

The following statements communicate club policies and answer many commonly asked questions. The Board of Directors reviews the policies regularly and updates do occur. We incorporate best practices from US Club Soccer, youth athletic thought-leaders, and child development experts to cultivate these policies along with practical experience running a competitive soccer club. The Board retains the right to amend these policies as needed.

### **1. Is Blackhawks SC Competitive, Rec, or Travel Rec Soccer?**

The Blackhawks Soccer Club is the competitive travel division of the River Dell Soccer Association (RDSA). To be clear, it is neither recreational soccer nor is it travel recreational soccer:

**It is a competitive soccer club.**

Our teams compete against other competitive soccer clubs in the Northern Counties Soccer Association or similar league. Information about the league can be found at <https://www.ncsanj.com>

### **2. Volunteers:**

Please keep in mind that Blackhawks is run and supported by volunteers from your community. They are your neighbors and parents themselves with full-time jobs and other commitments. The volunteers do this in combination for their love of community, their love of soccer, and to instill positive lessons about competition for children in our community. The Board thanks all of the volunteers for their efforts!

**3. General Commitment Expectations:** As a competitive soccer club there is a level of commitment expected in training availability, game availability, and behavior. Lack of commitment to games/practices and lack of player desire for competitive soccer are two primary reasons why teams struggle. Consequently, we ask that you consider these expectations thoughtfully. By accepting an invitation to the Blackhawks you, on behalf of your child, are agreeing to the parent and player codes of conduct (published on our website) as well as the commitment statements contained in this policy document. If commitment will be an issue, we recommend participating in the Recreational Soccer Program as it may be a more appropriate level of competition and commitment. Recreational Soccer is a wonderfully accessible way for all levels of skill to enjoy the beautiful game and we are proud supporters.

- a. **Time Commitment:** Players are expected to attend trainer led practice sessions and be available for scheduled games. If you know you will miss more than 2 games in a season (Fall and Spring considered separately) then please do NOT accept the invitation.
  
- b. **Weather Commitment:** Soccer is played in the rain, snow, and/or cold weather. Games and practices are postponed when lightning alarms (at fields) indicate the potential for unsafe conditions caused by lightning. The NCSA also applies rules where fields can be deemed unplayable by a club, municipalities, or at a referee's discretion. For full details please download "Rules of Competition" available on the NCSA's website: <https://www.ncsanj.com/>
  
- c. **Holiday Statement:** League games are scheduled on many holidays, such as Mother's and Father's Day. There are no league games Columbus Day Weekend, Memorial Day Weekend, or Easter Weekend. Coaches may sign-up their teams for tournaments during non-league weekends (ex Memorial Day Weekend) and/or for winter activities. However, that scheduling takes place after a dialogue between the coaches and parents regarding availability.
  
- d. **TeamSnap/Team Schedule Mgmt Expectations:** All teams will have their practice and game schedules posted to the TeamSnap app once schedules are released to coaches. It is your responsibility to update your child's availability for both practices and games in a timely fashion. While we strongly encourage you to update availability within the first week of posting it is a requirement to update final availability at a minimum 7 days before any event. Coaches and Club Admins need this time to coordinate guest players from teams within the club (per league rules) should it be needed for an upcoming game.

#### **4. Commitment and Player Behavior Expectations:**

As a competitive soccer club we have the expectation that players want to play competitively. What's more, the players should not be playing due to pressure from their parents/guardians. This is unfair to both the child and their teammates. As such, we strongly recommend you ask your child each year:

- a. Do you want to play at this level of competition?
- b. Are you enjoying yourself?

c. Are you committed to giving your best effort which includes showing up when you may not feel like it?

Coming with a positive attitude, listening, treating teammates respectfully, and giving it your best effort are all expected. Some silliness/distraction/mischievousness (age appropriate) is needed so soccer stays fun for the kids. However, too much and at inappropriate times can be disruptive. If your child cannot meet behavioral expectations then we ask that you do NOT accept the invitation and suggest the recreational division of RDSA may be more appropriate at this time.

### **5. Accepting Invites & Refund Policy:**

**Please understand that as a competitive program your child is not guaranteed a placement or an offer on a team.**

By making a payment you are accepting an invitation to be a Blackhawk along with the policies outlined in this document and others posted on our website.

We do our best to give time after team rosters are released for parents to rescind their acceptance (all without having to give a reason). If offered an invitation and you accept then you have 72 hours from the time sent to withdraw your child's acceptance.

Practically speaking you or any parent could reverse your child's acceptance in those 72 hours for any reason. If you accept and then withdraw in this 72 hour period the club will retain a \$100 deposit. Even in this initial period, it is disruptive to team formation when a player rescinds as other players may need to be moved, entire team's reformed, or entire team's disbanded as a result.

