

ERIE FC GUNNERS



PARENT INFORMATION
2026/2027 SEASON

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The ERIE FC Gunners program is designed to provide soccer training in an environment that combines skill development and game play. This is achieved through age-appropriate practices and games. Gunners is open to all players regardless of current skill level or prior playing experience. The U6, U7, and U8 age groups will feature 1 or 2 weekday practices, plus a separate weekend game. The U5 age group will feature a combination of skill development and game play into each weekday practice (no weekend game). The program has open enrollment. Players are allowed to join or cancel at any time throughout the season.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Soccer training (or practice) will mainly focus on the technical aspects of the game in order to appropriately develop individual player skills.

- Dribbling: dribbling technique, ball manipulation, 1v1 moves, turning, shielding, speed dribbling
- Passing: passing technique, short passing, long passing, weight of the pass
- Receiving: receiving technique, body positioning, receiving transition, balls on the ground, balls in the air
- Shooting: shooting technique, shooting for power, shooting for accuracy, volleys
- Goalkeeping: goalkeeping technique, shot stopping, catching, distribution
- Other: juggling, soccer agility, mobility, coordination, balance

GAME PLAY

Soccer games (including game play during practice) will allow players to apply the skills learned into a game situation. Introduction of the basic tactical components of soccer will also be coached.

- Technical: dribbling, passing, receiving, shooting, goalkeeping
- Tactical: positions, offense, defense, transitions, awareness, decision making, teamwork

AGE GROUPS

US Soccer defines age groups by school based years, with August 1 being the start of a new age group. For example, U8 means Under-8, and is for players born between August 1, 2018 and July 31, 2019. Players in this age group are 7 years old as of July 31, and will turn 8 during the season.

2026/2027 SEASON AGE GROUPS

Age Group	Oldest DOB	Youngest DOB
U5	August 1, 2021	July 31, 2022
U6	August 1, 2020	July 31, 2021
U7	August 1, 2019	July 31, 2020
U8	August 1, 2018	July 31, 2019

Based on the recommendation of the coaching staff, players may play in an older or younger age group if it's a better fit for the development of the player.

PLAYER POOL vs TEAMS

In Gunners, we treat each age group as a pool of players, rather than individual teams. Even though players are divided into teams for weekend games, the main focus is on individual player development, and the overall development of the player pool as a whole. A large player pool translates into better overall player development. Teams (for games) are shuffled throughout the season, allowing kids to play with many different teammates within their age group.

GAMES

Kids want to play “the game” as much as possible. And at this age, regular weekly game play is very important to player development. It is also important to make sure the game format is age-appropriate. We use US Soccer recommendations for game format and field sizes. Below are the guidelines used for each age group.

	U5	U6	U7	U8
Game Day	Built into practice	Saturday	Saturday	Saturday
Format	3 v 3 (2 + GK)	4 v 4 (3 + GK)	4 v 4 (3 + GK)	5 v 5 (4 + GK)
Time	10-20 minutes of practice	2 x 25-min halves	2 x 25-min halves	2 x 25-min halves

*Game format, time, etc may be adjusted as needed.

GAME PLAY & POSITIONS

- During games, coaches try to ensure a rotation of players to allow players to have breaks, and play a variety of positions. It’s important for players to experience all positions, including goalkeeper.
- Please communicate with the Director if your child will miss an upcoming game due to sickness, other activity, out of town, etc. This way if a team is low on number of players, we can invite other players to help.

TEAM ROSTERS

- U6, U7, U8: Players are divided into teams (usually 4 or 6) for each schedule block.
- Each schedule block will usually consist of 8-weeks of games. Then, team rosters will be shuffled for the next schedule block.
- Shuffling teams and allowing kids to play with many different teammates within their age group further adds to their development.
- We will send an email and team chat notification when the rosters are changed.

UNIFORMS / WHAT TO BRING

The uniform kit is available to purchase through the ERIE FC Team Store. The jerseys require a number, and players may select any number they wish (duplicates with another player is fine). Uniforms will be delivered directly to you from the uniform supplier.

WHAT TO WEAR

Practices: Any Gunners jersey can be worn for practices. Players can wear any shorts and socks.

Games: Players should wear the full Gunners uniform kit (jersey, shorts, socks) for games. Follow the schedule to know which color jersey to wear for the game. The color is listed in the top row for that column - Black or Red.

We understand that at the beginning of the season (and for new players), you may not have received your uniform yet. Any soccer or athletic clothing, with a black or red shirt is fine until your uniform arrives.

WHAT TO BRING TO PRACTICES & GAMES

Shin Guards: Shin guards are required for practices & games, and must be covered by socks.

Soccer Shoes or Sneakers: EPS West & EPS Pennbriar both have artificial field turf - indoor or outdoor soccer shoes, turf shoes, or sneakers are permitted (no metal cleats).

Drink Bottle: Please make sure the player's name is on it.

Soccer balls are provided for practices and games by ERIE FC Gunners.

SCHEDULE / HOLIDAYS

The Gunners program is a full 9-month schedule that follows the traditional school year. Start dates and end dates of the program are posted on the website. Practices are every week unless otherwise adjusted for a holiday. Practice and game schedules are outlined on the website and will be posted on the communications app.

