

**January 2001.**

The following comments were compiled via e-mail in November and January of 2000. At one time, the National Directors of Coaching viewed 7v7 as the game for U-10's. This discussion is the response to my e-mail of 11-16-00 asking that the 7v7 recommendation be revisited.

Hello all,

A year, or so, ago we came up with a national coaching agenda, which served to provoke discussion and focus our stance on a number of important playing issues. I applauded and embraced that process then, and continue to view dialogue as necessary for evolution. One area that has become a study point for me in the past year, has been the recommended playing numbers at under 10. At that time, we promoted 7v7 (or less). My gut feeling now is that those numbers are still too big. Unless Ohio is unrepresentative of the country in general, under 10's don't understand how to create and use space and, therefore, cannot play in numbers larger than 5v5 and still have the time and space to play with the ball in a game they understand.

I have attached an article (Space: The tactical frontier) that was recently published in our state newspaper, Ohio Soccer. I suppose I am asking to begin a new dialogue on the merits of these observations and ask whether a re-evaluation of our recommendations is warranted. As before, I will be happy to forward comments and observations to the group.

**Tom Turner (DOC, OH-N, 11-16-00)**

Thanks for the initiative to share on something that is currently a big issue in Minnesota. I very much agree with your observations. For those that have time the attached "Jamboree" article was written after I spent a day watching U9 and U10 kids try to play soccer in an 8v8 model. The other two attachments suggest to clubs how they may implement small-sided play and avoid some of the stresses they assume that change will bring. Briefly, 8v8 does not work for the U9 and U10 players and their coaches in this state. It is my contention that we must continue our coach education programs to the fullest. The reality is, however, that we can only do so much and the coaches, like the players, learn most from their environment. If we could get to 5v5/6v6 models of play not only would the players be more engaged the anxiety for the coaches in regard formations, set plays etc is diminished. In Minnesota the state sponsors U9/U10 8v8 travel leagues summer and fall. We are very close to getting a commitment from our clubs to try a pilot program of 6v6 for U9/U10 and 8v8 U11/12 as early as fall of 2001. It is a struggle, but I believe we are getting there. One key element to the potential success of our initiative is doing a lot of the logistical thinking on behalf of those who want 11v11 ASAP. To that end we took a 90x50 space and suggested how a club could use the space for U6 through U12. This simple effort has got us to the issue of player and coach development much quicker in discussion with clubs and coaches. Tom thanks again for getting us together, hope my two cents worth helps,

**Ian Barker (DOC, MN, 11-16-00)**

Speaking from my experience in GA Soccer who plays U10 at 8\_aside. 8 players on the field is not only too many, but further more no formation with 8-aside can truly mimic the 11-a-side game. I have for years asked for GA Soccer to look at 6-aside (5 and a keeper) at the U10 age group. Here they can still develop shooting and goalkeeping as well as the most likely formation

would be a 2-1-2. This formation would help develop man-to-man marking, playmaker / center midfielder, and a 2 man front-runner system. Of course with only 6 total players on the field, the number of touches and technical development would increase.

**Chad Liddle (USSF, 11-16-00)**

Thanks for the article and the valuable information. I have been talking to my Board about the merits of the small-sided games and the reduction in the number of players on the field at the younger ages. As you can imagine, the conflict that comes up is the same as you have heard before. That would be a change in field sizes, goals, number of coaches, and etc., etc., etc. I have explained how it can be done, but there is some resistance. I can preach all day, but it is so hard to change the minds of many who cannot see the value of change.. I feel that unless we, as a region or nation, make a widespread change that even though they believe what I tell them, they do not want to be on an island and “the only ones” who have changed. Any ideas and insight you can provide would be helpful. Also, would you mind if I used what you wrote below in our next newsletter to help amplify what I have been saying?

