

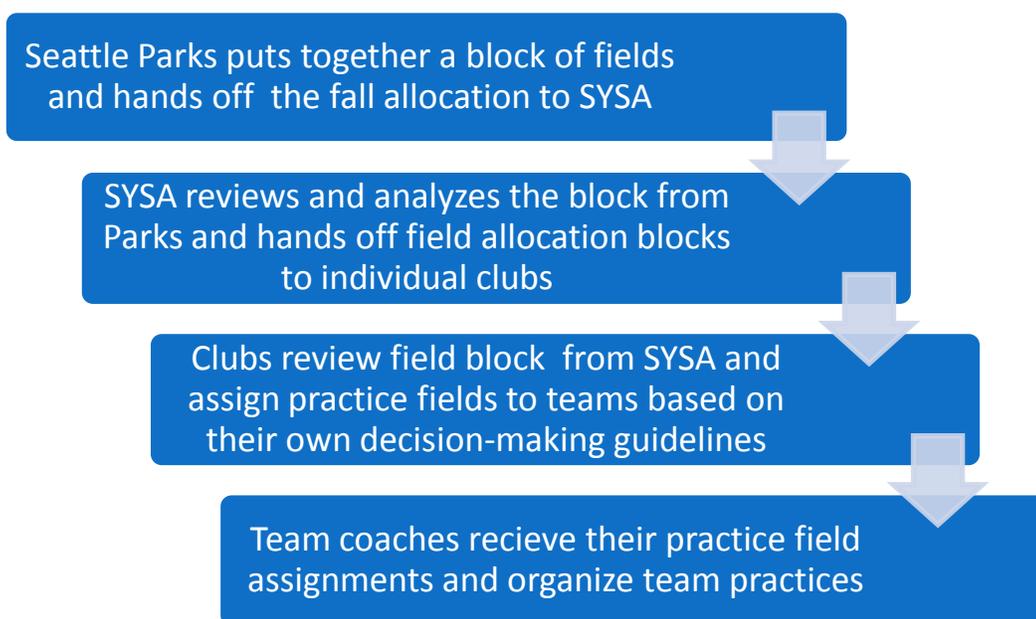
Frequently Asked Questions about Practice Field Allocation in SYSA

Introduction

One of the most anticipated moments of the fall soccer season for coaches is when they receive their practice field assignments. Coaches may be elated, surprised, disappointed, or angry by the field they receive for their weekly training. No matter what it is, their field assignment means a great deal to them!

The Field Allocation Process

A simplified field allocation process is shown in the flow chart below. In June, Seattle Parks sends SYSA a large reservation of practice field time, with practice field hours for individual fields on specific days, beginning in August and continuing through the end of November. SYSA divides these field hours into 14 smaller blocks for the clubs in SYSA. The clubs then assign the fields for practice times to their coaches, using whatever guidelines or methods they prefer within the club.



A New System Needed

In the past, fields within a club's geographic boundary were assigned to that club, with a small portion going to SYSA's previous select program, Emerald City. With the creation of SYSA's new select/premier club, Seattle United, nearly all select teams were moved into this one club and out of the recreational clubs. In 2010, Seattle United comprised over 1,300 players, making it one of the largest clubs in SYSA.

Seattle United does not have a geographic boundary. But along with citywide teams, which draw players from all over SYSA, it has regional teams with a player base located in the clubs within that region. For example, the Seattle United West Region includes players in the Ballard, Queen Anne, Magnolia, and Woodland club boundaries. In addition, Seattle United has a group of 23 citywide teams, with players from all over the SYSA area. This makes a system for allocating fields to teams in Seattle United complex to

engineer, especially when the fields SYSA receives from Parks varies from year to year, and the number of SYSA players and teams is not final until later in the summer.

If SYSA had an adequate supply of field space, this would be a simple formula to come up with, and all teams would have as much practice space as they wanted. However, **there just is not an adequate field supply for the 13,000 SYSA kids who play soccer in the fall.**

Not all the field space in Seattle is available to SYSA in the fall. Other soccer programs such as CYO request fields, as do other fall sports like tackle football. Adult leagues also require field time. In addition, school teams have priorities on school fields. The result of this competition for field space reduces the pool available to SYSA.

The reality is that **most teams in SYSA must make compromises** for their practice space, either with shorter practices, sharing fields with other teams, or using a field that is not their first choice. Throw in the additional realities of encroaching darkness in October and November, occasional rain closures of grass fields, and the final closure of all grass fields in late November, and the squeeze for field time becomes even greater.