GAME SCHEDULE LINK

The Gunners game schedule page will be continually updated as we progress through the season. Please bookmark the page:

<https://eriefc.com/junior-programs/erie-fc-gunners-game-schedule/>

- At the top of the schedule table will be a Black and Red column title. This will indicate which color your team is to wear for that game.

PRACTICES DURING HOLIDAYS

- If a practice falls on a holiday (Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, etc), players are permitted to attend another practice that week as make-up.
- During extended holiday breaks (Christmas to New Year's), we may have full days off, or a few open practices during that week for any player to attend.
- All of these scenarios will be communicated through email and the communications app as they arrive on the schedule.

GAMES DURING HOLIDAYS

- If a game day falls on a specific holiday, we will have the day off.
- If a game day is near a holiday (the Saturday before Easter), we will have a game. However, it will typically be an "open" game allowing players to choose which game time works best for them. Since many families may be out of town or have holiday commitments, this will allow us to still have games without worrying about specific team rosters.
- All of these scenarios will be communicated through email and the communications app as they arrive on the schedule.

COMMUNICATIONS / TEAMSNAAP APP

We use two main methods of communication: email and TeamSnap app. Both methods are used to notify you of any changes or cancellations as it relates to schedules, announcements, weather, etc.

TEAMSNAAP

You will receive an email notification to accept the invitation to your Gunners group in TeamSnap. You are able to add as many family members as you would like to the account. All activities for each age group are added to the schedule within TeamSnap. You will follow the practice schedule according to your practice selection(s), and game schedule according to the team assigned. For games, please cross reference the website for the most accurate schedule.

TeamSnap has two types of chats.

Team Chat: These messages will go to every family within the age group. This main chat is used for general communication and announcements.

Direct Message / Chat: If you have a personal request or question, please send that as an individual message to the program director or coaches. For example, if you have a schedule conflict and need to attend a different practice day, please send that message individually rather than in the team chat.

PLAYER & PARENT GUIDELINES

PLAYERS

At ERIE FC Gunners, we strive to teach players the following traits.

- Have fun and be positive.
- Be respectful to coaches. Listen and be attentive.
- Be respectful to other players. Encourage teammates and make new friends.
- Learn, work hard, and try new skills. Keep trying to improve.
- Play and practice at home.

PARENTS

At ERIE FC Gunners, we encourage all parents to follow these guidelines.

- Enjoy your child's soccer experience, but most importantly, let them enjoy the game. Be positive. At this young age positive feedback can go a long way. Celebrate good play, teamwork, hustle, and skill development. Be respectful to all players in the same manner.
- Encourage your child to learn, work hard, and try new skills. This is the discovery age of soccer, and we want players to try new things and take risks. "Failing" is ok, and try not to dwell on the negatives. Encourage your child to try again.
- Let the players play and the coaches coach. Soccer can be a very free flowing sport. We don't want "soccer robots" that only wait until a coach or parent tells them what to do.
 - Let players make their own decisions. After all, they are the ones playing the game.
 - Coaches can certainly tell players what to do on every single play. But we will balance guiding players, making suggestions / corrections, and allowing them to make their own decisions.
 - You will hear coaches saying things like: "Head up. Spread out. Find the forward. Look to score." These are ways for us to guide players in making correct decisions without specifically telling them what to do.
 - Each week, there is a different practice topic. During games, coaches may focus on correcting that specific skill since it was the weekly topic. Even though there may be multiple other things that can be corrected.
- Encourage your child to play at home. This can be with siblings, neighbors, or even you as parents. For most kids, the only time they play soccer is during an organized practice or game. Backyard soccer, pick up games, or even just practicing moves in the garage or basement will aid in the player's overall development.

FAQs

Can we cancel or take time off? Yes, Gunners has open enrollment. Players may join or cancel at any time. Please contact the program director and your billing will be adjusted accordingly.

Can we attend a different practice if we have conflict that week? Yes, we are flexible and allow players to practice on a different day within their age group if you have a conflict that week. Please send that request to the program director via email or direct message.

Can we change our regular practice day due to a schedule change / availability? Yes, if your schedule changes due to other activities, contact the program director to change your practice.

Can we request to attend a different game time? At times, your child may have to miss their scheduled game, but is available for another game. Please send that request to the program director via email or direct message. We are usually able to accommodate those requests, but just need to make sure that doesn't cause the other game to have too many players.

What does my child wear if we haven't received his uniform yet? We understand that at the beginning of the season (and for new players), you may not have received your uniform yet. Any soccer or athletic clothing, with a black or red shirt is fine until your uniform arrives.

How do we know what color jersey to wear for games? At the top of the schedule table will be a Black and Red column title. This will indicate which color your team is to wear for that game. It is also listed in the TeamSnap app next to the team name (B or R).

My child has little or no playing experience. Is the Gunners program still a good fit? Yes, Gunners is designed for players regardless of current skill level or prior playing experience. Don't feel discouraged if your child seems "behind" other players. Many times, players catch on quickly and you will see skill development in a short period of time.

Is there a summer Gunners program? Yes, we offer a summer version of Gunners in June-August. This is typically an 8-week program with 1 or 2 practices per week. It is a combination of skill development with game play built into each practice.