After this initial 72 hour period any partial refunds are at the discretion of the Board. As a board, we need to swiftly begin to register players with US Club Soccer (our governing body) and our teams with the NCSA so fees paid are used quickly.

Most importantly, it is increasingly disruptive to the kids who remain on the team when a parent retracts their child's acceptance after the initial 72 hours.

**6. Team Formation/Coach Ratings/Tryouts:** As a competitive club, the ratings from tryouts, trainers, and coaches drive the placement. The tryout ratings can only be used for new players, as there is no coach rating from the prior year. These ratings drive placements on teams by birth year as this is the max age cut-off set by current league rules.

**Single Birth Year & Mixed Birth Year Teams-**If we can create an additional team(s) for a single birth year then we will do so, but numbers often warrant that the need to combine two adjacent birth years to form a single team and keep kids playing.

*Please note many other sports form ONLY mixed birth year teams (usually across two grade levels)*

Still the league deploys a flighting mechanism to address factors of competitive readiness including, but not limited to age. Flighting is an attempt to even the playing field so our children are playing against competition of an appropriate level. In short, lower flighted divisions are not yet at the same skill and intensity level as higher flighted divisions and this helps kids to develop without being overly challenged. It's also worth noting that every other club in the league has some mixed age group teams. Just like single birth year teams some struggle and some excel. Lower flighted teams (single and mixed birth year) give an opportunity to play, to learn, and to grow with professional trainers in a competitive environment for many kids who otherwise would not have been invited to join or continue on a Blackhawks team.

**Tryouts/Annual Assessment:** Team placement is not locked in perpetuity. Tryouts as well as annual ratings are used to determine and reassess placement each year. In some cases, this means promotion to a higher flighted team or placement onto a lower flighted team for a player. Our intent is to cultivate individual player growth while developing competitive teams.

The structure of tryouts are regularly reviewed by the Board of Directors with input from our tryout assessors. Please note, an emphasis is placed on game situations rather skill specific drills.

Many clubs, coaches, and parents mistakenly believe that constantly pushing and challenging a player beyond their capabilities will simply make them better. This includes placement on the most competitive team possible. We believe it is a misguided belief that is often counterproductive and often leads to a negative player experience. Players often gain confidence and begin to excel in season subsequent to a move from the most competitive teams to one where foundational skills are still developing.

Conversely, more advanced players may be bored and better suited for a competitive environment.

Ideally, we advocate a more nuanced approach favored by US Soccer where children are placed each year at a challenge level just outside their comfort zone/current ability level. While perfect matches are not always available we do keep that as a goal for player development. We empathize that team placement can elicit positive and negative emotions so we do not take the responsibility lightly. We also understand that you as a parent may not agree with the placement of your child, but changes will not be made based on your advocacy or alternative assessment.

**Transitions from 7v7 to 9v9 to 11v11-** Please note that U9 and U10 teams will eventually transition from 7 players on the field to 9 players on the field when they go to U11 and U12. These teams will transition yet again from 9 players to 11 players on the field starting at U13. As a result, the club often deploys more significant restructuring in transition years, such as three teams becoming two or two teams becoming one for a given age group.

**Disbanding a Team:** In rare cases, a team may be disbanded even after invitations are sent and accepted. This is usually the result of other players rescinding post acceptance or the lack of a volunteer head coach. While we attempt to avoid this situation there are times where forming a team with no or limited subs sets up a team to struggle. As a result, the Board retains the discretion to disband. Some players or no players from a disbanded team may be placed on another team. Again ratings/assessments drive these difficult decisions.

**Roster Changes & Team Alterations-** Although we try to avoid it the club can make roster changes to any team at any time due to various circumstances. Most likely, these changes will occur before a season starts, but could happen at any time. This means that the Board may make alterations after team rosters are published. The board does not take player movement lightly, but it is possible. Once accepted, your child may be moved to another team.

**7. Roster Size:** A common question is how are max roster sizes decided and why? We apply max roster sizes as allowed in our primary league rules. US Soccer has slightly smaller recommended max sizes, but their presumption is max size for the highest competitive level of youth soccer development. We err to a larger size because it aligns best with the goals and operations of the Blackhawks

With this in mind, we do review this area and most policies regularly. We aim to enact any changes for the subsequent year.

## **8. Parent Coaches & Paid Trainers:**

As we touched upon earlier, the Blackhawks SC operates thanks to volunteer coaches. It is always our expectation that a parent-coach will step-in to manage every team. Historically, non-parent volunteers from within the community have also stepped up to coach our youth, but this is a rarity and does not relieve the expectation of parent-coaches. A core function of the parent-coach is that of administrative manager and liaison between the trainer, other coaches, parents, and players. If there are not any parent volunteers to coach then a team may be disbanded as outlined in the aforementioned sections.

