

March is launch time for all sorts of US soccer. Here in Rapid City, the doors closed on the last indoor tournament on Sunday night and players are teams are by Rapid City Youth Soccer for the opening outdoor games on April 1. Coaches are being contacted with dates for their meetings to pick up their new roster with plenty of additional information for players and parents.

Referees are also preparing. There is a "bridge" class being offered to those who are ready to move up from the beginning level (Grade 9) to Grade 8. This class is March 16 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the RCYSL office on West Main. There is a re-certification class offered on Tuesday and Thursday, March 25 and 27 beginning at 7:00 PM in the RCYSL office.

Referees will teach the Grade 9 class on March 22 and 29 at Hot Springs and Spearfish respectively. Contact George Lee for more details at his office: 394-4042 or cell phone: 430-6103.

This is the beginning of Olympic Qualifying for the US. This is the Under 23 squad not the national team. The men's qualifying tournament is underway in our geographical region, CONCACAF. The US is in Group A and will play Panama and Honduras after a tie with Cuba on Tuesday. The must-win game with Panama is tonight at 6:00 PM, MDT and all games are carried live on Fox Soccer, ESPN Deportes and ESPN360.com. The last game in this round is with Honduras on Saturday, March 15 at 5:00 PM MDT. The top two teams from Group A will meet the top two from Group B that includes: Mexico, Canada, Haiti, and Guatemala. Semi-final games are March 20 and finals are March 23. The winners of the semi-final games advance to the Olympics in Beijing.

The US Women are currently in Portugal wrapping up the Algarve Tournament. The U.S. women followed their 4-0 win over China with a 2-0 shutout of Italy in the team's second match of the 2008 Algarve Cup. They defeated Norway on Monday moving on to the finals with Denmark yesterday. The US successfully defended their title with a 2-1 win. The US allowed only this one goal in the tournament.

The next stage for the US Women is the Olympic Qualifying tournament in Mexico. This is a six-team tournament over a period of 11 days. The US is the defending Olympic champion.

Major League Soccer teams are in training and friendlies around the world. The LA Galaxy has been playing an Asian tour and Beckham has been packing them in. Other teams have been in the Caribbean and Europe for matches. The season opens March 29 around the country.