

SMALL SIDED GAMES

What are small-sided games?

Games played with less than 11 v 11. These games are designed to be age appropriate and player development based.

In August, 2003, US Youth Soccer's state associations approved changes to the policy on players and player's rules that affect the game for players under age 12.

Justification for small-sided games

1. Using small-sided games for match play for players age 6-12 creates more involvement in the game; increases contact with the ball, provides greater opportunities to solve problems in the game and ultimately, provides the player with more enjoyment.
2. During the ages of 6-12, players develop a basic understanding and passion for the game. By creating an environment that fosters development throughout this age period, players will either excel and become top players or they will continue to enjoy the game at their own level of ability and eventually enjoy watching the game being played.
3. Players must be challenged at their own age/ability levels to improve performance. Too many players on the field of play negatively effects this learning process and creates poor playing habits and limits the players understanding of the game.
4. Children come to soccer practice to have fun. They want to run, touch the ball and play a game. The environment which we place players in during practice and games should promote all of these desires. It is important during this period of basic education that we provide countless opportunities for players to enjoy and master the fundamentals of the game.

Frequently asked questions

1. Why make the changes? It makes the game of soccer a better experience for children. More touches on the ball, more opportunities to make decisions, more actual play. Energetic workouts due to playing both attacking and defensive roles. While learning both offense and defense, a player will become more complete and will understand more readily the roles and importance of teammates.
2. Whose idea was this? US Youth Soccer has been a proponent of small-sided games since the 1980's. Small-sided games are endorsed by the National Coaching Committee, the State Directors of Coaching, and US National Team coaches for men and women,
3. Why can't they play 11v11 like "real soccer"? The 11v11 format is the adult version of the game. Using an adult-sized field and goals makes little sense for children under the age of 12.
4. Other sports don't alter their game – why does soccer? It is not a good comparison with football or baseball - neither have the element of transition that soccer does. Look at basketball – how many children play basketball 5 on 5? Most basketball is played 1v1, 2v1, or 2v2 in a driveway! Children don't wait until they have 9 friends to have a game! Playing on a small field is a more efficient use of space, it takes less time to advance for a shot on goal, and children are more actively involvement for a longer period of time.
5. I didn't grow up playing this way! True! Whether you grew up in the USA or another country, soccer was traditionally played 11v11 for all age groups. This is not true any longer – small-sided game formats are in use all over the world – not just in the United States.
6. How will they learn to play 11v11? Progressing from 3v3, 4v4, 6v6, to 8v8 BEFORE 11v11 is a sound educational method. The problem is that young players were forced into 11v11 before they were physically and psychologically developed to play the adult version of the game. Any notion that players will be less prepared to play 11v11 is not justified.