



**US Soccer Federation**

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To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to explain the importance of the Olympic Development Program in terms of the development of our nation's elite young soccer players. This is especially true at the Regional level, where players are exposed to other regional and international competition for the first time. The value of this experience for our young players cannot be overstated. Without this experience, we would be missing a major step in the developmental process. Furthermore, there is virtually no way to make up for the initial experience of representing your Regional ODP team at that level of competition.

In the process of developing players through the ODP programs, the final step before they are considered for selection in the National team pool, is inter-regional and international competition. Coaches and players are only as good as the level that they have been exposed to in their soccer environments. Before they get a chance to test themselves against competition that plays at a higher level, it is unclear how they will perform in that type of environment. It is a simple concept, but one that serves as the basis for development at every stage. In order to become better, one must be successful at their current level in order to compete at the next.

The same is true in terms of evaluating a players' ability. It is difficult to predict how a player will adjust to the demands of the next level, if the person evaluating them does not get a chance to see them at the highest level of competition possible. Obviously, we must make decisions based on perceived predictions of what a player can handle in a more competitive environment, but having an opportunity to evaluate players that are playing against the same level or higher is extremely beneficial. Inter-Regional and international competition provides coaches this evaluation opportunity.

As the Head Coach of the US U17 Team, I can assure you that my staff and I utilize the Olympic Development Program to the best of our ability. Players develop through the ODP process by continually being placed in a more competitive environment. The experience of testing their individual skills and abilities at higher levels is paramount in their developmental process. For coaches, evaluating and selecting players for the National Team programs, the chance to see them in these types of competitive environments is a key factor. Furthermore, having the opportunity to see these players at the same place and time allows us the chance to make the most informed decisions.

Sincerely,

John Ellinger  
Head Coach, U17 MNT