



## SMALL SIDED GAMES

Coaching Education Department

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# SMALL SIDED GAMES

Small sided games are (SSG) any game played with less than eleven-a-side teams. Eleven-a-side soccer is an adult game devised by and for adults to play. While US Youth Soccer includes all age groups up to U19, the U16 and older age groups are allowed to play adult, as well as, youth soccer.

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# SMALL SIDED GAMES

Therefore, the U15 and younger age groups are the ones that can and should be involved in small-sided games. The objective of small-sided games is a stair step approach for young players to grow into the adult game of 11 versus 11.

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

*Soccer games smaller than 11 versus 11 provide many critical advantages to players including:*

- ✓ **The ability to repeatedly contact the ball and the ability to repeatedly experience basic tactical problems.**
- ✓ **In terms of player development, this ability to actively participate is directly related to fun and enjoyment and to the issues surrounding quality of play and the retention of players.**

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

- ✓ **Makes it difficult for players to “hide” in SSG, all players must attack and defend in order for their team to succeed (mobility).**
- ✓ ***More space + fewer numbers = less bunching. Enhanced tactical awareness (positioning). The game is less complicated and easier to understand.***

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

- ✓ **Players under twelve are routinely structured into formal positions at ages when their spatial awareness and technical range do not lend themselves to a practical understanding of large group tactics.**
- ✓ **More “fun” and personal enjoyment; due to small fields and simplified rules.**

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

- ✓ More playing time, which encourages maximum individual participation.
- ✓ More individual involvement improves fitness.
- ✓ More responsibility, every child has greater opportunities to score or stop the opponents from scoring, this builds their self-esteem and self-confidence.

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

- ✓ **More freedom of expression; there are no positions; children will find their own position (U6 & U8). A player can be a forward, midfielder and defender during the course of the game. Children will migrate to areas of the field where they feel comfortable. When they are older we will discover their best position.**
- ✓ **More child-centered not coach controlled.**

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# SSG BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

- ✓ More experience in all phases of the game. There is no hiding or dominant player hogging the ball. Every child has to participate in all facets of the game, attack and defend. The emphasis is on PLAYER DEVELOPMENT.

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# EVIDENCE OF VALUE OF SSG

The move to SSG for preteen players is based on educational research on the way children learn. Just as with their academic education their soccer education is progressive. Empirical studies have been conducted into the improvement in the game environment for children in SSG as opposed to the adult version of soccer.

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# EVIDENCE OF VALUE OF SSG

**There is also evidence, from exercise physiology studies, of improved physical fitness due to the SSG environment. Anecdotal inquiry shows psychologically children prefer the SSG format.**

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# EVIDENCE OF VALUE OF SSG



- Mathematical formula
- Observation analysis
- Physiological data
- Biological stages of growth
- Cognitive stages of growth
- Social/Emotional stages of growth
- COMMON SENSE

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# Lines of Interaction

$n(n-1)$

■ 2-players	2	■ 10-players	90
■ 3-players	6	■ 11-players	110
■ 4-players	12	■ 12-players	132
■ 5-players	20	■ 13-players	156
■ 6-players	30	■ 14-players	182
■ 7-players	42	■ 16-players	240
■ 8-players	56	■ 18-players	306
■ 9-players	72	■ 20-players	380
		■ 22-players	462

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# EVIDENCE OF VALUE OF SSG

## ✓ Mathematical Formula

- Lines of interaction are the *possible* passing connections between players. Each time another player enters the field of play the level of complexity of the game environment increases. The interactions are tactical possibilities.

