

Why Small-Sided Games?

by Tom Goodman

Former US Youth Soccer Director of Coaching Education

As the newly appointed US Youth Soccer Director of Coaching Education, veteran youth coach and father of three adult children, who used to be little soccer players, I have thought long and hard about the answer to the question, "Why Small-Sided Games?" Let me make sure that everyone understands the meaning of "Small-Sided Games". These are soccer games with fewer players competing on a smaller sized field. These are fun games that involve the players more because one ball is being shared by fewer players. All ages can play "Small Sided Games", but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players.

My recommendations for "number of players" at the various age groups are as follows:

- U6 3 against 3 no goal keepers
- U8 4 against 4 no goal keepers
- U10 6 against 6 with goal keepers
- U12 8 against 8 with goal keepers
- U13+ 11 against 11 with goal keepers

** Consult updated Small-Sided Games Chart from US Soccer in resources.*

Here are some of the reasons why I believe we, as soccer coaches, administrators and parents must guarantee that our young soccer players play small-sided games:

- Because we want our young soccer players to touch the soccer ball more often and become more skillful with it! (Individual technical development)
- Because we want our young soccer players to make more, less-complicated decisions during the game! (Tactical development)
- Because we want our young soccer players to be more physically efficient in the field space they are playing in! (Reduced field size)
- Because we want our young soccer players to have more individual teaching time with the coach! Less players on the field and less players on the team will guarantee this! (Need to feel worthy...need to feel important)
- 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)
- Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunity to play on both sides of the ball! (More exposure to attacking and defending situations)
- Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunities to score goals! (Pure excitement)
- These are the reasons why we adults must foster "Small-Sided Games" in our youth soccer programs. The "Small-Sided" environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our young soccer players.

It's a FUN environment that focuses on the young soccer player. It just makes sense...doesn't it?