



**O·P·D·L**  
— EST. 2014 —



# OPDL PARENT HANDBOOK 2026

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# ABOUT THE OPDL

# WELCOME TO THE OPDL



We are delighted that you will be a part of this exciting initiative that raises the bar in the development of youth players in Ontario. The *commitment* for players and you, as the parent, is higher in the OPDL, and this handbook is designed to help answer any questions you may have about the OPDL, both now and throughout the season.

Never heard of the OPDL, or don't have a child at the U13 age level yet? This document will provide you with all you need to know to consider the OPDL today, or in the future.

The OPDL was created and developed by Ontario Soccer with one clear goal: to create a development environment that best supports players becoming their best.

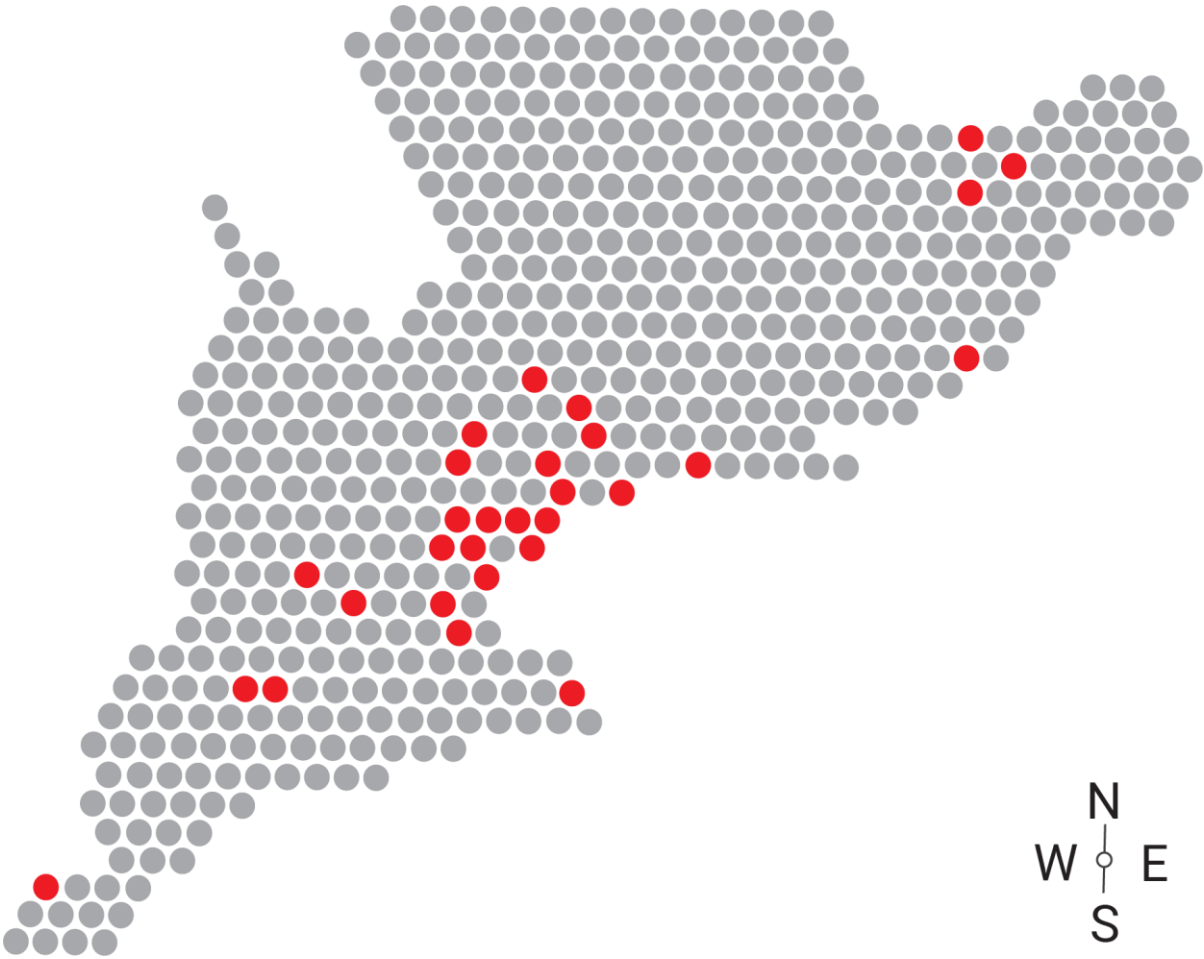
**IN THE OPDL, THE LEVEL OF PLAYER PREPARATION  
AND DEVELOPMENT IS SIGNIFICANT**



- Launched in 2014 with the 2001 age group, the OPDL is one of Canada's first youth standards-based program that combines top level competition and training environments to give the best experience to players, coaches and match officials.



# SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM



- In 2026, 25 Licence Holders and two partners will operate in the OPDL, with over 220 teams and 4,000 players participating from Windsor to Ottawa. The geographic placement of the OPDL demonstrates both the continued growth and ever-expanding reach of the program across Ontario.



# CONTRIBUTING TO A BETTER SOCCER SYSTEM



The OPDL is one piece of a large, transformative process that Ontario Soccer has undertaken to modernize soccer in Ontario. This innovative, exciting youth program is an important component of the core principles of Long Term Player Development (LTPD) across soccer in Ontario and Canada.



