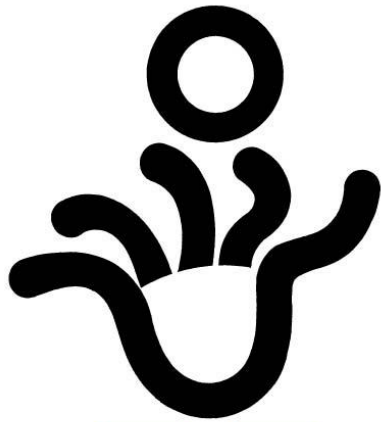


Small Sided Games Manual

COACHING EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



US **YOUTH**
SOCCER®

INTRODUCTION

Small-sided games have been part of our soccer history in the United States for generations. Many of our parents, our grandparents and our great grandparents immigrated to America having played this wonderful game in the streets of their native countries.

Small-sided games are games played on smaller fields and with fewer players than the adult game of 11 versus 11. Games of 3 versus 3, 4 versus 3 and 4 versus 4 are examples of small-sided game numbers. As you can see, playing numbers can be even or uneven and the game can be played.

In the past it was not uncommon for small-sided games to be played in the streets and in vacant lots with uneven numbers and mixed ages. Now the streets are too busy and the vacant lot is too dangerous or no longer exists. Thus, it has become the responsibility of the soccer club or youth organization to recreate the small-sided environment.

This manual provides the information needed to successfully implement small-sided games in your soccer club. It will cover the reasons for small-sided games, the implementation process, models of small-sided game play, recommended modified rules of play and helpful references.

REASONS FOR SMALL SIDED PLAY

Philosophical

1. Because we want our young soccer players to have more *individual teaching time* with the coach! Fewer players on the field will guarantee this! (Need to feel worthy...need to feel important)
2. Because we want to distance our young soccer players from the external undo pressures of the adult game. (eliminate extrinsic value)
3. Because we want our young soccer players to enjoy the game for its own sake. (foster intrinsic value)

Educational

1. Because we want our young soccer players to touch the soccer ball more often and become *more skillful* with it! (Individual technical development)
2. Because we want our young soccer players to make *more quality decisions* during the game! (Tactical development)
3. Because we want our young soccer players to be more physically *efficient* in the field space in which they are playing! (Reduced field size)
4. Because we want our young soccer players to have *more involved playing time* in the game! (More opportunity to solve problems that only the game presents)
5. Because we want our young soccer players to have *more opportunities to play on both sides of the ball!* (More exposure to attacking and defending situations)
6. Because we want our young soccer players to have *more opportunities to score goals and make saves!* (Pure excitement)

The “Small-Sided” environment is a *developmentally appropriate environment* for our young soccer players. It’s a **FUN** environment that *focuses on the player*. These are the reasons why US Youth Soccer endorses “Small-Sided Games” for U6, U8, U10 and U12 players across the board...across America.

STAGES OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

All ages can play “Small Sided Games,” but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players. This has to do with the stages of development that all children go through.

As children progress through these stages, their intellect grows, they mature physically and they get emotionally stronger. For example:

Four and five year olds (U6 players) are very, very little people. They are very egocentric. The ball represents a toy that belongs to them...they don't share well. They love to run and jump and roll around. They have wonderful imaginations! It's about *PLAY!* It's about *FUN!*

Recommended game playing numbers: 3 versus 3 (no goalkeepers)

Recommended maximum field size: 25 yards x 30 yards

Six and seven year olds (U8 players) are still little people but are maturing and have better balance and agility. They begin to experience success technically and will share the ball a bit with a teammate or teammates. Numbers on the field must be small so that they can have the ball a lot. This allows them to practice their newly learned skills in an uncluttered environment. They begin to enjoy playing *soccer!*

Recommended game playing numbers: 4 versus 4 (no goalkeepers)

Recommended maximum field size: 30 yards x 25 yards

INTERESTING ARTICLES

“Freddy Adu: Just Going Out To Play”

Says Pele, "I told him, 'Listen. God gave you, you know, the gift to play football.'" Freddy learned the game as soon as he learned to walk, in his native Ghana, in West Africa. He didn't just play soccer; he lived it.

