

USL

Step Up



The Bold Next Phase of the USL's Women's Soccer Strategy



ON THE COVER

Top Left: Maddy Williams, Katie Soderstrom, and Rachel McCarthy, Indy Eleven

Bottom Left: Jaida Nyby, South Georgia Tormenta FC

Bottom Right: Steph Savino, Head Coach, Morris Elite SC



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Introduction

The USL was founded with the mission of uniting communities through soccer – in all its iterations at all levels. This is why we have committed so firmly to building a comprehensive women’s pathway.

Step Up provides a blueprint for the USL to build, operate, and grow the most comprehensive and powerful ecosystem in women’s soccer. One that we believe will help shape the future of women’s soccer in America.

Across the nation, we are creating new opportunities in women’s soccer – and for women in soccer. Over the next five years this will translate to more than 25,000 playing opportunities, tens of thousands of referee assignments, thousands of front office jobs, and hundreds of new coaching positions.

We are developing strong club brands, constructing stadiums, engaging communities, and creating commercial platforms for partners and investors who believe in the power and impact of women’s sport. We are building a broad community-centered ecosystem that will have new teams in more markets across the United States, giving more fans the chance to connect with the game they love and the players they want to cheer for.

We are providing players and coaches with new opportunities, ensuring the business viability of our clubs, and driving long-term sustainability for our leagues. And we know that being a global leader in women’s soccer means that our values must lead the way in how we achieve this.



**We are helping
shape the future
of women’s soccer
in America.**

Step Up lays the foundation for all of this. We are excited to see it come to life and are inspired by the commitment our players, clubs, staff, and partners continue to show to women’s soccer.

Together we are stepping up our efforts to accelerate women’s soccer during this exciting time in our country.



Alec Papadakis
CEO, United Soccer League



Amanda Vandervort
President, USL Super League

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USL'S WOMEN'S SOCCER TIMELINE

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- January 2021** ● The **USL** hires its first employee for the women's pathway, appointing Betsy Haugh as Director of Women's Soccer Operations.
 - May 2021** ● The **USL Academy** runs a successful pilot program for girls at the USL Academy Cup, with 16 teams competing in a U17 age group.
 - June 2021** ● The USL announces the formation of the **USL W League**, a new pre-professional league.
 - September 2021** ● The USL announces the formation of the **USL Super League**, a new professional league.
 - October 2021** ● The USL appoints Amanda Vandervort as President of the **USL Super League**.
 - January 2022** ● The **USL** names Dr. Missy Price as Vice President of Women's Soccer to lead on-field initiatives for its women's pathway.
 - May 2022** ● The **USL W League** launches with 44 clubs. The first season includes 240+ matches, 1,500+ players, and 170+ coaches. Nearly 20 W League players go on to sign pro contracts in the U.S. and Europe.
 - July 2022** ● A sold-out crowd of 6,489 fans watches the inaugural **USL W League Final**, won by South Georgia Tormenta FC, 2-1, over Minnesota Aurora FC.
 - August 2022** ● USL hires an Academy Director, Sarah Brady, to oversee the development of the **USL Academy** girls' program.
 - January 2023** ● The **USL** publishes *Step Up: The Bold Next Phase of the USL's Women's Soccer Strategy*.
 - 2023** ● The **USL W League** expands from 44 to 65 clubs in 2023, with a target of 100 clubs by 2026. The **USL Academy** launches a pilot girls' league for the summer season.

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Mission

To unite communities and grow the sport of soccer at all levels across North America.

Vision

To be a global leader in women's soccer on and off the field.



Sarah Fuller
Minnesota Aurora FC



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Objectives

Sangmin Cha
Minnesota Aurora FC



Create more opportunity

- For players, coaches, referees, staff, and fans
- To empower and support women in soccer

Set exceptional standards

- For girls and women in sport
- For a comprehensive women's soccer ecosystem

Build a smart business

- That drives the value of clubs
- That ensures long-term sustainability of the league

Inspire and connect people

- Through the power of women's soccer
- Through a collective vision for the future

Taylor Heemstra
Referee, USL W League



Selena Barnett
Indy Eleven

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The USL women's pathway has a designed foundation to highlight young and new talent. It has established an exciting platform for women to compete at a high level in hopes of sustaining a solid, developmental player pool for women's professional soccer.

Julie Carlson
Head Coach
Greenville Liberty SC





Tampa Bay United SC

Strategic Pillar #1

Build a comprehensive, clear, and aspirational pathway for all those who play, work in, and watch women's soccer.

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DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM.

- 1. **Construct intentional connections** between the USL's women's soccer properties to facilitate growth, collaboration, and opportunities for advancement for players, coaches, staff, referees, and more.
- 2. **Develop systems to drive upward mobility** for players, coaches, and technical staffs, including scouting networks, talent ID technology, and coaching development programs.
- 3. **Establish professional-development programs** for front office staff, including executive conferences, networking events, and educational opportunities.