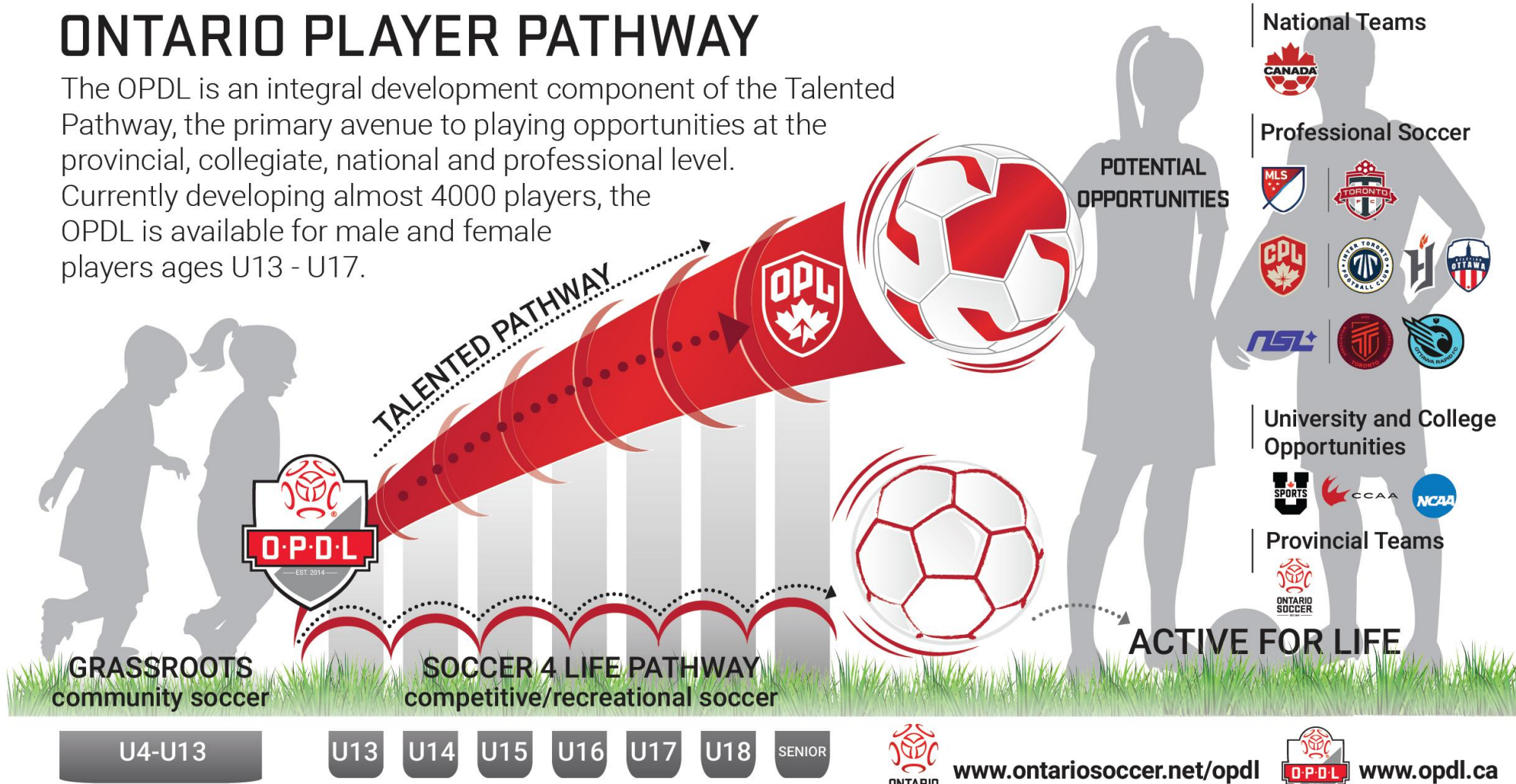
**LTPD helps talented youth players, who have the ability and dedication to train at a higher level, develop into top players with a strategically-designed training philosophy in mind.**

# OPDL AS PART OF THE TALENTED PATHWAY



## ONTARIO PLAYER PATHWAY

The OPDL is an integral development component of the Talented Pathway, the primary avenue to playing opportunities at the provincial, collegiate, national and professional level. Currently developing almost 4000 players, the OPDL is available for male and female players ages U13 - U17.



U4-U13

U13

U14

U15

U16

U17

U18

SENIOR



[www.ontariosoccer.net/opdl](http://www.ontariosoccer.net/opdl)



[www.opdl.ca](http://www.opdl.ca)



# WHY WAS THE OPDL CREATED?



Ontario Soccer formed a committee of technical experts called the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to investigate our system of player development.

*This committee identified some important gaps in the previous system:*

- The best players were not necessarily playing with or against each other frequently enough.
- There was no player development accountability for clubs/academies. Instead, they were 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, to the detriment of their development as a player.
- There was no high-level coaching requirements in youth soccer leagues.
- There was no clear pathway of leagues for 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.

From these observations, in 2014, the OPDL was born. The purpose of the program was to 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.

Talent.  
Development.  
Performance.



