



Travel Soccer- is it right for my child and our family?

Azzurri Storm Travel Soccer Program

Thank you for your interest in the Azzurri Storm travel program. AZZURRI STORM is very proud of the coaches, parents, and especially the children who make up our travel teams. While we are hoping to use this forum to explain how travel soccer with AZZURRI STORM works, we strongly encourage you to talk to friends and neighbors about their experiences, while recognizing that each team has a unique character.

What is the difference between recreational and travel soccer?

In a recreational program, all children who register on time will be assigned to a team, and will receive equal playing time. Ability is not a factor, and all interested players are welcome. Coaches are almost always novice, and usually are parent volunteers who offer to coach their children and their friends. Travel soccer is a competitive program. All players are welcome to attend try-outs, but not all will be asked to join a team. **Once asked to join, playing time is not guaranteed.** Additionally, once on a team, players will continue to have to try-out every May/June to keep their roster spot. Coaches are generally licensed and can bring a wealth of personal playing and training experience to the teams they lead. Travel is a highly competitive world, and player development is of the utmost importance on AZZURRI STORM travel teams.

Who should play travel soccer?

Please realize that travel soccer is not for everyone, and that in many cases, a player and his or her family may be best served by a recreational program. To be successful in travel soccer, children should show a high level of ability, and their families should recognize that a greater commitment, both in terms of attendance at practices and games as well as financially, is required.

When are the games held?

Generally travel games are held on Saturdays, but almost every team will find themselves with games on Sundays and possibly midweek evenings during the season. Tournament games are held on Saturdays and Sundays; tournaments are discussed below in more detail.

How old must a player be to try out for a travel team?

Generally, players are offered the opportunity beginning at U8. AZZURRI STORM plans to supports at least one team, and possibly two, at every age through U19.

How can I find out when and where tryouts will be held?

Please check the website in April. Tryout dates and times will be listed there. You may also check with your child's coach or contact the club directly for information as the time draws near.

What do you mean by tryouts? What must my child do?

Tryouts are held every spring in May, and all interested children in an age group are encouraged to attend. Tryouts, which may be held over two or three sessions for each age group, are essentially handled like a practice, with one coach leading the sessions. Ball control, foot skills, speed, an understanding of the game, and the like are assessed by the coaches. Within a few days, coaches may offer a roster position to a player, or may call to discuss areas where the child should focus on improving.

What if there are two teams in an age group? How do we choose?

Please note that for many age groups, children have the option of two or more teams within the club; they are encouraged to accept a slot from the best team to offer one, but this is not required and the final choice is the player's. All teams in a specific age and gender (U10 boys, for instance) hold tryouts together. The more advanced, or "A", team will make the first selections and contact players. The next team will then be able to make their choices and contact those children. It may take a few days to hear from a coach- do not despair if there is not a phone call the night that the last tryouts take place! Every player will be contacted, regardless of the outcome.

How many players will 'make it'?

U9 and U10 teams play 7 v 7; therefore a roster will generally not have more than 12 players. At U11 and U12, the teams play 9 v 9 and rosters will generally not exceed 14 players. At U13, the teams play 11 v 11 and roster sizes can be increased to 18. However, many coaches choose to select fewer than the maximum number of players allowed in order to increase each person's playing time. Nobody wants to have a child sitting on the bench for long periods due to enormous rosters. Again, many age groups have multiple teams already, and AZZURRI STORM is willing to form more teams if interest and ability indicate the need.

What, specifically, does the "travel" part of Travel Soccer entail?

While many families, especially those considering this level of soccer for the first time, fear that by 'travel' they are committing to going out of state every weekend throughout the season, this is definitely NOT the case. Generally, league games for the youngest teams (U8 to U12) will be played in Southwest Florida (Lee and Collier counties). Older teams will play in either a Miami-based league or a Tampa-based league therefore depending on which league your team is in you will play "away" games every other week in Miami or Tampa. Some teams playing in the Tampa-based league may play "home" games as far away as Englewood. You may have a number of "away" games nearby as well, if other Southwest Florida-based teams are in the same Miami-based or Tampa-based leagues.

