

## **Small Sided Games Thoughts from College Coaches**

Recently US Youth Soccer formally adopted the principal of small-sided games. Each state association will come up with their own format to for small-sided games. Here are some thoughts from some of the collegiate coaches in our state about the importance of small-sided games for player development.

"Since the late 1960s youth soccer in America has been growing and evolving. The change has been to adapt an adult sport so that children can play it. We have already moved away from U8 teams playing 11 a-side on a full size field, with a size 5 ball and a regulation goal. Now another step is being made to improve the soccer environment for children and that is towards Small Sided Games. This next step in our Evolution into a soccer nation will accelerate the development of the next generation of players. When the change was made in the mid-1980s from 11 v 11 for U8 teams to 7 v 7 it was seen as a death knell for the sport by many. Obviously that did not occur and in fact the sport has flourished. I am convinced that the same will occur this time with the move to Small Sided Games. Our sport will become more vibrant than ever before!"

### **Sam Snow**

Director of Coaching  
Louisiana Soccer Association  
(225) 766-0815  
FAX (225) 236-0004  
coachsnow@lsa-soccer.org  
www.lsa-soccer.org  
U. S. Soccer National Staff Instructor  
U. S. Youth Soccer National Coaching Committee

"Small-sided games create the best developmental environment for young players to maximize their technical and tactical abilities. Technically, players better develop because there are more opportunities to touch the ball. Tactically, small-sided games are more suited to the psychological makeup of young children and create more opportunities for learning from their decisions. Small-sided games also force players to develop individual and small group abilities, which are the basis of all successful soccer players."

### **Jerry Yeagley-Head Men's Soccer Coach-Indiana University**

"Small-sided games are an essential part to the building block of developing young soccer players. Reducing the number of players and the size of the field enables players to develop soccer skills at a much greater rate than full eleven a side games. I also find that players have no problem taking the skills of small-sided games and translating then to bigger sided games at a later time.

On a further note, taking over the IU women's soccer program has meant developing this team by improving their skills and teaching them the game as I see it played. To do this, I am using small sided games because it is the BEST teacher of the game."

### **--Mick Lyon-Indiana University Women's Soccer Coach**

Vince,

"Just a quick follow up to let you know that I think the proposed idea of small sided games for the younger players in Indiana is a tremendous idea, and one that should have been

implemented a long time ago. It is no secret that the technical ability of our youth players increase dramatically with increased opportunities on the ball, and playing in smaller than 11v11 situations allows for this to occur. Small sided games allow players to be involved more frequently thus increasing the number of repetitions on the ball, and keeps players from "hiding" on a larger field. Good luck with this, and let us know if Notre Dame can be of any help. The idea just makes sense!"

**MIKE AVERY**  
**Assistant Soccer Coach**  
**University of Notre Dame**

Vince:

"There is no doubt in my mind that 4v4 is the best game for development of younger players and reinforcing concepts for older players as well. The 4v4 structure allows for the basic fundamental concepts of pressure-cover-balance when defending as well as support and penetration when attacking. This is accomplished in a small-group environment that encourages communication as well as maximizing player touches on the ball for individual skill development.

4v4 is far superior in my mind for these reasons and it also does away with the "daisy picking" and "butterfly chasing" seen so often when younger players are thrown into 8v8 or 11v11."

**Pete Morey-Women's Soccer Coach Bethel College**

Vince,

Great to hear from you, and I hope all is well with you! Welcome back by the way....

As far as small-sided games are concerned, this really is the only way for our young players. First of all their chronological age dictates that they don't understand working with large groups, sharing, etc.

This alone should be reason enough to teach our sport in 4:4 games. We can play 11:11 all day and try to encourage passing and positions, but the kids aren't mentally mature enough to grasp these concepts.

Secondly, we all recognize (or hopefully we all do) that in a 4:4 game all players will get more touches on the ball. This is a must for technical development. Long lines and teams of 11 are much like outfielders in a baseball game. They simply stand around too long with not enough repetitions to improve their technique. Also, the 4:4 games are a great environment to encourage individual abilities such as developing an attacking personality, or a defending one as well. Players don't get lost in the numbers of a full field.

Lastly and possibly most importantly is that a group of four can be put into a shape that encompasses all of the components required for tactical knowledge. Even though we wouldn't coach the tactics so much here, the game itself would. Our kids don't get exposed to enough soccer first hand or on TV, so they have no model to go by. They don't know what it is suppose to look like. In 4:4, one can put them into a shape that encourages supporting, penetration, height and width to the attack as well as depth. These are the requirements or the "passing priorities" if you will. You penetrate or play forward

if it's on, wide if it is not, and sometimes backwards in order to go forward again. It's a natural shape to learn what the game is all about on both sides of the ball.

I commend you on your efforts. There is no need to reinvent the wheel and this is the proven way around the world. We must accept this change, and forget about the adults need to have a league or team of 11 with trophies etc. We must think clearly of the development of our future!

**Sincerely,**

**Randy Waldrum  
Head Women's Coach  
University of Notre Dame**

Vince,

Concerning small-sided games--I believe it is simple. Youngsters get better with the soccer ball by touching the soccer ball. We can guarantee more touches of the ball by reducing not only the number of players but also reducing the size of the field. Youth, amateur and adult teams constantly reduce both the number of players and the field size in training--youth will benefit from this on a regular basis (their games are intended as teaching/training moments). We all know it is far more enjoyable to get a hold of the ball regularly in positions where you can shoot and score, than to chase it around with a pack of nineteen other children on a field the size of a landing strip for the space shuttle.

**Robert Klatte-Purdue University Women's Soccer Coach**