## Talent.

- In addition to having a holistic level of talent, players eligible for the OPDL should also possess:
  1. Intrinsic Motivation
  2. Immense Potential
  3. Utmost Commitment



## Development.

- Through the application of global best practices, the OPDL provides an unmatched development environment for:
  - Players
  - Coaches
  - Match Officials
  - Club Staff



## Performance.

- The “best with best” philosophical approach fosters a competitive environment.
- Performance Management technology is used to track, profile and measure athlete progress.



# PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM



The OPDL, in collaboration with Ontario Soccer's Provincial Xcel program, deploys performance management technology for the tracking of players as they progress across the OPDL and Talented Pathway.

Beyond the OPDL scouts, who are reporting on potential talent, OPDL Licence Holders are also equipped to utilize this technology for:

- A management tool for day-to-day tracking of their OPDL players
- Provide feedback to players on their development through age-specific assessment tool, assessment rubrics, fitness testing and individual development plans that are located in each individual player's profile

**During the 2025 season, over 7,000 player assessments were entered into the Performance Management Platform, demonstrating the depth of the platform and detail to which performance management is executed in the OPDL.**



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# WHY THE OPDL IS DIFFERENT

# OPDL ISN'T JUST A SOCCER LEAGUE...



There are a variety of key differences that you will see and may have already noticed in the OPDL:



## Organizations enter the OPDL, not teams

→ OPDL accepts organizations into the program in their entirety, once they have met a significant number of standards-based requirements in various areas such as technical, administrative, logistical, and financial.



## No promotion or relegation

→ Teams remain in the OPDL as long as their organization retains an OPDL Licence. This ensures the on-field results of the team does not interfere in any way with the development of the players.



## Minimum training standards

→ OPDL Licence Holders must provide a year-round training program that is structured and delivered to age and stage appropriate training best practices (different training at different times of the year with managed calendar breaks) with a minimum of three training sessions a week.



## Provision of Sports Science Resources

→ Licence Holders must also have a proper sport science program, directed by a qualified provider managing the physiological development of players. This program supplement will cover fitness, strength and conditioning, injury prevention, nutrition and lifestyle management.



## Competition is played at high quality venues with a great degree of technical oversight

→ Quality standards also extend to competition play in the OPDL. Unlike 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.

# ...IT'S A PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



## High quality game day experience

→ OPDL provides a high degree of on-site event support to competition. This includes assigning and paying for Match Officials as well as medical personnel as assigned by Sports Injury & Rehabilitation Centre, Inc. and on-site event coordinators at Central Venues.



## A longer competition season

→ OPDL is longer than traditional leagues, providing training immediately beginning in January building towards a total of up to 20 matches over the course of the Summer. It creates a year-round, turn-key training and development program for Ontario's top players, rather than a seasonal program.




## A year-round, periodized training calendar

→ 12-month periodized training at high quality facilities with a minimum of 3:1 training to game ratio plus strength and conditioning is unrivaled. Planned training breaks are written into the annual training calendar to allow players to rest, recuperate and spend time with family and friends.



## Provincial technical staff support

→ Some of the most established soccer technicians in Ontario are actively involved in working with Licence Holders to further support and develop OPDL players.



## Scouting opportunities year-round

→ In tandem with Ontario Soccer's technical staff and innovative use of technology, players will be actively tracked, profiled and scouted.



## Coaching

- The OPDL is also driven by nationally-recognized coaching, with Head Coaches currently required to possess a minimum of National B Licence for all age groups. Assistant Coaches must hold a minimum of a C Licence.
- The Head Coach requirement have pivoted to the Concacaf B Diploma; a continentally standardized certification which includes developmentally appropriate training for working with young players.
- Licence Holders must offer Goalkeeping and Strength & Conditioning programs to supplement players' development



## Match Officials

- The OPDL is also an integral part of the Match Official Talented Pathway.
- In the 2025 season, over 5,200 Match Official appointments were made, during which they are mentored and developed for constant improvement.



# PARTNERSHIPS

- OPDL continues to welcome a growing family of partners that help elevate the brand of the program, as well as contribute to the continued sustainability of program operations. Players and families can expect to receive exclusive access to TFC games, scouting opportunities, athlete appearances and events; products and nutrition education from Gatorade; and savings from partners such as O'Neills.



**Presenting Partner**

**Program Partners**





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# U13 IN THE OPDL

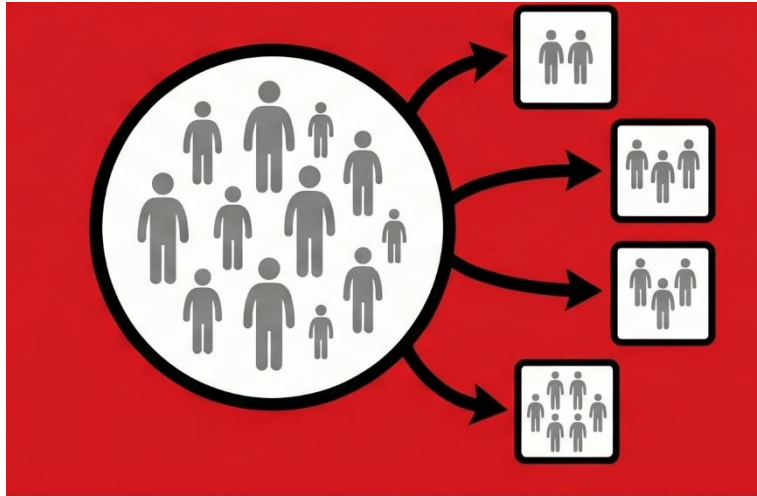




From the inception of the OPDL, U13 has been the entry point for players across Ontario. With the implementation of the Canada Soccer Grassroots Standards in the 2026 outdoor season, the OPDL has shifted the U13 division to align with grassroots mandates meaning:

- Licence Holders continue to organize player pools rather than dedicated OPDL & non-OPDL environments
- Games are played on a smaller sized pitch in a 9v9 playing format

# PLAYER POOLS AT U13



A **player pool** is a type of roster structure allows all interested players to train and develop together within the same environment no matter the number. Rather than having a fixed, permanently selected roster, player pools **prioritize long-term development** by giving players flexibility to be moved between competition levels on rosters week-to-week based on form, learning needs, and workload. This ensures all players receive appropriate training opportunities over the season which helps manage growth spurts, injuries, and confidence levels that are common at this age, and **creates a healthy, competitive environment** where players are encouraged to focus on effort, improvement, and learning rather than **winning**.



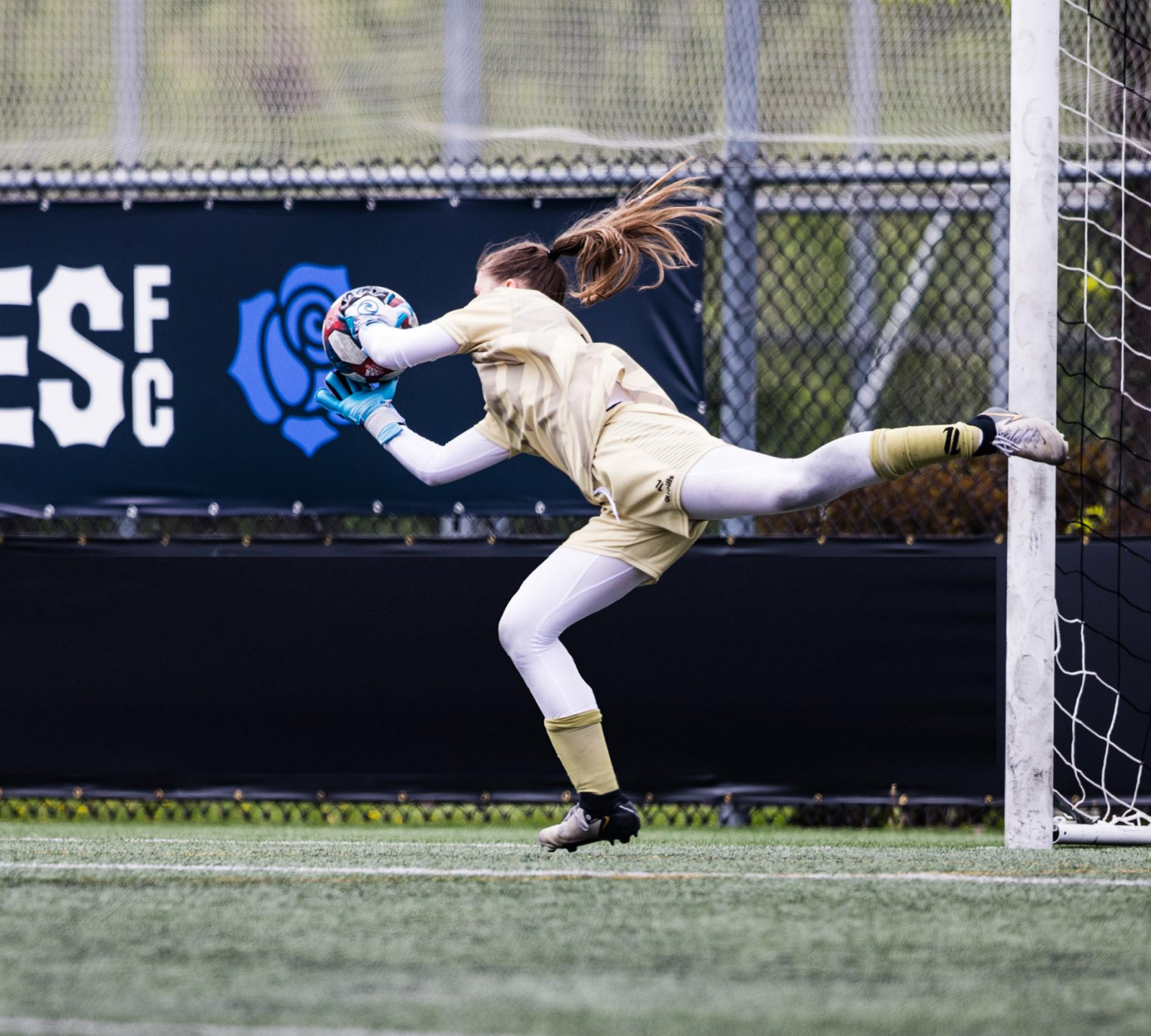
# 9v9 PITCH ON OPDL GAME DAYS



A **9v9 pitch** at the U13 level is designed to better support player development by matching the field size to the players' **physical, technical, and cognitive stage**. With less space, players are more frequently involved in the game, leading to **more touches** on the ball, more decision-making moments, and more opportunities to practice skills under realistic pressure. The reduced space encourages **quicker actions, better movement, and improved understanding** of spacing and team shape, while also supporting appropriate physical demands as players continue to grow. In the OPDL environment, players can expect to play on 11v11 pitches **in a box-to-box** orientation using the **full width** of the pitch, or on **dedicated 9v9 fields**.