**Brett Thompson (DOC, NE, 1-16-00)**

I would like to thank you for sharing and giving us all the opportunity to discuss this problem. Here in New York West I am, like Ian in Minnesota, taking the initiative and going out preaching the 6v6 for the U9 and U10's. I have a slightly different problem in that we [The State Association] do not run the leagues in any of my six Districts and so it may take a while to have any influence on the league boards. I have implemented a couple of programs in the Rochester area, and am using them as role models for others to come in and see. Your correspondence also gives me an opportunity to throw out a topic that I have been mulling over for a while. Do any of you have an interest in starting, a State Directors of Coaching Association...sort of a union I suppose. USSF, OR USYSA, seem to have a problem in mandating policy on age appropriate field size and team size. Maybe there are many political reasons why the best we get is "we suggest". Why we do not have policy throughout the country is beyond me, especially as everyone agrees that the small-sided games are the way to develop players up to the age of 12/13. How come we can't make it mandatory for all leagues? Clubs to do it? Whose call is it? What is everyone afraid of? As State Directors we are probably as close to the real world as anyone in the game in this country. Club Directors could also be a part of the group...is there any mileage in such an organization? If nothing else, it would be an avenue to share ideas and learn what works for each other in our respective states and what does not. Comments and thoughts from anyone?

**Glen Buckley (DOC, NY-W, 11-16-00)**

I agree with many of your thoughts. Can we introduce 3v3 or 4v4 soccer at the school level? Kids need to play with smaller numbers, smaller fields and goals and maybe a smaller ball at times. Keep up the good work and I hope all is all right.

**Sigi Schmid (Head Coach LA Galaxy, 11-16-00)**

Listen, the whole issue with U10's is that 8 or 7 a side is too large. The biggest stumbling block I found to changing their game was at U11 & U12 it goes to 11 a side, which is its own dilemma. The administrators, presidents and parents cannot grasp that the game can go from 6v6 to 11v11 and that players adjust. Now, I even talked about U 12's being 9 a side and U14's becoming the

11 a side game. You'd thought I was speaking against democracy and for socialism!!!! Have you thought about the 11 a side game for U12's???? it's just as insane as 8v8 for U10's!!!! There's no doubt in my mind that all the "logic" for why we play with the present numbers needs to be reworked...if we could find any logic in and amongst the administrative intellects out there, we'd find a former soccer player!!!!

**Dave Simeone (USSF, 11-16-00)**

Great observations, my son! We are currently doing 7v7, including the goalkeepers, to a size-appropriate goal. Our U-6's play 3v3, and the U-8's are 4v4. In the U-11's we are doing a split season; that is, playing one game 7v7 then the next weekend 11v11 I am certainly of the mind that the longer the kids can play smaller sided games, the better off they will be. If we could just put off 11v11 until U-12 or U-13, I think our kids would be much more technical players. Then, when they are cognitively ready to handle tactics at ages 11, 12 or 13, they can make tremendous strides. But no tactics can be employed if you don't have the stinking ball! So, that's my 2 cents! Do I need to expand any more on this response? Are you trying to drum up a body of support for your proposals? Our club, now Triangle Futbol Club, is a typical TPD (Total Player Development) program, advocating Tony Waiters' Micro Soccer System. Should I send this on to Tony, who is now on our National Staff?

**Alex Hernandex (USSF, 11-16-00)**

Thanks for sharing your article. Here in New York West I am trying very hard to make people realize that small-sided games are the way to develop players. Unfortunately the State Association do not have any control over the leagues, so it makes the job that much harder. There has to be some mandate from the top. Why can't USSF or USYSA mandate the playing field size and the amount of players on the field? It has to come from them. State associations would be fighting from a much stronger position if it were mandated nationally. Do you think there is any mileage in forming a State Directors of Coaching Association, to include Club Directors? It seems to me from the answers to your correspondence that we are all in the same boat, experiencing the same problems. The people opposed to small-sided games are generally those that do not have any underpinning knowledge of the game but are in decision-making positions within their clubs or organizations. We need a stronger voice.

