time to time, other technical personnel from outside the OPDL may attend games for scouting purposes. This may include representatives from the national team program, or scouts from universities or professional soccer clubs. OPDL technical personnel will be identifiable in their OPDL/OSA uniforms but parents are asked not to approach them or 'promote' their child to them. They are present purely in an observatory capacity and should not be distracted from their job on OPDL game day. Needless to say, if your child is showing the advances to merit it, they will be selected for further opportunities regardless of what you might say to technical staff.

### Match Officials

The OPDL is a learning environment, but not just for players. It is a development environment for Ontario's Match Officials as well. Match Officials assigned to OPDL Games will hold a minimum Grade 6. As such, OPDL Match Officials will be of a higher quality, as is appropriate for this level of play. However, they are still learning and developing and are prone to mistakes and open to improvement.



Mentors will be onsite at all OPDL games monitoring the performance of OPDL Match Officials and managing their development. Please do not approach Match Officials or mentors at any time to challenge a decision that has been made during the game. Exhibit the same level of respect and support for these learning Officials as is asked for the players. Remember, without Match Officials, we have no game! OPDL is very important to develop our best referees, so please help us make it the effective development arena it is intended to be.



## During The Game

During game time, remember that OPDL is a development league, where the development of the players is of more importance than the actual game result. As such, players may be coached to try skills, passing patterns or other tactics and techniques that they are learning in training that may not produce good game outcomes at first. It is crucial that you as parents understand this, support it and work hard to create a positive, encouraging game environment. This gives all of the players the confidence to execute what they have learnt in training in a game environment.

## Code of Conduct

OPDL has issued a Code of Conduct that must be adhered to by all OPDL coaches, players and parents. Your License Holder should make this available to you and ensure you are committed to adhering to it. It is also enclosed at the back of this Handbook for your convenience.

Remember, the components of this Code are not there to make your life difficult or interfere with your enjoyment of the game. Instead, they are there to protect the best interests of all of the players and the vast majority of parents and coaches who conduct themselves in exemplary fashion.

To that end, feel free to support your child and their team and enjoy the game. But keep your remarks positive, encouraging and supportive. Do not issue instruction to your child on field. They will be trained to follow their coach's instructions, so instruction from you will create confusion.

## Half Time

During half time, your team will have a protocol that your child will need to follow. Do not attempt to communicate with or distract your child from the team's activities unless asked to do so by the team's management team.

## After the Game

Following the game's final whistle, your team will have a post-game routine which will probably include a team debriefing that the players will be trained to rigidly follow. To that end, parents should wait to meet with their child until team management indicate the player is free to do so. When you do meet with your child, keep your remarks supportive and encouraging, as they will likely be mentally and physically tired and in need of support from you.

Above all, remember that the result of the game is not as important as the development of your child! And this means their mental development as well as their physical and skills development. If you disagree with some of your coach's decisions or have questions or feedback from them, withhold them for 24 hours and follow the process set by your organization to engage with your coach.

# Player Evaluations & Trials

## Evaluations

During the year, your OPDL License Holder will be conducting evaluations and routine assessments of all of its players. This is an essential component of any meaningful player development program. It is also required of the organization by the OPDL.

OPDL requires that at least two formal evaluations are conducted on all players per year and that each evaluation is discussed with parents. However, OPDL License Holders may choose to do more at its discretion.

An organization may institute a variety of evaluation techniques to make assessments (such as skills testing). The nature of the evaluation will vary over the course of your child's development. But it will always monitor fundamentals of player development from physical, technical, tactical and psycho-social standpoints.

Your Head Coach should be able to explain the system of evaluation for your child. OPDL License Holders are expected to properly communicate evaluation feedback to players' parents or guardians. So make sure you ask about it at the beginning of the OPDL season, if you are not actively told by the organization.

Note that receiving feedback does not entitle you as a parent to dispute, reject or overturn your Head Coach's evaluation results, nor should you attempt to do so, even if the results are not what you or your child would ideally want. Instead, make sure you listen to and understand the evaluation feedback in full. Be sure to understand both positive and constructively critical feedback, so you can play your important role in helping your child process evaluation information and apply it moving forward.