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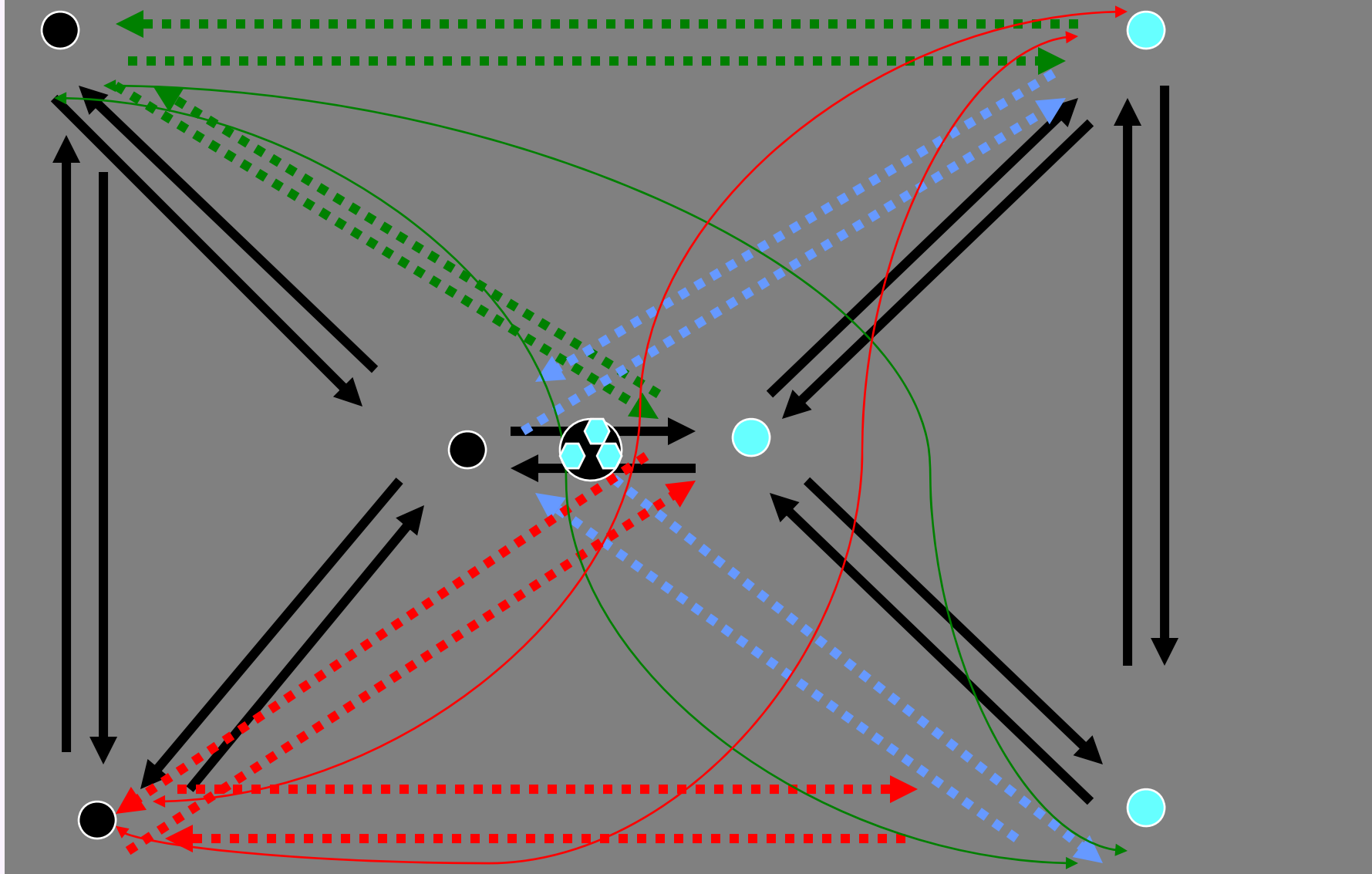
# LINES OF INTERACTION

- **The point of attach is the place on the field where the pass was initiated.**
- **The point of insertion is the place on the field where the pass finished.**

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# 3 v 3



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# 3 VS 3

- Black = 14 interactions (12/team plus 2 between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> defender)
- Green = 6 interactions
- Blue = 4 interactions
- Purple = 6 interactions
- TOTAL = 30
- Solid Lines = strongest interactions
- Dotted Lines = secondary interactions
- Curved Lines = tertiary (reduced) interactions

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# 3 VS 3

**Each player has 4-6 strong interactions, 0-4 intermediate interactions and 0-2 weak interactions based on static relative positions. Players at the point of attack have the most interactions (10) or options. Obviously, to exploit individual differences in the match-ups, players could and should rotate through the scheme.**

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# EVIDENCE OF VALUE OF SSG

## ✓ Observation Analysis

- The purpose of the following study, conducted by the California Youth Soccer Association – South using SoftSport SecondLook software, was to collect data to compare the 4 vs. 4 game to the 8 vs. 8 game for U8 players.



