



THE ROAD TO PROFESSIONAL SOCCER

MLS PLAYER PATHWAY

	MLS Academy Development	MLS Next Pro 2nd Team / Reserve	MLS 1st Team Professional
Age Range	U-12 to U-19 Youth development windows	18-23 (core) Young pros, signed veterans	Any age Average MLS player ~25-27
Salary	Housing Stipend Stipends, housing possible for older academies Amateur	\$20K - \$80K Min. salary ~\$20K; homegrown players vary Professional	\$80K - \$5M+ MLS min. ~\$80K; star players earn millions DP / TAM eligible
Contract / Status	Academy agreement Non-professional; maintains college eligibility	Professional contract MLS Next Pro roster; can be loaned up	Full MLS contract Senior roster; Designated Players, TAM, GAM
Competition Level	MLS NEXT National youth league; GA Cup eligible	MLS Next Pro 3rd tier pro league; 30 teams in 2026	MLS 1st division; 30 teams; Supporters Shield, Cup
Training Load	~15-20 hrs/week Balanced with school; periodized training	~25-30 hrs/week Full-time professional training schedule	~30-35 hrs/week Full-time; film, recovery, fitness, media
Physical Standard	Developing Speed, technique, tactical foundation	Athletic Near-pro strength & speed; injury resilience	Elite Peak sprint speed, VO2 max, power output
Tactical IQ	Learning Introduction to system concepts & pressing	Applied Full team shape, set pieces, game management	Mastery Reads game in real-time; complex schemes
Path Forward	Homegrown signing College, USL, MLS Next Pro, or professional abroad	First team call-up MLS roster, loan abroad, SuperDraft eligible	Retain or transfer Contract extension, move to top leagues abroad
National Team	U-14 to U-20 Youth national team scouting pools	U-20 / U-23 Olympic qualifying pipeline; senior fringe	Full national team International eligibility
Primary Focus	Skill development Technical identity, individual growth, winning culture	Pro transition Bridging gap between youth and 1st team demands	Win trophies MLS Cup, Supporters Shield, CCL performance