**Paid Trainers:** For all teams, we pay the trainers to run practices and to attend a maximum of 5 games each season. Our trainers also train other teams within the Blackhawks and other clubs so 5 games are not guaranteed, but coaches are instructed to work with the trainers ASAP to maximize the number of games they can attend.

***Coaching is a privilege granted at the discretion of the Board. The club reserves the right to remove and/or not ask back any coach. This applies to all coaches and trainers regardless of tenure, at any time, and for any reason.***

## **9. Double Carding:**

Players can be carded with the Blackhawks and with another club that plays in another league, such as EDP. However, this is not encouraged as our expectation is commitment to the Blackhawks and the team your child is placed on.

## **10. RESIST THE URGE TO SIDELINE COACH AKA JOYSTICKING**

It is the most important way we can give the kids ownership and ensure the game stays fun. Some of the most common examples of sideline coaching are comments like:

“pass it”

“shoot it”

“down the line”

“boot it”

“not in the middle”

“Look for Susie or Johnny” [insert any other name]

“Kick it out”

**None of these comments or any other instructions are helpful in the long run and may also be counterproductive to a coach or trainer's instruction in that situation.** The more it occurs the more it will hold the player back as they will never learn independent decision making. This is not just true for parents. Coaches also need to be mindful of what they say, when they say it, and how often they give advice during the game.

## **12. Referees**

### **Do NOT engage with the referees and be respectful**

Booing/Hissing/Challenging Calls/Abusive Language (includes sarcastic remarks) is NOT acceptable. They are doing their best, are more trained in the rules, and are sometimes teenagers (think someone's son or daughter).

Bad or missed calls will happen. Let's model how to let it go so our kids move on if a call or a game does not go their way/is unfair. We submit post game evaluations each week and can file a grievance with the league if something egregious occurs. If you have a question on a rule then please reach out and we will do our best to explain it.

## **13. SPORTSMANSHIP-MODELING RESPECT FOR OTHER TEAM**

### **Please also do NOT criticize or make sarcastic/negative comments to the kids on the other team. It is NOT acceptable**

Unfortunately, we have seen unacceptable parent behavior toward youth athletes from our supporters and from other teams. It is embarrassing to the team, the club, and most importantly that person's child. What's more, coaches can get carded and/or fined for parent behavior. On a game day, if one of our coaches feels it is warranted (or at the ref's behest), they will ask someone to leave the field and/or the complex before resuming the match.

## **14. Winning, Losing, & Scoring Goals:**

Any game played where a score is kept is going to be competitive by nature. We as parents/guardians do not need to add extra incentive or pressure to win. As a club, we

do NOT believe winning and scoring goals are the primary (let alone sole) indicator of success or growth.

You will likely see other teams (especially at younger ages) where each kid only plays one position and/or tactically uses only athleticism to win. That may work in the short term, but soon it does not and is a path to mediocrity. As kids get older then positional play becomes more the standard, but we strive to err on the side of developing total soccer players.

We want to encourage independent thinking, to build resilience, and to promote brave play on the field. Playing bravely includes a willingness to try new things kids may not be good at yet, choosing to pressure, trying to get control of the ball instead of just “booting it”, and going for 50/50 balls to name a few fundamentals.

Lastly, we encourage all to focus on competing instead of winning. Our children can choose to compete every game even when outmatched or way ahead. What’s more, we firmly believe that wins are the dividends that will eventually come from choosing to play bravely, training in the correct form, being coachable, and competing no matter the score.

### **15. Scheduling (Training/Practices/Games):**

As fellow parents we empathize that scheduling multiple activities can be a daunting task and we support kids (especially at developmental ages) participating in other activities. We encourage coaches and parents to communicate with each other when conflicts inevitably arise.

However, sometimes tough choices need to be made and there is an expectation of attending practices and games when accepting an invite for a competitive soccer club.

To give more context, the training sessions for teams have many moving parts within the club in terms of other team schedules, field availability, trainer availability, and coach availability to highlight a few areas. For every team there are conflicts with other activities (ex: football, baseball, dance, cheer, hockey, lacrosse, religious education, tutoring, instrumental lessons etc.) so individual coaches and the club cannot create a schedule free of conflicts. These conflicts make respectful parent and coach dialogue all the more important. We appreciate your patience and understanding as well as your commitment as parents of youth athletes.

**16. Costs-** We regularly review the fees charged to our membership as it compares to other competitive travel programs. Our fees and services are in line on average with the other programs within our league. There is no one for one comparison, but you can find information for other clubs (including their websites) within our league at [www.NCSANJ.com](http://www.NCSANJ.com).

**17. Refunds-** Refunds are at the discretion of the Board outside of the specific situations addressed earlier in the policy statement.