"I did not go one day without playing," he recalls, and it was just kicking and learning.

"It was awesome," he explains, "because, you know, like, there were no coaches, no one to tell you what to do. It was just; you play and learn stuff on your own." It was during those early days in Ghana that Freddy's mother, Emelia, first encouraged her soccer prodigy. Freddy recalls: "My mom was always the supplier of soccer balls, and so people were always knocking on my door, and trying to get me out so we could play." Freddy's street soccer days ended in 1998, after his parents entered a visa lottery at the U.S. embassy in Ghana. They won the lottery and got visas to come to the United States. Freddy was 8 years old.

“Street Soccer And Small Sided Games”

By Andy Roxburgh

It was lunchtime in Turin, and while others around the table spoke about the UEFA Champions League match which would take place that evening in the Stadio Delle Alpi between Juventus FC and Manchester United FC, Roberto Bettega, Juve's vice-chairman and former star player, talked to me about street football.

Time for self-expression

"Although I was attached to this club from the age of nine years, much of my development took place in the streets – it was there that I practiced and refined my basic skills," said Roberto, who won seven championships for the 'Old Lady' of Turin and represented Italy on 42 occasions. What troubles Roberto, who played alongside Michel Platini, Paolo Rossi, Zbigniew Boniek and other icons of the game, is the dominating style of many youth coaches. With the passion of a street fighter, he added: "Young players need some time for self-expression, for spontaneity. Their coaches need to watch and listen more and instruct a little less."

Valid philosophy

In many parts of Europe, street football has all but disappeared, but the philosophy and the mentality remains valid. The street game was player-centered, competitive, skilful and fair, and the small-sided game, with one-on-one a key element, was the basic form of play. Youngsters practiced for hours on tricks and on passing and shooting techniques, using a wall as their silent partner. A love of football permeated all activities, and cups and medals (extrinsic motivation) had no immediate significance for the fierce young dreamers who were dedicated to the ball and lost in the romance of the game.

Grassroots Program

UEFA, through its Grassroots Program, is committed to supporting the associations and the clubs with their community schemes and player development programs. Football leaders are acutely aware that the loss of the street environment, particularly in industrial

regions, has provoked a greater need for training facilities, free-play areas, and appropriate equipment. But equally, there is an increasing demand for well-educated coaches who have the specific knowledge and the ability to work with young players. Just as the smart referee knows the difference between a foul, a dive and a legitimate tackle, so the sensitive youth coach understands when to drill, when to teach creatively, and when to encourage self-reliance and free expression.

Football maxim

Every player, even the stars, were once grass-roots players. Every Sunday morning, as a youngster, Michael Owen of Liverpool FC played two v two games with his father and two elder brothers. Ronaldo claimed that his 'toe-poke' goal against Turkey in the semifinal of the FIFA World Cup was the product of his Futsal (five v five) experiences as a young player. Wayne Rooney, Everton FC's 17-year-old striker, who recently became the youngest player to play for England, still plays in the streets with his friends. It is a football maxim: if the grass roots are strong, then the game will grow and blossom.

Street mentality

As facilities improve and programs become more sophisticated, there is the danger that some will lose sight of the heart and soul of the game. Coaches who have a street mentality, who appreciate the value of free play, self-expression, and passion, will never allow the game to become sterile and mechanical. The Japanese have a saying:

"You are never too old to have a happy childhood." For the youth coach, this translates into a simple message: stay young at heart – it is a sentiment, which Roberto Bettega would fully endorse. This article, written by UEFA technical director Andy Roxburgh, appeared as an editorial in an edition of the UEFA publication "The Technician"