The SYSA Fields Task Force

The work of creating a new process for field allocation was taken on by an ad hoc committee in SYSA called the Fields Task Force. This group comprised representatives from all geographic regions of SYSA, from Seattle United, and from SYSA itself.

The Fields Task Force met through the spring and summer of 2010 in order to begin discussing and designing a way to more fairly allocate practice fields to clubs and Seattle United. The 2010 fall field allocation was the first effort at a better distribution. The task force began meeting again in the late fall of 2010, in order to further improve the allocation system, address problems in the 2010 allocation, and achieve a better balance of field distribution between all the clubs in SYSA.

Key to the work of the task force was agreement on a set of guiding principles. These principles and values are published on the Fields Task Force page. Using these principles, the task force came up with a new system for dividing the block of practice fields from Seattle and Shoreline Parks and allocating fields to the clubs.

The Fields Task Force presented a new allocation system to the SYSA Board of Commissioners at the May, 2011 monthly meeting. The SYSA Board, made up of representatives from all 15 SYSA clubs, voted to approve the new allocation system for use in the fall of 2011.

The new field allocation system devised by the task force is built around the concept of “proportional distribution.” This concept makes some key assumptions:

- Clubs will work collaboratively within regions to more equitably balance field availability and types.
- The distribution of practice fields within a region should be proportional to the number of players in a club.
- Proportional access within a region is guaranteed to all clubs across the spectrum of field types and quality, whether it's dirt, grass fields, or synthetic/lit fields.

Using Fields Efficiently

One of the guiding principles of the task force was finding ways to ensure that fields in the fall will be used as efficiently as possible, especially during October and November, when darkness eliminates the use of any field that does not have lights. A number of ideas came out of this focus on efficient field use.

Numbers of teams on a field – Recommendations for the number of teams on fields during practice were discussed. The task force felt that fields were often being underutilized. At younger ages especially, a good training session can occur on only a small part of a field.

The FTF strongly recommends that clubs follow this density chart when assigning teams, especially during the dark period of October-November. The allocation system was built in large part assuming that clubs would use a field density approach to get maximum use from its fields.

	Option 1		Option 2	
	Ages	Teams	Ages	Teams
Full Field	U6 – U8	4 - 6	U6 – U9	6
	U9 - 10	4 - 5	U10	4
	U11 – U19	3 - 4	U11 - 19	3
Mod Field	U6 – U8	3 - 5	U6 – U9	4
	U9 - 10	3 - 4	U10	3
	U11 – U18	2 - 3	U11 - 19	2

Compensating for select player attendance – A system for adjusting field time for select team players, who attend practice at higher rates than recreational team players, particularly at older ages, was formulated and agreed to by the task force members. In order to compensate for this higher level of field use, the task force created a formula to balance field allocation. The term used to describe this was the “practice density factor,” or PDF. After getting feedback from the clubs, the task force agreed to use a PDF of 80% for rec players, and 95% for select players. Applying this formula to all player numbers across all clubs and fields will provide a slightly higher percentage of field time to select players than rec players, and hopefully results in a more efficient and more complete use of the field time we have.

Two phase scheduling – The task force recommended that all clubs examine their fields and consider rescheduling practice times after early October. This would allow clubs to ensure that teams which were training on unlighted fields have a place to practice once darkness arrives by mid October.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQ attempts to broaden your understanding about field assignments, and give you some ideas about the complexities and realities of the athletic field situation in SYSA and in Seattle generally.

- How does my club assign fields to its teams?
- Why can't I get the same practice field each year?
- Why don't my club and SYSA have enough practice field space for every team?
- Why can't I go directly to Seattle Parks and get practice field time for my team?
- Why do I see Seattle United teams practicing on my neighborhood field?
- Do select teams get preference over recreational teams for fields in SYSA?
- How does Seattle Parks decide how much field time to allocate to SYSA?
- How are practice fields divided between clubs in SYSA?
- Why does my Seattle United team never seem to have enough practice time or space?
- Why do some teams have shorter or longer practice sessions than others?
- What is the SYSA Fields Task Force and what does it do?
- Why are some fields empty during the evening when my club says they don't have any field space?
- What is SYSA doing about the field shortage in Seattle?
- What can I do about the field shortage in Seattle?
- Are dogs allowed on athletic fields in Seattle or Shoreline?

