

## **Frequently Asked Question's About Small-Sided Games**

**Why make the change?** 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.

**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 our national coaching committee, the State Directors of Coaching, US National Team Coaches for Men & Women, including many foreign soccer organizations: England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, France, Korea to name a few!

**Why can't they play 11v11 like "real" soccer?** The 11v11 format is the adult version of the game. Using an adult size field and goals makes little sense for children under the age of twelve.

**Other sports don't alter their game- why does soccer?** It's not a good comparison with football or baseball- neither has the element of transition that soccer does. Look at basketball- how many kids play basketball 5 on 5? Most basketball is played 1v1, 2v1 or 2v2 in a driveway! Kids don't wait until they have nine 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 involved for a longer period of time.

**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 isn't true any longer- small sided game formats are in use all over the world- not just in the US.

**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 their bodies were physically developed to play the adult version of the game. Any notion that players will be less prepared to play 11v11 is not justified.

**Does competitive or travel have to play by this new rule?** Yes. The decision to play small sided games is based on "age appropriate" philosophy- the level of play is not a factor. All players of that age group should play the same format. **This will never work!** Sure it will! A number of State Associations have been playing 3v3 at under 6 & 4v4 at Under-8 successfully for more than a dozen years! Adopting 8v8 for under 11's and under 12's is the fastest growing trend in youth soccer.

**Where do I find rules?** The US Youth Soccer website [usyouthsoccer.org](http://usyouthsoccer.org) has playing rules posted in the Coaches, Referees and Download Center pages. A free brochure, "Official Handbook: Introductory Rules for Small Sided Games U6 & U8" is available from your State Association.

**Will I need more coaches?** No, if you currently play 8v8 for under 8's you probably have eleven or twelve players rostered per team. To play 4v4 without changing your roster sizes simply use the "dual field" method described below.

**Will I need more referees?** Small sided games rarely need more than one referee to cover the field. Under 6's playing 3v3 rarely have need for the referee to solve a dispute more serious than who's "kick in" it is! If you have a shortage of certified referees consider using coaches or parents as "officials"- someone to monitor the game. Training materials specific to small sided games are available for free from US Youth Soccer or your State Association.

**Will I need more fields?** Rather than build new fields "convert" your existing ones. For U-12 8v8 they can play across the width of an existing full size field or put the goals at the top of the penalty box. 3v3 and 4v4 fields can be laid out in grassy spaces that were previously unsuitable for 11v11 soccer.

**Will I need more goals?** YES! But they should not be permanent or expensive. A number of manufacturers offer lightweight portable goals or you can make your own. Flags can be used for the U6 and U8 age groups. Remember player safety is a priority- don't let children hang or play on the goals.

**We'll have to break up our current team rosters!** No, Simply adopt the "dual field" method explained below!

You may also now instead of cutting players, form two teams and simply train them at the same time. For example, if you have a roster of 12 players currently and when tryouts occur for the next season, 15-16 players show up. Now, instead of cutting 3-4 players, make two teams of 8 players if the age groups play 6v6. Have both teams train on the same day(s).

**How many players on a roster?** If playing 3v3 no more than six, if 4v4 no more than seven. Since participation is a priority, every player should play at least 50% of each game. If playing "dual field" you could have as many as nine or ten on a 3v3 roster and in 4v4 as many as ten or eleven on a roster. As far as the U10 and U12 age groups, the IYSA Registration Committee are looking at what would work best for our state.

**What is the "dual field" method?** We recommend the "dual field" method for 3v3 and 4v4- two fields, side by side, with the coaches and substitutes in between. Players rotate from Field "A" to Field "B" to Substitute. Using this method maximizes player participation. (How to coach two fields at once? That's the beauty of two fields- you can't! Let the kids play! **Practices are the coaches time, games are for the players.**