Never disagree with the evaluation in front of your child or make excuses for them. Central to the OPDL is self-responsibility and player ownership of development outcomes. It may be hard to do as a parent. But it is imperative that you help your child bounce back from setbacks they'll feel in critical evaluation themselves, without your direct intervention.



## OPDL Surveys & Feedback

As OPDL is a learning environment, active feedback is sought across the entire program to continuously improve it year on year. The players are not the only ones evaluated in OPDL. Evaluation extends to the League itself and those who actively deliver it.

To that end, you as a parent play an important role in offering feedback that will be sought from you throughout the year that will be used to evaluate quality in the OPDL, and make improvements in the program where necessary.

After each OPDL game, your team management will be asked to complete an evaluation of the game day you have just experienced. In this questionnaire, they'll be asked to assess the venue, OPDL Coordinator and event staff, Match Officials and other factors that impact on an enjoyable game day experience for all. It is essential that you actively forward your feedback to your team management after your game for inclusion in this survey.

When doing so, follow these basic guidelines:

1. *Be honest, but fair.*

If criticism is warranted, by all means give it. But do not over exaggerate or be unreasonable in your criticism. Remember, your feedback directly ties into the performance management of people, so be aware of the impact of your feedback.

2. *If you were satisfied, make sure you say it!*

Too often, satisfied customers are silent and only unhappy customers speak up. It is important that good feedback, if deserved, is received by the OPDL so it can retain good staff, central venues and event practices where indicated.

3. *Don't give feedback immediately after the game if you are emotionally upset or angry.*

The chances are you will not give an accurate assessment of your experience than if you were calm. So wait at least 24 hours, until you are relaxed and thinking clearly before giving your feedback.

4. *Give specific examples if you can.*

If you have specific examples of where you experienced good or bad practice at the game, please give them. This will be important in OPDL pinpointing where specific issues are and actively managing them in the future.

You will also be asked on two occasions during the year to complete an online parent survey asking for feedback on your child's club and its OPDL program. This survey is very important to help OSA properly assess the quality and performance of all OPDL clubs, and their programs therein. So please ensure you complete these surveys when you receive them, using the same guidelines as noted above.

# APPENDIX A

## OPDL CODE OF CONDUCT

### General

The OPDL endeavours to provide a unique and challenging program that strives to provide the best possible environment for elite player development. To that end, the OPDL enforces a strict Code of Conduct for the behaviour that all individuals involved in or around the OPDL are expected to follow.

### Team Official Conduct

- ✓ Be respectful of the Match Officials and your opponents
- ✓ Refrain from using foul or abusive language
- ✓ Limit the amount of coaching done from the sidelines to only when necessary
- ✓ Keep your players and fans under control
- ✓ Remember that the score of the game is secondary to the opportunity for your players to demonstrate and improve their game
- ✓ Present a professional example to your players before, during and after competitions
- ✓ Coaches must adhere to any rules set out by the OSA and OPDL and policies and guidelines.
- ✓ All coaching/team officials must demonstrate responsible behavior in all training environments.
- ✓ The use of tobacco, consumption or possession of alcohol and illegal substances is not supported and may not be consumed while performing official License Holder/organization duties in the presence of minors.
- ✓ All OPDL Coaches agree to sign an OPDL Code of Conduct agreement.

### Player Conduct

- ✓ Be respectful of the Match Officials and your opponents
- ✓ Refrain from using foul or abusive language
- ✓ Remember that you are here to provide a strong performance, and that the result of the match is secondary to its benefit as a development tool.
- ✓ All players must demonstrate responsible behavior within all training environments.
- ✓ All OPDL players must agree to sign an OPDL Code of Conduct agreement.

### Fan/Spectator Conduct

- ✓ Be respectful of the Match Officials and the teams on the field
- ✓ Refrain from using foul or abusive language
- ✓ Keep comments positive.

- ✓ Refrain from coaching from the sidelines
- ✓ Remember that you are here to support your child, not win a game where achieving a result is not the primary objective.
- ✓ Keep in mind that your attendance at OPDL events is a privilege, not a right, and that the organization will be held responsible for the behaviour of its fans



## For Further Information

To find out more about the Ontario Player Development League, visit [www.ontariosoccer.net](http://www.ontariosoccer.net) or call the Ontario Soccer Association at 905-264-9390

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The information contained herein is subject to change.