How does my club assign fields to its teams?

Each club uses a different system for assigning practice fields to teams. Some use a system based on seniority, some based on volunteer hours, others based on an open online signup. Ask your club field assigner if you are unsure how your club assigns fields.

Why can't I get the same practice field each year?

Clubs assign fields based on criteria that might change from year to year. In addition, the block of fields SYSA receives from Seattle Parks changes each year. So while SYSA generally receives the same overall field allocation, there are yearly variations, often caused by field closures for remodel projects. A closure in one area can have a ripple effect throughout the system. Talk to your club field assigner if you have questions.

Why don't my club and SYSA have enough practice field space for every team?

The competition for fall field space in Seattle and to some degree Shoreline is strong and shows no sign of weakening. This year, along with SYSA and CYO leagues, there are two additional youth soccer clubs seeking field space. Middle school and high school teams practice and play games and need field time. Tackle football is also in season, of course, and many fields are multi sport and are used for both. Finally, adult leagues look for field time as well, usually later at night and on the weekends.

While competition for fields is an issue, the field inventory in Seattle itself is just not large enough to accommodate the demand. Also, the closure of grass fields in November to protect them from damage

once they are soaked by rains, and the limited number of lighted fields to allow play past evening darkness as the days get shorter, all play a part in the limited fall supply.

Why can't I go directly to Seattle Parks and get practice field time for my team?

Seattle Parks requires that all field requests be funneled through one person for each organization. For SYSA, that person is the SYSA field scheduler Phoebe Russell. Here's why Seattle Parks operates this way.

Seattle Parks has the responsibility for providing thousands of reservations over more than one hundred fields. In order to make this more manageable, and to allow organizations such as SYSA to manage their own field schedules, Parks provides large blocks of field reservations to each organization to distribute to its teams. This allows Parks to limit the point of contact to one person per organization, avoid having to repeatedly arbitrate multiple requests for fields (what if three SYSA teams requested the same field at the same time?), and simplifies their work. Most sports organizations would prefer to make their own decisions about field assignments anyway, and avoid assignment decisions being made by an entity such as Seattle Parks that doesn't know the teams, coaches or players as well.

Why do I see Seattle United teams practicing on my neighborhood field?

Most Seattle United teams practice in the regions where the majority of their players come from. If you see Seattle United teams on a field near you, it likely means the players live near you as well.

Seattle United, SYSA's new premier and select advanced development club, has two levels of play. At the highest level of competition, commitment, and cost, up to two citywide teams at each age/gender are formed with players across Seattle and Shoreline. In addition to citywide teams, there are also regional teams. These teams are formed with players from the four regions of Seattle: North (Shoreline's Hillwood and Shorelake), West (QA, Ballard, Magnolia, and Woodland), Northeast (LVR and Lake City), and South (Capitol Hill, Mt Baker, McGilvra, Liga Rainier, and Beacon Hill).

SYSA and Seattle United are committed to having regional teams practice and play games within the region where the players reside. This preference was repeatedly requested by the families in SYSA. Seattle United has worked closely with SYSA and the neighborhood clubs to try to achieve this goal.

Do select teams get preference over recreational teams for fields in SYSA?

There is no preference given to either select teams or recreational teams. Both are part of SYSA, and both deserve practice fields. SYSA has worked hard with all the clubs to achieve a balanced and fair distribution of field time. Once the allocation to the clubs has been done, individual clubs decide how they want to distribute fields to their teams.

How does Seattle Parks decide how much field time to allocate to SYSA?

Seattle Parks has a charter to serve ALL field users who request fields, equally and without discrimination. Given the number of groups requesting fields and the shortage of space, the department is under considerable pressure to fulfill this goal. In order to achieve some measure of fairness and balance, Seattle Parks uses a number of criteria to create fall field allocations to organizations. Previous (historical) use is one criterion the department uses. Organization size is another. In addition, Seattle Parks tries to accommodate emerging sports, as well as sports that fulfill the City of Seattle initiative to achieve greater diversity.

Seattle Parks admits it does not have the resources to extensively weigh all data and do a thorough analysis before creating allocations. They do the best they can with the staff and time they have. SYSA works with

Parks to provide input on our needs and our player and team counts. In the end, though, what Seattle Parks decides to allocate to SYSA and other groups is their decision.

How are practice fields divided between clubs in SYSA?