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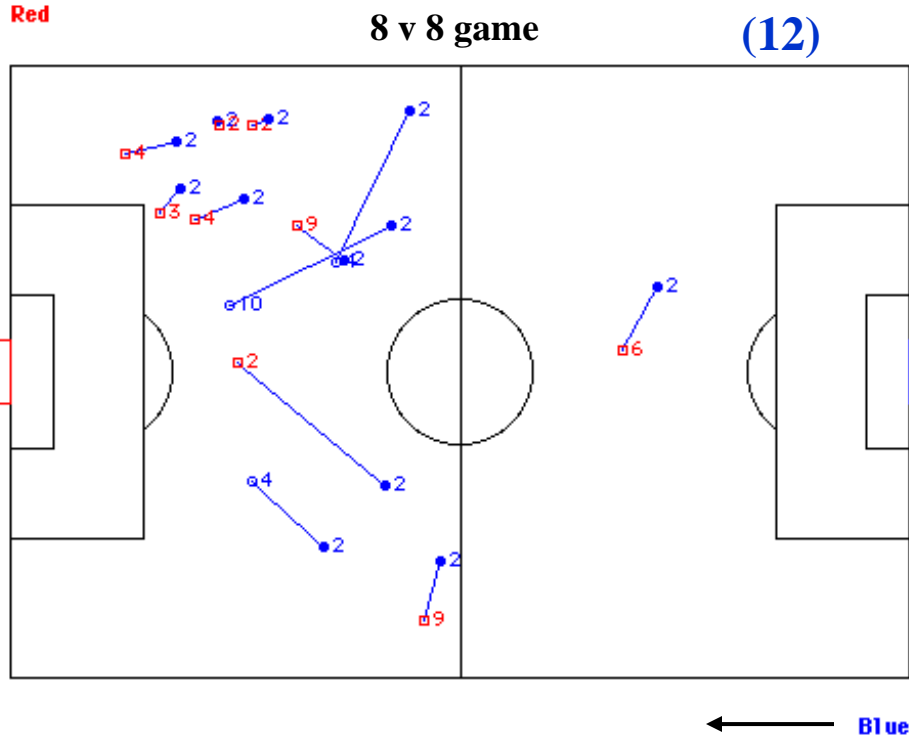
# Jackie - Player Performance - Total Passes

Blue Team - No "2"

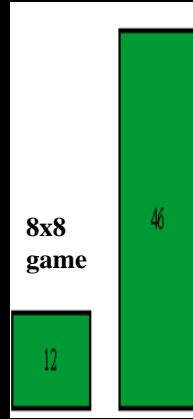
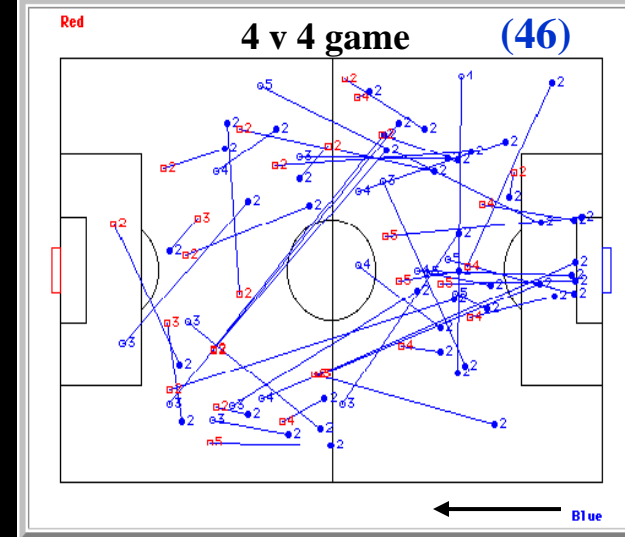


4 v 4  
game

## Total Passes by Jackie



## Total Passes by Jackie



Total Passes  
Comparison

### Legend:



She **initiated** the pass  
to her teammates

She **competed** the pass  
to her teammates



She **initiated** the pass  
to her teammates

She **lost** the pass  
to her teammates

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# Jackie - Player Performance - Total Passes

