

Small Sided Games: why start them so small?

As you may (or may not) know, the U6Coed play 2 simultaneous games:

- U6 teams play 4 v 4 with no goalkeeper
- When the ball goes out, they kick it in from the sideline
- Players who are not on the field during a quarter stay between fields with the coaches

Small-sided games are good for player development. The one obvious fact is players touch the ball more. The importance of this is often over-looked and misunderstood. By touching the ball more, the player not only has more opportunities to improve his or her skill under the pressure of the game; he or she also has many more opportunities to make decisions as the game demands.

Of equal importance is the fact that each player is required to play a bigger role in each game. No player can be assigned a purely offensive or defensive role. All of the players must be involved in quickly transitioning from defense to offense when the ball is won, and from offense to defense, when the ball is lost. When a player's team has the ball, he or she must become much more involved as part of the group that is attacking than is required in the 11 v 11 game. Similarly, when his or her team loses the ball, the player cannot expect others to carry the full responsibility of defending and winning the ball back. The game played on the world level often is won or lost by quick transition from offense to defense, or vice versa.

When players compete in age-appropriate small-sided games, they have greater involvement in the action. For players, this means doing more of what they love most about soccer – shooting, dribbling, passing, scoring goals, blocking shots, and simply running after the ball. And in terms of their development, this increased involvement results in improved technique, clearer decision making, active participation in both the attack and defense, and a greater appreciation for the game.

At first glance, it may appear that by competing in small-sided games, it will take players longer to adjust to more typical games. However, given that small-sided games provided increased contacts with the ball and more opportunities to hone decision-making while moving quickly from attack to defense, by organizing these games, our players will be better prepared to play 11 a-side.