**Glen Buckley (DOC, NY-W, 11-17-00)**

Thanks for the article especially as it targets the players I am attempting to impact here in Illinois. I seemingly have the same dilemma as Glen in New York in that my State Association is reluctant to mandate small-sided games for fear of losing their affiliates, so I too am resolved to going on the road and convincing the various leagues to adopt the small-sided games format for the benefit of players and coaches alike. I am also committed to providing continuing education programs outside of our current licensing programs to promote age appropriate training for the 10s and under. (Any help in devising curriculums will be greatly appreciated.) Currently here in Illinois our competitive leagues play 8v8 for U\_9s & 10s then jump straight to 11v11 at U-11 I have long believed that there should be an intermediate stage with 11v11 coming into play at U-12 at the earliest. As for our recreation leagues, its anything from 4v4 to 11v11 from the youngest age (5 & 6 year olds), usually depending on the size and location of the program not to mention the background of the people running the organization. It certainly appears that there is

a growing consensus that we the coaches need to be heard not only on this most important of issues but for all player development nationwide. Keep up the great effort

**Ian Mulliner (DOC, IL, 11-17-00)**

Good stuff. I would welcome a national debate on such. I assume we can reprint and use this article as needed?

**Nigel Boulton (DOC, MS, 11-17-00)**

I agree with everything said and outlined here. However, I think it needs to be mandated by USYSA, so all of the states have to comply. This will make it easier for all of us to implement small sided games. Getting clubs in Tennessee to agree to this type of format on a voluntary basis would be extremely difficult. We do not have enough qualified people in the clubs to see the benefits of small sided games. Many of these coaches will complain that the other states do not have a similar format, and this would make it difficult for them to play in tournaments outside of the state. Unfortunately, player development is not the main focus for many clubs, no matter how much we preach.

**Ajit Korkaokar (DOC, TN, 11-17-00)**

I applaud your efforts at trying to get coaches, parents and players to realize the benefits of young players playing in small-sided games. All of the points that you have pointed out I agree with, but I have had a very difficult time convincing other coaches and parents as to the benefits of the small sided game. As a former middle school teacher and coach I try and explain to parents and players that "soccer school" is very similar to "academic school" in that the foundation skills, love for learning, creativity, confidence, etc., have to be all built in layers a little at a time. This is why we have different grade levels so that the children have time to develop layer by layer step by step. I have been on the Louisiana State Staff for six years now and I always work with the youngest age group of girls each year. My main focus is individual ball skills, first touch and technique with the vast majority of this taught with in the small-sided game format. Please keep me informed as to the success that you have in getting people to change their point of view.

**Rick Garey (Staff Coach, LA, 11-19-00)**

I never did get your original article. As you know, a couple of years ago I strongly suggested that we follow the following progression: U6-8: 4 a side; U9-10: 6 a side; U11: 7 a side; U12: 8 a side; U13: 11 a side. Please send me your original article, so I can see what everyone is responding to. Thanks. Hope all is well with you.

**Gary Allen (USSF, 11-22-00)**

I agree with what you have to say about playing smaller numbers and such. However, I just spent this past weekend at our Recreation Cup in Morehead City and was able to speak with the coaches, watch games, and get feedback about different ideas such as this one. Just like Dave Simeone said, it would be ideal to have smaller numbers, but the politics of getting this passed in different states would be a difficult task. Seeing as how parents and administrators are making most of our decisions at the local level, I do not think it would pass. Now, if USYSA made this a mandate, how many groups do you think would flock to AYSO and SAY? We have many of

