

Small Sided Games 2003

In August, US Youth Soccer's State Associations approved changes to the Policy on Players and Playing Rules that will affect the game for players under age 12. Current US Youth Soccer policies require that Under-10 teams and younger play games with not more than eight players per side. Effective September 1st, 2003 this rule will detail age group specific playing numbers.

Rule 303. LENGTH OF GAMES, NUMBER OF PLAYERS, OVERTIME PERIODS, AND BALL SPECIFICATIONS *(effective September 1, 2003)*

Section 1. (a) Except as provided by US Youth Soccer or a State Association, the length of games, overtime periods, ball size, ball circumference, ball weight, and number of players for each age group is as follows:

Age Group	Game Length	Overtime Periods	Size	Circumference	Weight	Number of Players
U-12	2 30' halves	2 10' halves golden goal	4	25–26 in	11–13 ozs	No more than 11, 8 strongly recommended
U-11	2 30' halves	2 10' halves golden goal	4	25–26 in	11–13 ozs	No more than 11, 8 strongly recommended
U-10	2 25' halves	NONE	4	25–26 in	11–13 ozs	No more than 7, 6 strongly recommended
U-8	4 12' quarters	NONE	3	23-24 in	11–12 ozs	No more than 5, 4 strongly recommended
U-6	4 8' quarters	NONE	3	23-24 in	11–12 ozs	No more than 4, 3 strongly recommended

(Under 13- Under 19 are unaffected by rule change)

Frequently Asked Question's

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? 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 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. 3v3 and 4v4 fields can be laid out in grassy spaces that were previously unsuitable for soccer. The smaller dimensions of a 3v3 field allow for as

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. 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!

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.

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.

I've heard of "academy" and "scramble" methods- what are they? Rather than a set number of players on a team roster, each player practices with a larger group of players and several coaches. On

game day players are divided into teams of three or four for games. Practice groups or "academies" may be formed around neighborhoods or school attendance zones.

Will other State Associations play the same format as our state? The rule change is to a national policy. While each State Association is free to adopt the format they feel best meets the needs of its members, interplay between States is governed by this rule.

What is the easiest way to implement the new rules? The largest hurdles are education and logistics. Parents, coaches, referees need to be informed of the reasons for the change as well as the rules of play. Your State Association can provide coaching courses and clinics as well as assist with referee training. Converting existing fields is as simple as remarking fields to the small sided games dimensions and acquiring small goals.

Where do I go for help in implementing the small sided games? Coaching courses specific to each age group are available as are free materials dealing with the small sided game. Information is available on the US Youth Soccer website usyouthsoccer.org or contact your State Association or US Youth Soccer 800-4SOCCER.