



Utilizing Small Sided Games

Preparing teams for competition

We as soccer coaches are always thinking of ways to get our teams match fit for the game. If we believe the game is the best teacher, why not use the game to prepare the players for the challenges ahead.

The first thing players ask when they arrive at practice is “When do we play the scrimmage?” Another question they ask is “What are we doing today?” They ask these questions because they want to make sure that they will be playing the game at some point during practice. As coaches, we need to listen to them and make sure that our training sessions have moments of uninterrupted play. The more players play the game during training, the more they are able to comply with the technical, tactical, physical and psychosocial demands of the game.



4v4 SSG with GK's

What are Small Sided Games?

US Youth Soccer says “These are soccer games with fewer players competing on a smaller sized field....fun games that involve the players more because fewer players are sharing one ball.” Small sided games (SSG's) will make your training sessions more enjoyable and definitely will assist you with development of your players.



3v3 Small Sided Game

As a coach can have the players play 3v3 to small goals if you do not include the goalkeeper, however I recommend playing with a goalkeeper and making the game a 4v4. This way, every game looks like a small version of the game on the weekend.

Small sided games will have many positive results in your players. If we look at the four components of the game, it is easy to see the benefits of SSG's for players.

Technique

Dribbling, Receiving, Passing, Shooting, and Tackling

SSG's will allow players to have more touches on the ball, with only 6 -8 players on the field, each player will get more opportunities to dribble and/or take players on and receive, pass, shoot, and tackle the ball.

The demands in SSG's are more realistic than in a drill, therefore a players ability to execute technique under pressure will improve due to the limited time and space they will have.



4v4 Small Sided Game

As a coach you can utilize SSG's to focus your feedback to players on effective technical execution. Once a player's technical ability improves, they will be more creative, SSG's are the perfect environment to cultivate creativity.

Tactics

Tactics are decisions. There are three different decisions in soccer: individual, small group, and large group decisions. The small sided game is a great tool to teach individual decisions which are the basis and beginning of good tactics.

'Small Sided Games allow coaches to introduce the Attacking Principles - Penetration, Support, Mobility, Width and Improvisation and the Defensive Principles - Pressure, Cover, Balance, Delay, Compactness, Composure & Restraint'

SSG's allow for more attacking responsibilities – Players with the help of the coach will learn to recognize when to dribble, pass, or shoot assisting them with solving recurring soccer problems:

- When, where, and why to dribble
- When to pass, where to receive, who to pass to
- When and where to shoot

Similarly, SSG's place more defensive responsibilities on players. Players with the help of the coach will learn to recognize when to defend and more specifically:

- When and how to put pressure
- When and where to get back
- When and how to cover



4v4 Four Goal SSG

Small sided games ensure players have to be involved on both sides of the game - Attack and Defense; therefore, they will transition from one to the other more times and faster. Players will encounter the same situation over and over. They will learn how to deal with it and transfer the appropriate decision to the game.



4v4 SSG to Goal and Counter Goals

Psychosocial – Collaboration, Competition, Cooperation!

The Psychosocial component is an often overlooked element of the game. Small sided games are more fun than drills, because they are playing and enjoying the game, players will have higher levels of concentration because of the continued action.

Small Sided Games promote team work, players have to work together to attack and defend, the players have to be active participants in the game and they learn to compete! The increased opportunities for repetition that SSG's allow for give players more success thus increasing self-esteem and confidence.

Physical – Agility, Speed, Coordination and Balance

Because of the dimensions of the field, players will be running forward, backwards, turning, jumping, changing direction, doing the same movements required to play the game.

Players will be on the move constantly during the duration of the small sided game, coaches can play games for several minutes with a 1-2 minute rest, then play again for the same amount of time. This way, the coaches are manipulating the active/rest times to improve physical recovery.

'As coaches, we can see the benefits of playing small sided games and what a great tool they are to prepare our teams in our quest to get our players match fit and helping them to reach their full potential' - Loy Urbina