In past years, field allocation was done mostly by club boundary. If a field was in a club's boundary, its use was given to the club. In addition to that, a percentage of field time was given to SYSA's former select/premier club, Emerald City, before the handoff to the clubs.

In 2010, an SYSA Fields Task Force was created to address the issue of field distribution. With the creation of Seattle United as SYSA's new premier/select club, Seattle United, which included nearly all select teams in SYSA, most of which are regional teams based within club/region boundaries, the method of distribution needed to be updated. The task force reviewed the process, and made recommendations for how to change and improve it. The distribution of fields to clubs in fall 2010 was the first attempt at using this new method. A newer method based on "proportional distribution" will be used in 2011. See the section on Fields Task Force earlier in this document.

Why does my Seattle United team never seem to have enough practice time or space?

As discussed above in previous questions and in the Introduction, field practice space is at a premium in the fall. SYSA has 13,000 players looking for fields to practice on. In addition, other soccer organizations and other sports are also looking for fields. Balancing all these needs with a finite amount of field space is a challenge. Seattle Parks and SYSA try to accommodate all the field and practice requests it receives, but the reality is that there is not enough to meet the demand.

One of the strategies for getting teams the practice time they request is to have them share fields with other teams. This requires more coordination and more planning by coaches to make the practice successful. Another strategy is to find pockets of unused field space whenever possible. SYSA asks all coaches and teams to be patient in the fall as we work to improve the field situation and share the resources as equitably as we can.

Why do some teams have longer or shorter practice sessions than others?

Practice times are determined by individual clubs based on how they want to use their assigned fields and what their coaches prefer. Some clubs might have teams practice for shorter times, but have more open field space for the team. Others might prefer longer practice times, but share fields with more teams. Don't assume that just because a club or team has longer practices, they are getting more field time. All clubs and teams are feeling the pinch of tight field space in SYSA equally. The allocation system used in 2011 is designed to allocate field time to clubs as equitably as possible.

What is the SYSA Fields Task Force and what does it do?

In 2010, SYSA formed a committee to review the field allocation system and other issues that the association faced regarding fields. This committee is called the Fields Task Force. Its primary mission was to redesign a method for allocating fields to the individual SYSA clubs based on the block allocation that SYSA receives from Seattle Parks each fall. In addition, the task force is reviewing such issues as how to most efficiently use the field space we have, sharing team practice field assignments between clubs, how to more equitably align field resources between clubs, and how to advocate for more field space from Seattle and Shoreline Parks.

Why do I see fields empty during the evening when my club says they don't have any field space?

As the flow chart in the introduction to this FAQ outlines, field assignments flow from Parks to organizations to clubs to teams. Once teams have been assigned field practice time, it is up to them to use it when they have it. Occasionally, teams might cancel practice, or players might not show up. Coaches don't always turn in fields when they know they can't use them. As an association, we need to get better about this. Also, other soccer or sports groups might have the fields reserved, but they aren't using them, or might have the same issue with cancellations or no shows as SYSA teams.

If you see a field that is repeatedly empty, let your club assigner know, and they or SYSA can follow up with Seattle Parks to see if the field is available or can be gotten from another group.

What is SYSA doing about the field shortage in Seattle?

SYSA has an active program of field advocacy. The association regularly lobbies for more and improved fields, supports initiatives and levies that include funding for field development, and works closely with Seattle Parks and city government on field issues. SYSA has had a direct hand in many of the field improvements and additions that have occurred in the past 5 years. While there has been progress, we need to continue to advocate for more playing fields for our young players.

In order to make better use of the fields, SYSA is developing a number of concepts through the Fields Task Force. We need to train coaches to use fields more efficiently, doing as much training in small footprints as possible. We need a better system for re-assigning fields that coaches know they won't be using. We are working with Seattle Parks to find ways to know about fields that have been turned back in. Finally, we need to be diligent to keep track of any unassigned field time that has been allocated to SYSA, but that never was assigned to a club team.

What can I do about the field shortage in Seattle?

An active membership is the best form of advocacy for fields. SYSA suggests you contact your club, your local city council members, the mayor, and the Parks department, and get involved in any field projects that occur. If you have a strong interest in this area and want to get more directly involved, contact the SYSA executive director at execdir@sysa.org.

Are dogs allowed on athletic fields?

No, city regulatory codes state that dogs are NOT allowed on any athletic field. Signs are usually posted at the entrance to athletic fields stating this law. Please leave your dogs at home or in your car. Thank you for your cooperation.