

MISSISSIPPI SOCCER RETURN TO PLAY TIMELINE

FOR EXTERNAL RELEASE (March 24, 2020)

Dear Mississippi Soccer Families, Friends, Coaches, Referees, and Players,

Mississippi Soccer Association (MSA) has been the governing body of soccer in Mississippi since 1979. As a non-profit organization overseeing the 45+ non-profit member youth soccer clubs in Mississippi, the MSA mission continues to be one of serving Mississippi with integrity, providing value, and empowering our members to grow through the game of soccer.

By now, everyone should be aware that all organized Mississippi soccer operations have been suspended until at least April 1st. **In consideration of Governor Reeves' closure of schools until April 17th, the earliest date to resume spring soccer has been moved to April 18th. This is the first date that any teams of an MSA sanctioned organization may gather and take the field.** MSA will review this date no later than April 2nd and will extend the current spring season start date again if necessary.

Some of you receiving this may be 'first timers' in the Mississippi Soccer community. We welcome you into our family. We hope you soon find out why soccer is considered to be "The World's Sport", achieving more internationally than any other sport.

You may wonder why we don't cancel the spring season now. We can appreciate these sentiments, but the answer is not so simple. Locally, we've made it through hard times as friends, teams, clubs, and as a community. For many who grew up playing the sport, whether locally or nationally, we often reflect on the immense benefits sports has had on our lives. The physical, mental, and social well-being provided by soccer got many of us through hard times and made us better individuals. MSA and all Mississippi Soccer clubs believe that continuing to provide these benefits and fulfilling these needs has to be our goal. We can't and we won't just give up on the opportunity to emerge from this devastation so as to again serve our community.

Taking into consideration the diversity of the soccer community we serve, our decision to strive for stability and survival runs deep. Whether this is your child's first venture into organized sport, or your child lives and breathes soccer, the survival of youth soccer is vital to the continuation of:

- Soccer as the best form of exercise a child may get on a weekly basis.
- Soccer as the most welcome or possibly only non-school social time kids may have on a weekly basis.
- The immense benefit of the coach-player mentorship relationship.
- The stability in the life of a child that comes from being part of a team.
- Soccer is the only main outlet in life for some kids.

While not each of these may apply to your child, some or all of these benefits apply to children everywhere in the greater Mississippi Soccer community.

Without spring soccer, the sport as we know it, the infrastructure that has taken decades to build, the continuity and livelihood of many coaches, and field access will be crippled. Without a spring season, we are concerned many of our member clubs as we know them today will not survive in their current form. Some of our member clubs may be forced to lay off employees, coaches, downsize field access, or even close their doors. All MSA member clubs are non-profits, and few of them carry the extensive financial reserves necessary for them to make it intact through the events we are currently facing.

Working with USYS, we are gathering a list of non-profit assistance providers. This will be distributed in the coming weeks.

The MSA Council is holding weekly conference calls to address the soccer landscape as it changes constantly. The District Directors will be contacting their respective clubs to pass along any new information as well. We encourage everyone to share ideas, challenges, and future plans.

We believe now, more than ever, we need to focus on the future and pulling through this together so that our children will have a sense of normalcy as our community emerges from this devastation.

This will be a journey for us to take together, and together, we will emerge stronger.

Doug Kitchens, *President, Mississippi Soccer*

Kay Boulter, *Executive Director, Mississippi Soccer*