# OUTCOMES OF THE OPDL



- The OPDL provides increased exposure to performance-centered environments, and directly leads to more Provincial, Collegiate, Professional and National level identification opportunities.
- In 2025 the female Provincial teams had 91% of its players drawn from OPDL, while 80% of Ontario's male Provincial Teams were made up of OPDL players.

# PLAYER GRADUATION



- In 2026, 32% of Men's Youth National teams players were from Ontario and totalled 64% for the Senior Men's National Team.
- Similarly, the Women's Youth National Teams, 50% of the squad were from Ontario and 50% of the Senior National Team players came from Ontario.
- Currently, 96% of all players in Canada Soccer's National Development Centre (previously Regional Excel) were drawn from the OPDL. Similarly, 71% of Toronto FC Academy's 2026 player intake, across all age groups, were from the OPDL.



**REQUIRED COMMITMENT OF  
BEING IN THE OPDL**



# PARENTAL COMMITMENT



As a parent of an emerging athlete, the commitment asked of you is in many ways as high as that of the player. In this journey through the Talented Pathway with your child, it is important that you are as committed to the process as your child is.

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

- A year-round soccer training program
- Bringing your child to and from training at least 3 nights a week
- Competition weekends that normally run from May to October
- Significant travel to and from OPDL games



# HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE OPDL



Discuss training sessions on their completion with your child, focusing on learning outcomes and positive points.

Meet with your Head Coach at times prescribed by the OPDL Licence 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 the ball around with them!

Remind your child that development is a long-term process and that we don't learn without making mistakes.

Maintain a calendar of your child's training program and mark their progression on it.

Encourage your child to start a training diary. Many top athletes do, as this can be a great motivation tool.

Show support for your child at OPDL games. Negative remarks to opposing players, coaches, parents or the match officials will only put unnecessary stress on your child.

Speak to the Head coach to ensure you understand the OPDL player evaluation. Reinforce the positives and development goals outlined with your child.

Never be critical of your child's coach, their program or other players on the team in front of your child.

Demonstrate commitment to your OPDL Licence Holder; adhering to the OPDL Player Commitment Letter



# PLAYER COMMITMENT



## Commitment to:

- The entire training program for the year (Jan-Dec).
- Any personalized training, injury prevention or injury management work.
- Any performance testing and/or evaluations performed by the Licence Holder.



## Attendance at:

- All training sessions, with exceptions made for sickness or injury.
- All off-field sport science sessions, including nutrition and lifestyle counselling sessions, strength & conditioning work and tactical/analysis sessions.
- All OPDL games, including pre/post-season exhibitions or tournaments.



## Adherence to:

- The Licence Holder's overall policies and codes of conduct, as well as the OPDL's player code of conduct
- The OPDL Player Commitment Letter and OPDL Operational Rules



## Mental Commitment:

- Focusing on training, not winning.
- Self-discipline required regarding proper nutrition, sport science, off-field training and lifestyle management.
- Recovering from defeat, rejection or other developmental setbacks.
- Balancing school with athletic commitments.



- The OPDL competition schedule is both intense and designed to draw out the best in your child.