## Blue Team - No "2"



### Head-to-Head Comparison

Game	GO	IG	SH	IS	CP	LP	TP	CR	IP	CK
4 v 4	1	0	1	0	18	28	46	39%	42	0
8 v 8	1	0	1	9	3	9	12	25%	9	0

*GO: Goals (Number of goals during game)*

*IG: Impact Goals (Number of passes resulting in a goal)*

*SH: Shots on Goal (Number of shots on goal)*

*IS: Impact Shots (Number of passes resulting in a shot on goal)*

*CP: Completed Passes (Number of passes completed to team-mates)*

*LP: Lost Passes (Number a passes lost to opponent)*

*TP: Total Passes (Completed and lossed passes during game)*

*CR: Completion Ratio (Percent of total passes that were completed)*

*IP: Intercepted Passes (Number of passes that were intercepted from the opponents)*

*CK: Corner Kicks (Number of corner kicks)*

*TI: Time (Total number of minutes played in the game)*

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# Jackie - Player Performance - Total Passes



Blue Team - No "2"

## Observations & Analysis

### 8 v 8 game

- She was assigned to play as a attacking player (the data showed that she played mostly as a forward)
- She had 12 total passes
- She completed 3 passes with a completion rate of 25%
- She intercepted 9 passes
- Most of her passes were forward (none into the penalty area)

### 4 v 4 game

- She played all positions (according to the data shown in the small field)
- She had 46 total passes (the highest in the game by both team players)
- No positions were assigned (she moved on her own all over the field)
- She completed 18 passes with a completion rate of 39%
- She intercepted 42 passes
- Most of her passes were forward but some were in the lateral direction

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# Jackie - Player Performance - Total Passes



## Comparison of Jackie's Performance

### 8 v 8 versus 4 v 4 game

- She had almost 4 times more passes in the small game
- She scored 1 goal and had 1 shot on goal in both games
- Her completion rate was up (from 25% to 35% in the small game)
- She intercepted almost 5 times more balls from the opponent in the small game
- She had 6 times more completed passes in the small game (from 3 to 18 passes)

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# Observational Analysis

- In the 4 vs. 4 game on a smaller field, most of the players (88%) touched the ball 3-4 times more in several different categories such as: goals, shots on goal, completed and lost passes and total passes while still maintaining similar completion ratios of 31 versus 35%.
- When no positions were given to the players (the player's were free to move around the field) the results were that they were much more involved and subsequently touched the ball 3-4 times more.

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# Training Objectives

- Provide maximum fun and enjoyment for the players
- Challenge players
- Develop playing ability incrementally
- Create opportunities for success, regardless of ability



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# Developmental Considerations

- Children like to compete with each other
- Skills need to be developed in playful environment
- Players can't learn when game demands skills or tactics they haven't yet learned
- If they encounter the same situation many times over, they learn to deal with it
- Complicated rules, such as offside, detract from the ability to learn fundamentals
- Commonly accepted now that ages 8 to 12 are ideal for developing technique and coordination
- In spite of this many coaches continue to implement adult rules and strategies, which hinder this development

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# Coaching Considerations

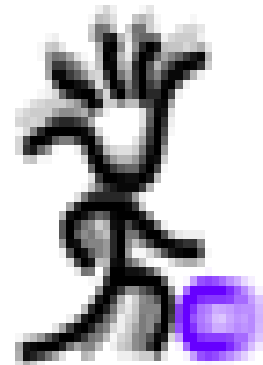
- It's not enough to merely substitute smaller games for 11 vs. 11
- Basic concepts such as passing, control, dribbling and ball possession must be taught
- Players should not be forced into rigid positional responsibilities until they have mastered the basics
- Development is a long term process and the players' enjoyment should take precedence over that of the parents - games that teach soccer fundamentals may not be the most exciting to watch
- By changing conditions and variations of the training games the coach can alter the playing style of the children

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# BIOLOGICAL STAGES

- **Infancy and toddler ages span from birth to approximately 5-years-old**
- **Childhood extends from the age of 5 to 15**
- **The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years with a range from 7-14; for boys, age 12 with a range from 9-16**
- **The general range for adolescence is 15 to 23 years of age**