those groups in our state right now and are in the process of getting them into NCYSA, but if these mandates came down, I think we would lose a lot more to the other associations. Now, if US Soccer made this mandate, then we are in business, because all of the above mentioned groups fall under US Soccer, then it would not be a problem. However, I have been able to see the goods and bads with the recreation and U12 and younger. Here in North Carolina, when I talk about playing small sided and 7 vs. 7, etc., coaches and parents always ask about the new cost involved. Smaller goals, more coaches, not enough fields to do so, etc. Now, I know there are ways around that, but I think before we make any decisions on this, we need to get out into the community and see what is really going on. Once you have done that, you will see the struggles the Recreation groups are going through and understand better how to implement what we feel is the best way for kids to develop. Also, I have U9 groups playing U11 so they can play 11-a-side. The way the by-laws read from USYSA, they are allowed to do so because they are playing and registered as U11. So, there are many things we need to talk about in order to get this the correct way. People always find a way and we need to make sure we close the loopholes if we go through with this. Thanks for your time and any thoughts or comments on this would be appreciated. Have a good Turkey Day!

**John Cirillo (DOC, NC, 11-22-00)**

Love everything about the article - with one concern - allowing the closest player to goal 'to pick up the ball with hands or become goalkeeper' ...either designate a keeper or play without keeper - but, don't suggest the use of the hands by a field player...A habit is hard to break - a bad habit is even worse!!! Love the idea of a Coaching Directors Association - hey, was that not on my platform during my service to USYSA? Yes, we should have a voice on many issues that involve our state associations. For example: Tournaments vs. Jamborees for the U-10 and younger age groups. Everyone is afraid to make a decision - Since our job is the development of the player - from beginning up - why should we not have a say in how they are introduced to the game? Oooooops, getting carried away with my opinions...! Let me know - what I can do to help...with U-10 issues or Coaching Directors Association...! Your 'ready to eat turkey' friend,

**Karl Dewazien (DOC, CA-N, 11-22-00)**

Thank you for your time and efforts on this very important issue. I am personally in agreement with you and believe that your "numbers" suggestions at the various age levels would do the most justice to the development of young players.

**Tom Goodman (USSF, 11-22-00)**

I think that we are all sold on the ideas. The problem is getting through to the Boards, Presidents, and Administrators in order to mandate. Until US Soccer and USYSA mandate this, we are spinning our wheels.

**Roby Stahl (DOC, OH-S, 11-22-00)**

Do you have any info what other countries are currently doing with their player development as it relates to numbers on the field and maybe size of fields also?

**Brett Thompson (DOC, NE, 11-22-00)**

Nice job on summary. Next time I'll e-mail back to you for editing rather than mass circulation. I got a response for Alex Hernandez you may appreciate it. I am going to expand a little on this

in my advisory group report. I think we are moving at a fair speed with this and could maybe press some of these issues in Indy or Vegas with the administrators/presidents etc.

**Ian Barker (DOC, MN, 11-22-00)**

Being an advocate of Tony Waiters micro soccer program and the total player development scheme, I disagree with you on a couple of issues. U-6, we do 3 v 3 with one of these as the goalkeeper. This of course allows for 2 v 2 situations because there is the concern about the goal. But, as we develop these youngsters, some of the restrictions that we place on play in training transfer into the game, i.e.. The goalkeeper must be out of the 6-yard box before one's team can score, or the goalkeeper must touch the ball before their team can score. While, initially, we only have 2 v 2 because the one player spends 2-3 minutes occupying the goal and does not leave it, we eventually get that player to leave the goal and support the play from behind. At u-8, we are doing 4 v 4. At u-10 we are at 7 v 7, which brings me to the issue for my agreement with you and tom. that it is too hectic for this age group. We have done a split season with the u-11's. One week they play 7 v 7 and the next they play 11 v 11. I would think that the fewer players we had on the field, the better the kids will get as they get more touches on the ball. And for their cognitive development, there is less stress in understanding the game. What are your thoughts on this? I am sending Tony Waiters your message for his review. Hope to hear from you soon. Also hope that things are going well there in the frozen tundra. I will be basking in the sun today!!! Have a great Thanksgiving.