*Time will be one of the biggest commitments both you and your child will make.*

# OPDL COMPETITION SCHEDULE

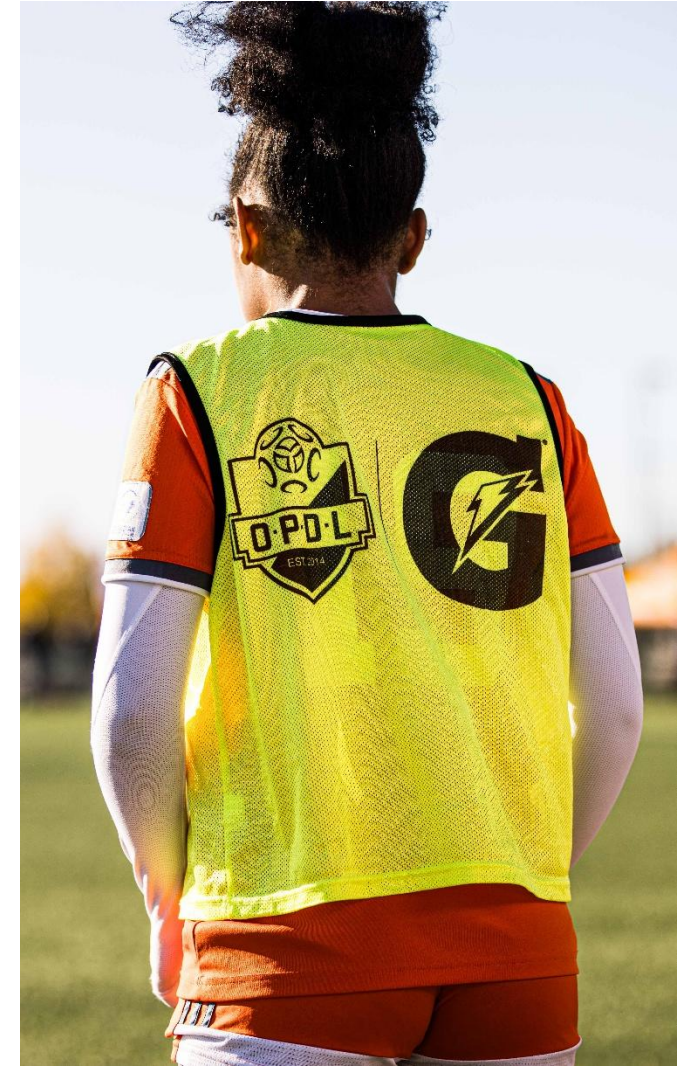


*OPDL games are hosted at Central Venues by Ontario Soccer and at home venues by each Licence Holder. The main objectives for the ID Weekends (central venues) are:*

- Allow Provincial Scouts to conduct player scouting and the identification process, as well as complete game day coach observation and evaluations.
- Ontario Soccer technical and operational staff are able to ensure demonstration and execution of game day best practices in collaboration with the Licence Holder.
- Central Venues are located across different cities in Ontario. The list of Central Venues along with venues used by each Licence Holder to host their home venue is released prior to the start of the competition season.

## *Events outside the OPDL Schedule:*

- OPDL players shall not participate in any other soccer programming with the exception of participation in Ontario Soccer Talent Development Centres, Provincial Xcel program, National Team programs or official trial or development opportunities, as deemed appropriate and permitted by the OPDL.
- To ensure events do not conflict with periodization and/or OPDL activities, exhibition games, showcases or tournaments must be approved by the OPDL prior to confirming participation.
- Approval to such events is done in writing by Ontario Soccer.
- If there are any questions or concerns over the status of a particular event, contact your child's Technical Director.



# OPDL COMPETITION SCHEDULE



The OPDL Competition Schedule normally runs from May to October with a two-week mid-season break.

*Games are played frequently on the weekends for three fundamental reasons:*

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



# THE OPDL GARY MILLER CHARITY SHIELD



To celebrate Gary Miller's rich legacy, after his sudden passing in May 2020, the OPDL Charity Shield has been renamed in his honor.

As Ontario Soccer's Director of Soccer Operations, Gary was a staunch advocate for Long-Term Player, Coach and Match Official Development. He oversaw and led the implementation of key initiatives like the introduction of Grassroots Standards, as well as the development and integration of Academies into the Ontario Soccer family.

However, nowhere was Gary's influence more critical and impactful than participating on Ontario Soccer's Technical Advisory Committee where the group was responsible for developing the standards for the Ontario Player Development League (OPDL) launched in 2014. This program has come to be the pace setter and embodiment of a more refined, standards-based high performance development environment benefitting players, coaches and match officials across Ontario.

By enshrining Gary's name with this highest standard of youth soccer competition, his memory will live on for soccer generations to come and his dedication to advance soccer, in all capacities, across Ontario and Canada will forever be fondly remembered.





- During the year, OPDL Licence Holders will be conducting evaluations and routine assessments of all its players. This is an essential component of any meaningful player development program. It is also required of the club by the OPDL.

# PLAYER EVALUATIONS & TRIALS



OPDL requires that at least two (2) written and one (1) verbal evaluation are conducted on all players per year and that each evaluation is discussed with both players and parents.

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A club may institute a variety of evaluation techniques to make assessments. 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 a physical, technical, tactical and psycho-social standpoints.

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Your Head Coach should be able to explain the system of evaluation for your child. OPDL Licence Holders are expected to properly communicate evaluation feedback to player's parents or guardians, in addition to utilizing player assessment tools on the Performance Management technology to submit their feedback.

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Note that receiving feedback does not entitle you as a parent to dispute, reject or overturn your Head Coach's evaluation results, even if the results are not what you or your child would ideally want. The feedback is meant to prioritize the focus and attention of your child over the course of the season.

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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 all development outcomes.

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# OPDL SURVEYS & FEEDBACK



The OPDL is a development environment. Active feedback is sought, through online surveys, across the entire program to continuously improve it year over year. Evaluations extend to the League itself and those who actively deliver it and you as a parent play an important role in offering feedback throughout the year to evaluate and make improvements in the OPDL program where necessary.

Throughout the OPDL season, your team management has the opportunity to complete an evaluation of all aspects of any game day experienced, covering: the venue, OPDL Coordinator and event staff, Match Officials and other factors. 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:*

- Be honest, but fair.
- If you were satisfied, make sure you say it!
- Do not give feedback immediately after the game if you are emotionally upset or angry.
- Give specific examples if you can.