Can you tell me more about tournaments?

Tournaments comprise a large part of the travel soccer experience, and the children love them. Tournament weekends generally mean a team will definitely play two games on Saturday and at least one on Sunday, with the possibility of more Sunday afternoon if the team reaches the semi-finals or finals. Most teams play at least two or three tournaments per season. These often take place throughout the season. Most AZZURRI STORM teams play the Dimitri Cup (f/k/a Kelme Cup) and some other tournaments held locally. However clubs like Plantation and Weston in the Miami area and ESPN Wide World of Sports at Disney in Orlando host major tournaments every year. AZZURRI STORM teams are expected to play the Naples Spring Shootout, which is the tournament our club holds in early- April. Additionally, the Florida Youth Soccer Association host two major tournaments every year. The first tournament is the Region C Cup, which is split into Division 1 and Division 2 and played over several weekends from mid-February to mid-March. Geographically, Region C is on the west coast of Florida and ranges from Tampa in the north to Marco Island in the south. All U11, U12 and some older AZZURRI STORM teams, will participate in Division 1 or Division 2 of the Region C Cup. Both divisions begin with a round robin format and progress to a single elimination tournament. All games prior to the semi-finals may be played at any host club in Region C. The semi-finals and finals are generally played in Auburndale. The second tournament is the State Cup which is played over several weekend from mid-March to mid-May. Higher level teams from U13 are encouraged to participate in the State Cup tournament. This tournament begins with a round robin format and progresses to a single elimination tournament. All games in the first round robin are played at a host club in Region C. All games after the first round robin and prior to the semi-finals may be played at any host club in Florida. The semi-finals and finals are generally played in Auburndale.

So what leagues do AZZURRI STORM teams play in?

We are fortunate to have three travel leagues in the area, and AZZURRI STORM teams compete in all of them. The Southwest Florida League is based in Lee and Collier counties and accepts teams from U8 through U12. The South Florida United Soccer Association operates a league based in Miami and accepts teams from U8 through U19. The SFU league accepts teams from the Southeast counties of Florida as well as teams from Collier and Lee counties. The United Soccer Association operates a league based in Tampa and accepts teams from U8 through U19. The USA league accepts teams from the West coast counties of Florida as well as teams from Lee and Collier counties.

My child enjoys other activities, like dance or baseball - will that be all right?

Many travel soccer players participate in other activities. The coaches understand this, however, it is expected that a player's primary commitment is to his or her soccer team.

How many hours a week will my child practice?

Generally speaking, travel teams practice twice a week for an hour and a half during the regular season. Sometimes a team will add a third night with a special trainer or to work on a specific aspect of the game such as shooting.

I've heard travel soccer is essentially a year- round sport?

Generally speaking, travel teams train and play about 8-9 months out of the year. After tryouts in late May, June and July are quiet months for travel soccer players and most families opt to take their vacations then. High school age teams generally start training at the beginning of August. Younger teams will generally start training at the beginning of September. The early season for high school age teams will generally begin in August and finish before the high school soccer season begins. The regular season for younger teams will generally begin in October and finish by the end of January. AZZURRI STORM teams will generally take a two week break over the Christmas and New Year holiday time. Teams will continue training after the regular season for the Region C Cup and State Cup tournaments. Many teams will play other tournaments throughout this time. Most teams will finish their season around mid-April after our tournament, the Naples Spring Shootout however some teams may continue playing additional tournaments all the way to tryouts in late May/early June.

Is there any financial assistance available?

AZZURRI STORM does not want any child to be unable to play soccer because his or her family is unable to afford the cost. We will make every effort to provide assistance or waive fees in instances where the player's family merits financial aid. Please contact the Director of Operations, John Dina at john@azzurristorm.com for more information.

As a parent, what are my obligations to a travel team?

All travel teams need a manager, who is a parent volunteer. This person handles the day-to-day administrative aspects of the team, such as sending emails to the team, contacting opponents before games, passing along information between AZZURRI STORM and the team members, and handling tournament applications and registration.