Jhenesis Ellerbe
South Georgia Tormenta FC

USL Super League 

Global leader in women's professional soccer on and off the field.

USL W League 

The trusted and preferred pre-professional women's soccer league in the United States.

USL Academy 

Development emphasizing the promotion of top young talent into senior team environments.

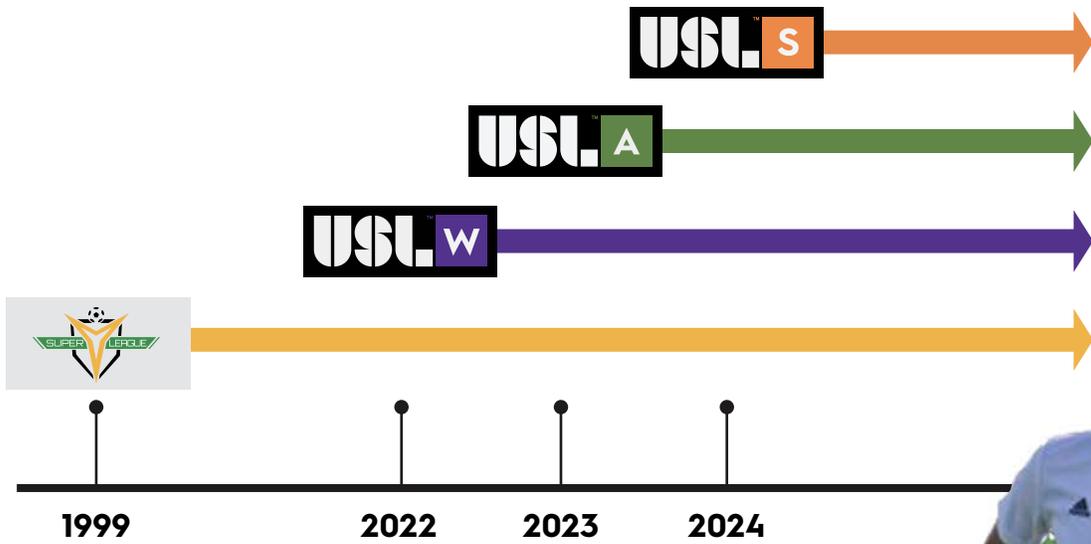
USL Super Y League 

Focus on youth participation while introducing players to the USL model.

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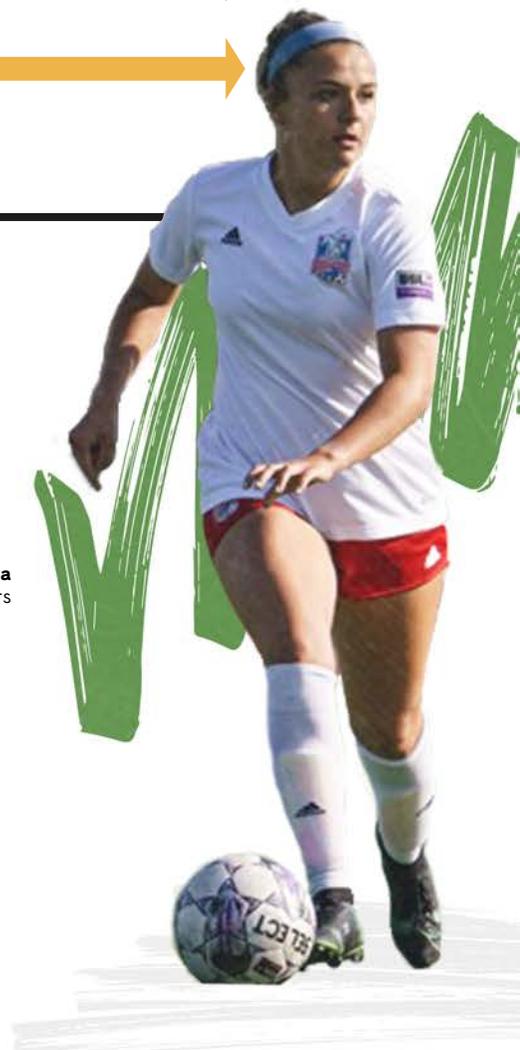
LAUNCH IN STRATEGIC PHASES.

1. **Launch the Academy, W League, and Super League** in an intentional and clear order.
2. **Provide “on-ramp” opportunity** for clubs and investors to engage in women’s soccer in the way that is best for their business and community.
3. **Collaborate with key stakeholders** across the women’s soccer landscape on strategic initiatives.



Nicolette Caneda
Long Island Rough Riders

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Detroit City FC

Strategic Pillar #2

Ensure the long-term sustainability of the USL women's soccer ecosystem.

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INTRODUCE STRATEGIC INNOVATIONS.

YEAR-ROUND CALENDAR

Operate a year-round competition schedule that prioritizes player welfare and opportunity, extends fan engagement, and increases revenue potential.