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# ASSOCIATED COSTS

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# OPDL COSTS

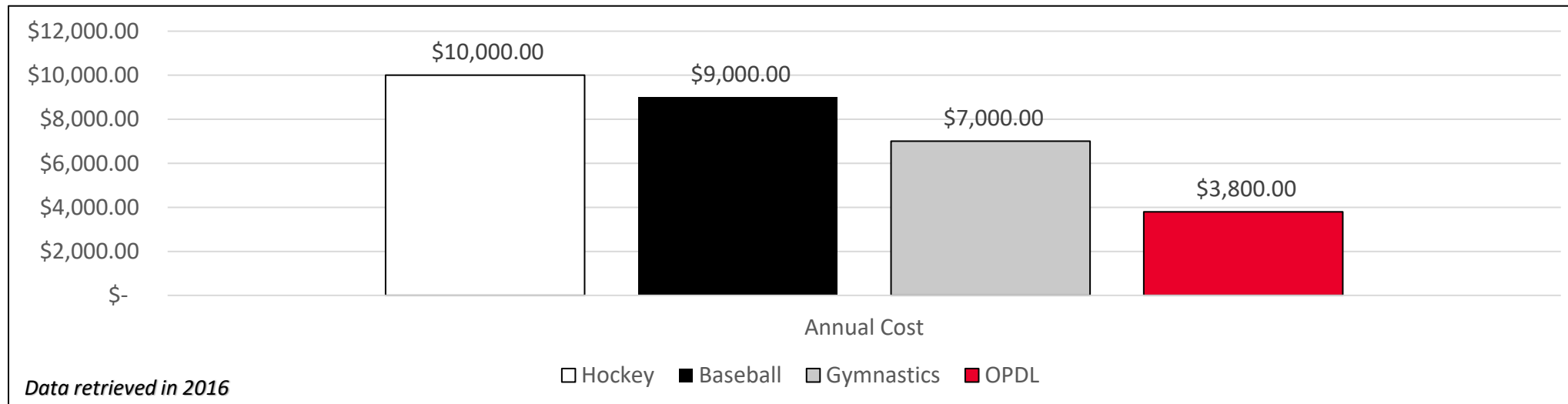


The OPDL requires a significant time and resource commitment from player’s families. The program significantly raises the bar on the intensity of routine training (including the addition of sport science), qualifications of coaches and length of League season. To ensure the best-in-class delivery of the OPDL, costs may be greater to meet the quality expectations of this much expanded youth standards-based soccer program.

Licence Holders also establish a payment schedule. This may mean full payment of the annual fee at the beginning of the year, or monthly or quarterly installments. The OPDL fee may include, but is not limited to, any combination of uniforms, staffing costs, facilities, travel, sport science services and/or training.

*Average annual costs for other high performance sports include:*

*OPDL Licence Holders determine the fees associated with their OPDL programs based on the above which includes the annual OPDL League Fee per Team (\$6,300 for 2022).*

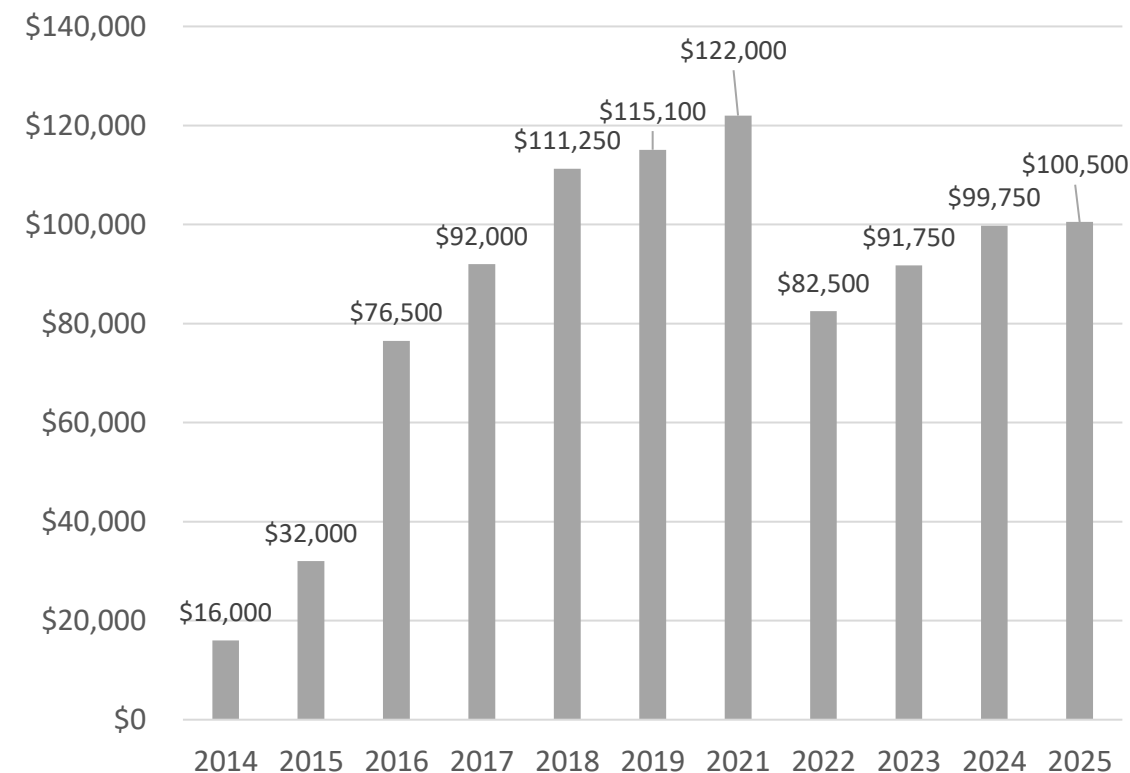


# ATHLETE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



This program seeks to lower barriers to participation in the OPDL by offering financial support to as many players as possible. Applications are submitted by OPDL Licence Holders to the OPDL and successful applicants receive a grant towards the player's OPDL costs.