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# COGNITIVE GROWTH

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Years

Sensory-Motor

---

Pre-Operational

---

Concrete Operational

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Formal Operational

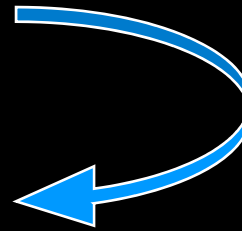
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# SOCIAL - EMOTIONAL GROWTH

- 4- to 8-years-old
  - From self-centered to playmates & sharing
  - Developing a conscience
- 8- to 10-years-old
  - Developing a conscience
  - Begin to initiate activities on their own
- 10- to 12-years-old
  - Developing a sense of self-worth
  - Gender social roles coming to the fore



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# SOCIAL - EMOTIONAL GROWTH

- Piaget's Stages in Consciousness of Rules

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Years

- Product of Mutual Consent



- Sacred, Untouchable



- Not Coercive



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# SOCIAL - EMOTIONAL GROWTH

- Piaget's Stages in the Practice of Rules

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

- Codification



- Cooperation



- Egocentric



- Motor



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# IMPLEMENTATION OF SSG

## Logistical Issues

- ✓ FIELD AVAILABILITY
  - ✓ Markings and size
- ✓ REFEREES
  - ✓ No need for them in the U6 & U8 matches
  - ✓ Training for novice referees in the U10 & U12 matches
- ✓ COACHES
  - ✓ Field Coordinators
  - ✓ Facilitators
- ✓ ROSTER SIZE
  - ✓ Less structured 'teams' for U6 & U8 ... players show up and play
- ✓ GOALS
  - ✓ Cones or corner flags in lieu of or in addition to regular goals

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# IMPACT ON PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

- **Technical abilities will accelerate due to increased time with the ball. Further, the ball skill demands are now realistic on a smaller field.**
- **Athletic growth is enhanced due to continuous movement.**

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# IMPACT ON PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

- There is a greater demand on mental concentration. The game is more fun to play because the players are always involved.
- More opportunities for problem solving are created for the players to work out together. Hence “teamwork” is promoted!

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# IMPACT ON PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

- This match environment now demands ***transition*** and thus tactical awareness. The players are involved on both sides of the ball, so there is no hiding in the weeds.
- There is a greater demand on individual and group tactics. The team tactical concept of compactness is enhanced in the small sided game.

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## ✓ CANADA

- Here are the CSA's recommendations
- U6 3 vs. 3
- U8 4 vs. 4
- U10 7 vs. 7
- U12 8 vs. 8
- 13 and older 11 vs. 11
- Mr. Sean Fleming
- National Staff Coach
- [sfleming@soccercan.ca](mailto:sfleming@soccercan.ca)
- 780-718-9375

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

- **5 vs. 5, including the goalkeeper for U12**
- **Ms. Kenisha Morgan**
- **Administrator Public Relations and Marketing  
Manager of the Cayman Football Association.**

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## ✓ SCOTLAND

4 vs. 4 for U8 – no goalkeepers

7 vs. 7 for U10 to U12 including goalkeepers

11 vs. 11 for U13 and older

Mr. David Little

National Secretary for the Scottish Youth Football  
Association

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## ENGLAND

- The F.A. does not encourage any organized football under the age of six. Over 6-years-old ‘Mini-Soccer’ rules apply.
- 4 vs. 4 or 5 vs. 5 for U8
- 6 vs. 6 or 7 vs. 7 for U10
- Over ten-years-old they begin to play 11 a-side.
- “This was introduced four years ago and we feel this has made a huge difference to our youth development programme.” Mr. Jonathan Arana, Senior Customer Relations Manager for The F.A.

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

- *IRELAND REPUBLIC*
- **5 vs. 5 for U8**
- **7 vs. 7 for U10**
- **9 vs. 9 for U12**
- **All formats include goalkeepers.**
- **Mr. Richard Fahy, Technical Co-ordinator for The Football Association of Ireland.**

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## NETHERLANDS

- 4 vs. 4 for U7
- The length of play in the U7 to U9 age groups is generally two halves of twenty minutes each. The length of play for U6 is two halves of fifteen minutes each.
- Mr. Jarno Hilhorst
- Royal Netherlands Football Association.

