

A question we hear often: “Shouldn’t my player move up a grade? Won’t playing against older kids make him better?” It’s asked with the best intentions, and it deserves an honest answer. This document explains how 212 Lacrosse makes that decision, why we make it the way we do, and what the pathway looks like for a genuine outlier athlete.

## PLAYING UP IS NOT A DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Development comes from a handful of things, and the age of the players on the field is not one of them. It comes from the quality of the coaching, the structure of the training, the volume and quality of a player’s repetitions, and consistency over years — the same principles laid out in our Family Guide. Moving a player up a grade changes none of those inputs. It only changes who is standing next to him.

For most young players, playing up actually works against development: fewer touches, fewer decisions with the ball, a smaller role, and habits built around surviving instead of growing. Playing up is a variable, not a strategy — used at the right time with the right player it can help; used as a default it typically does the opposite.

**The best thing for most players is to be a central, high-usage contributor on their own team — carrying the ball, making decisions, leading, and playing big minutes in moments that matter. That is where development happens.**

## WHEN PLAYING UP MAKES SENSE

There are players for whom playing up is the right call. They are rare, and they are identifiable. Before we move any player up, we look for all of the following:

- Complete skill foundation. Both hands functional under pressure. A player still building his skill foundation needs more quality repetitions at his level, not fewer repetitions a level up.
- Decision-making ahead of his age group. He processes the game faster than his peers, not just harder or stronger. Being strong, tough, and competitive is a real asset, but physicality is not the same thing as skill, and it is skill that carries a player forward.
- A meaningful role at the higher level. He must earn significant, productive minutes — not fill out a roster. Standing on a sideline a level up develops nothing.
- No cost to his current team. Contributing to a team he helps make better is itself development — leadership, confidence, and reps in the moments that matter.

These evaluations are made by our coaching staff, based on what we see on the field over time. They are not made by request, and they are never made differently for one family than another. That standard is what protects the program for every player in it.

### THE OUTLIER PATHWAY

Some players do outgrow their age group. When a player is a true outlier, we do not solve that by disrupting his team or his teammates. We have consistently created opportunities for players with outlier talent and physical ability: through relationships with programs and coaches across the country built over 17 years, we place those players in environments that give them the touches, the competition, and the coaching they need — while they continue to anchor their own team at home. The player gets stretched where it counts, and still comes home to lead. This is how it is handled at the highest levels of the sport, and it is available to any 212 player who reaches that point.

For our coaching lineage and program background, please visit [212about.netlify.app](https://212about.netlify.app).

### THE BOTTOM LINE

If your player is ready to play up, we will tell you — and we will build the right pathway, whether that is here or through our network. If he is not yet, we will tell you that too, along with exactly what he needs to work on to get there. Either way, the answer is driven by one thing: the development of the child. It will never be driven by pressure, and it will be the same answer any family in the program would receive. For the full picture of how we develop players year over year, please revisit the 212 Lacrosse Family Guide.

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Questions about your player's development are always welcome: [mike@212lacrosse.com](mailto:mike@212lacrosse.com)