- OPDL Licence Holders may offer further assistance programs in addition to this program. Since these programs are at the discretion of each organization, be sure to inquire about details and timelines.
- Athlete Scholarship applications are submitted during the off-season, closing 4 weeks into the start of the season, by OPDL Licence Holders to the OPDL for consideration. If you believe you qualify for assistance, please contact your Licence Holder for further details.



**To date, over **\$930,000** has been made available to players through the Athlete Scholarship Program.**



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**HOW TO JOIN**

# LICENCE HOLDER SELECTION



OPDL Licence Holders are selected every two years and hold a licence to operate in the League for a two-year period. Acquiring an OPDL licence is a demanding process. Organizations have to show quality in all areas; not just their programs and coaches, but their facilities, planning, and even their financial position.

To reduce unnecessary player migration, once committed to a Licence Holder, your child will not be permitted to move organizations until October 31<sup>st</sup> of the current OPDL season. Once you and your child make a decision to commit to a Licence Holder, you will be required to sign a “Player Commitment Letter” with them that binds your child to that Licence Holders for the year. So when choosing an organization, ask questions and do your research prior to signing.

- ✓ Target the OPDL Licence Holder closest to you
- ✓ Target organizations your child has played at before
- ✓ Do not select a Licence Holder based on price alone
- ✓ Avoid selecting an organization based on an individual coach
- ✓ Do not choose a Licence Holder based on other players playing for the team
- ✓ Do no try to trade organizations off against each other

# HOW TO TRANSFER WITHIN OPDL



## End-of-Season Transfers & Trials

The OPDL does not encourage you to move your child from one OPDL Licence Holder to another without an extremely compelling reason or an irresolvable problem.

In late September of each season, you are able to renew your commitment with your existing organization or request to seek other opportunities with other organizations.

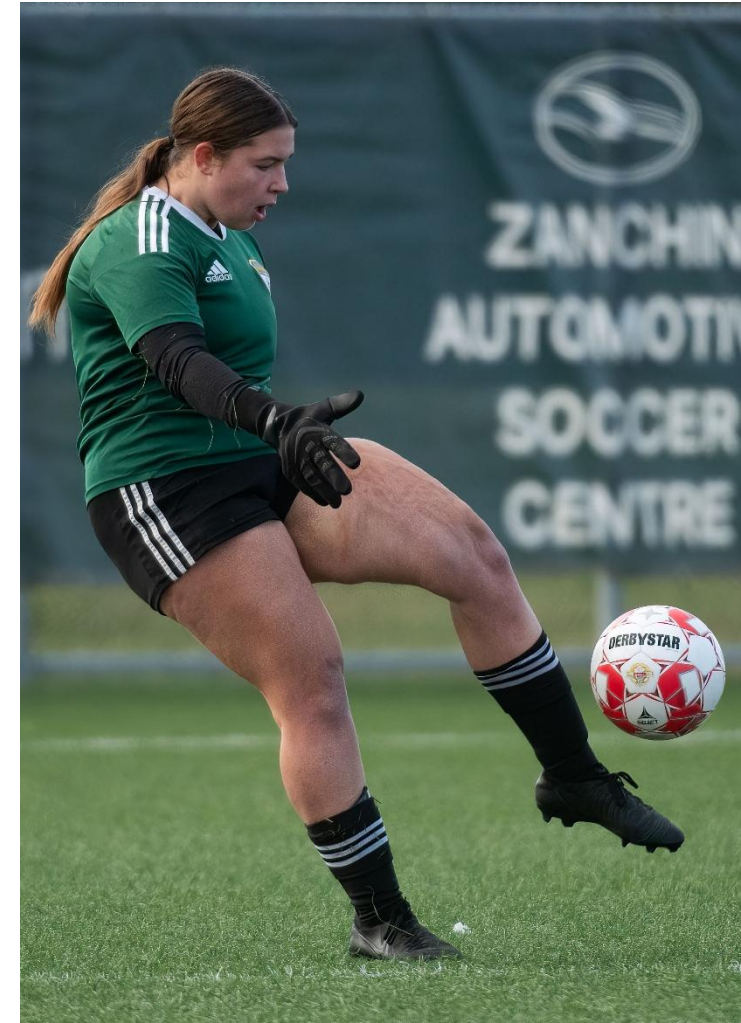
If you do wish to move, OPDL Licence Holders will hold trials in the Fall for player selection the following year. You can bring your child to these if you wish. Specific dates and times of trials are at the Licence Holder's discretion. Please check with the clubs you are interested in during the late summer/early fall. For more information, please refer to the OPDL Trial Guidelines published annually by Ontario Soccer.

## Mid-Season Transfers & Releases

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

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

If there are challenges, that are unresolvable through a structured process, then a release can be requested. Please note that released players will not be permitted to re-enter the OPDL program for the remainder of the current season.





- It is important to consider whether or not the OPDL is right for you. If you and your child are committed to one of the most rigorous soccer training programs in Ontario, and want to develop them into the best they can be, speak with a Licence Holder administrator or an OPDL staff member to learn more.



ARE YOU READY TO JOIN THE MOST ADVANCED  
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN ONTARIO?

Presented by:





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