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

- **SWEDEN**
- This is the Swedish age groups:
- 5 vs. 5 (7-9 years old) 7 vs. 7 (10-12 years old)
- 11 vs. 11 (13- years old) Med vänlig hälsning Peter Brusvik , Utvecklingsenheten
- SVENSKA FOTBOLLFÖRBUNDET ,Box 1216, 171 23 Solna
- Telefon + 46 8-735 09 31
- Mobil +46 70 5-49 09 54
- Telefax +46 8-735 95 93
- [peter.brusvik@svenskfotboll.se](mailto:peter.brusvik@svenskfotboll.se)

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# F.I.F.A. ASSOCIATIONS

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

- 3 vs. 3 for U6 – no goalkeepers
- 4 vs. 4 for U8 – no goalkeepers
- 6 vs. 6 for U10 including the goalkeeper
- 8 vs. 8 for U12 including the goalkeeper
- 11 vs. 11 for U13 and older players For a complete set of the modified rules, field diagrams and addendums for the U6, U8, U10 and U12 age groups please visit [www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org).
- Mr. Sam Snow Director of Coaching Education  
US Youth Soccer , [ssnow@usyouthsoccer.org](mailto:ssnow@usyouthsoccer.org)

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# CONCLUSIONS

- **The small-sided game allows coaches a perfect opportunity to observe and analyze the individual and collective responses of players under quick game-like conditions.**
- All over the world, soccer leagues have begun to realize...
  - **Soccer is viewed differently by young players than by older players**
  - **Young players cannot fully grasp the complexity of a full 11 vs. 11 game and learn best through a progression of building blocks**
  - **Without the building blocks, many players are thrown into more tactical situations bypassing technical and personal growth**
  - **We set the young players up for failure if we continue at the larger numbers at the younger age groups**

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# COMMON SENSE

- ✓ “Even when the kids graduate to six-v-six, there should remain little or no emphasis on playing a position, on winning, or on restricting individual decision-making. The individualist who would rather dribble than pass may not quite be the pariah that (s)he’s assumed to be. The ability to dribble past several defenders in a limited space is a quality that only a handful of the game’s greatest players have acquired. Kids should not have their creativity stifled, especially at younger ages.”

**Bobby Howe, former US Soccer Federation Director of Coaching**

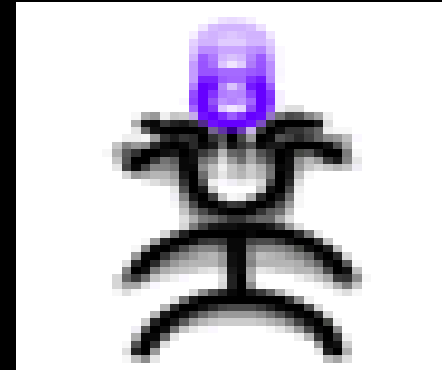
*Soccer, How to Play the Game: The official playing and coaching manual of the United States Soccer Federation*

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# COMMON SENSE

- ✓ “We found most children pre-12 years of age wanted to “play,” so we wanted to capture this personal (intrinsic) motivation.”



Rod Thorpe, Educator.

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# COMMON SENSE

✓ “As a kid you need to touch the ball as much as you can. You should always be with the ball. You should have a feeling that wherever the ball is, you can do anything with it. No matter where it is, where it is on your body, how it’s spinning, how it’s coming at you, the speed it’s coming at you, anything. You can learn the tactical side of the game later. It’s amazing to me that people put so much emphasis on trying to be tactical and worry about winning when it doesn’t matter when you’re 12 years old. We’re going to have big, strong, fast players. We’re Americans, we’re athletes. But if we never learn at an early age to be good on the ball, then it’s just useless.”

Landon Donovan, USA World Cup hero, in Soccer America, July 2002

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# CREDITS

- All 55 of the state Directors of Coaching of US Youth Soccer and the U. S. Soccer National Staff Coaches along with innumerable administrators, coaches and referees at the local level have contributed to the success and growth of Small-Sided Games in the United States of America.
- Following are a few who contributed directly to this presentation!

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# US YOUTH SOCCER™