Super League:

International match calendar

- Respects the summer international competitions
- Top-level players feature more consistently

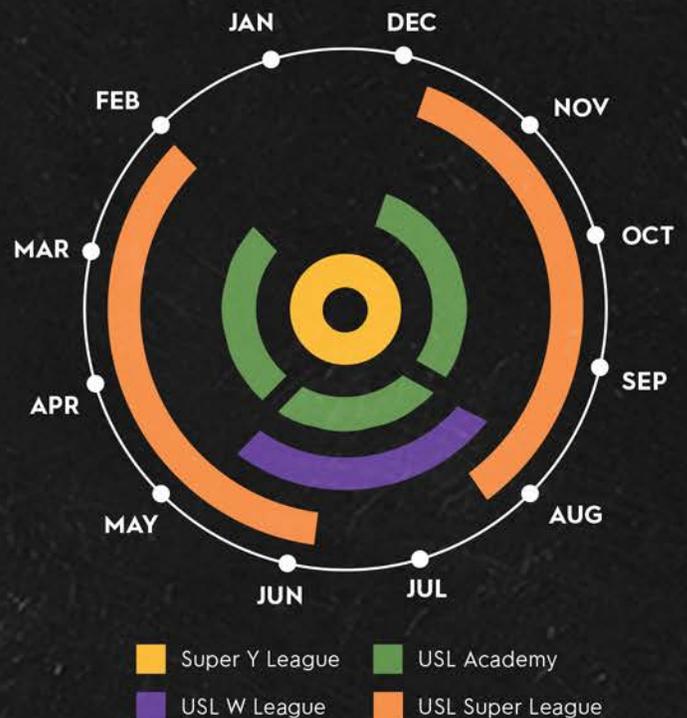
W League: May-to-July calendar

- Proving ground for potential pro players and coaches
- High-level summer platform for collegiate players

Academy and Super Y League:

Variable calendar

- "Path-to-pro" development program
- Complements existing elite youth schedules



PROMOTION/RELEGATION

Prepare the groundwork for potentially introducing a promotion/relegation system that maintains the highest business, sporting, and fan-engagement standards.

LEVERAGE THE USL'S DEEP KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.

Minimum Standards

Establish and enforce operational standards that maintain quality at all levels.

Elite Performance Environments

Focus on technical resources and conditions that allow players to perform at their highest levels.

Strong League Office

Drive and support best-in-class soccer business throughout the USL ecosystem.



I'm grateful that the USL helped get my name out there, and I'm excited to see what happens next.

Amy Andrews

USL W League Golden Boot winner
and 2022 W League Champion
South Georgia Tormenta FC

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PRIORITIZE THE SAFETY AND DIGNITY OF OUR COMMUNITY.

Safeguarding

Prevent and respond to incidents of abuse, discrimination, harassment, and exploitation.

Player Welfare

Implement policies and procedures that address the needs of female soccer players.



The W League helped prepare me to play pro because I played at a high level in practice and in games. I learned a lot from my coaches, and I competed against top players from around the country.

Morgan Turner
SCU Torreense (Portugal),
prev. Minnesota Aurora FC





Strategic Pillar #3

Support the existing women's soccer landscape while accelerating growth in new areas.

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Work with key stakeholders, such as U.S. Soccer, CONCACAF, and FIFA, to support and drive impactful initiatives, including domestic and international club tournaments.



Identify strong markets, both new and existing within the USL, to bring more women's and girls' soccer to more American communities.



Utilize fan insights to create community-centered clubs that fans want to engage with and support on and off the field.



Seek feedback from players, coaches, fans, and others to enroll the entire ecosystem in the continued evolution of *Step Up*. Ensure the standards, policies, and conditions are meeting or exceeding expectations.



Collaborate with leagues, teams, non-profits, partners, and individuals to collectively accelerate the growth of the women's game.

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The new USL pathways have provided the ability to continue to work and impact the game I love. It has given me the chance to learn about various new roles and experience what it takes to create a successful women's team.

Jenna Lamb
Business Development Director
Oakland Soul SC



What Comes Next

The launch of the Super League in 2024 will be the culmination of many years of planning and the beginning of the next phase of the USL women's soccer movement – a fully operational pathway, from youth to academy to pre-professional to professional.

The success of *Step Up* means that the USL will be:

- a global leader in women's soccer on and off the field
- an organization of choice for players, coaches, staff, and fans
- a compelling platform that drives revenue and engages partners

We will identify and nurture young, talented players to develop world-class professionals who can compete on the global level.

We will create strong, financially sustainable clubs that connect with their local communities.

We will develop exciting leagues that inspire more women's soccer fandom than ever before.

We will engage key stakeholders and facilitate a spirit of collaboration and inclusivity to further professionalize the women's game, both on and off the field, and to create a vibrant, dynamic, long-lasting women's soccer ecosystem.

In short, we will *step up*.



Hal Hershfelt
Greenville Liberty SC

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The Bold Next Phase of the USL's Women's Soccer Strategy