**Alex Hernandez (USSF, 11-22-00)**

Is it possible to introduce the playing of small-sided games into our licensing program? The curriculum would necessarily deal with the tactical choices in a 4 v 4, the shape of the 4 v 4 and how the tactical choices in a 4 v 4 differ when you go to the 5 v 5, 6 v 6 etc. If 4 v 4 became a mandatory part of the curriculum of the D license, for example, we may be able to get some movement here. We need to also show our constituent members how the different small-sided games 's can be coordinated to allow for a progression in tactical development and, ultimately, are beneficial, and related to the 11 v 11 game.

**Jeff Tipping (NSCAA / USSF, 11-23-00)**

Hello all,

Carrying on the small-sided games conversation to the implementation level, it appears that those states having success in producing change are following one of two patterns.

An example of the top down approach comes from Iowa, where the Board has apparently mandated small-sided games for the coming fall. Ian Bradley, would you please let us know the details of this process?

An example of a bottom up approach is in New Jersey, where Rick Meana is selling the concept one club and community at a time. He reports that his most successful tactic is to simultaneously compare the 7v7 or 8v8 game with the 4v4 or 5v5 game he is advocating. By contrasting the two games, relative to the ability and success of the players, he feels skeptical coaches and parents are more likely to be swayed towards change. Over time, he hopes to create momentum for statewide adoption of small-sided games from the Board.

In Ohio North, my approach has been to use a similar bottom up tactic with the largest leagues. By convincing the major players of the need for change, and then presenting the evidence via the players on the field, the response has been very encouraging. Like Iowa, we hope to be playing 5v5 at the u-10 level across the state this coming fall.

Dealing with the issue of field space and coaches and referees and standings, etc., has also been a stumbling block, particularly as we deal with very competitive and vocal parents and those coaches who want a neonatal World Cup. Does anyone have any experience in community "training groups" as an alternative to "teams?" We have had some success in setting up goals and dividing players randomly into teams as they arrive for each "play day," but the concept is in its infancy and the pressure on the community leaders is quite severe from the vocal minority who "know soccer."

Input anyone?

**Tom Turner (DOC, OH-N, 11-27-00)**

Do you have a recommendation for the size of fields for the ages below? Also as a side note, after our discussion last week I am making some headway with the local directors of coaching to move to the lower numbers on the field.

**Brett Thompson (DOC, NE, 11-29-00)**

Excellent!! Keep challenging the politicians!! I hope all is well.

Best wishes,

**Bobby Howe (Former DOC, USSF, 11-29-00)**

I have had a good response to a small town approach. I developed a program of 3v3 4v4 with a group of 5 and 6 year olds. Like your program the players showed up each week, were placed on different teams and played for 7 mins, before being moved to a different field to play a different group.

Prior to the program beginning we asked for volunteers to be facilitators or field spotters. 20 ADULTS SIGNED UP AND WE RAN THEM THROUGH A U6 U8 YOUTH MODULE. Prior to each game the spotters run a 10 min youth Module developmental game with the two teams on each field.

The children had a ball, and apart from the odd "know soccer" person complaint, the majority of parents thought the concept was great. In addition on the organization side a "stay behind rope" was strung the full length of the 4 fields and parents were not allowed inside of it.....this also worked and was well received.

My next progression is to hold [invite] all Club Presidents, league presidents [As we do not run the leagues within the State] to a "for the good of the game" meeting. New York West, will host and I will act as mediator to try and find some common ground that we can pursue. The problem I have is the diversity of the programs within my three major cities: Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse....Each has their own league, with its own rules.. Some cities have more than one

league....And, to cap it all, there is very little love lost between all of them. Players are traveling from one city to the other to play for the "top Premier team" and, of course, in each city there is more than one Premier team.....In reality, there are not enough quality players for one team let alone two per city.

I implemented a Coaches Association within the State, and in a 9 Month period it has grown to 350 members...at the various symposiums I have held for the members the feedback during the question times at the end is always the same.....Glen you are preaching to the choir...it is the League and Club presidents we need to convince.

Hence the upcoming meeting, to be held in Mid January. I will keep you posted of the results.

Finally, in my last response a few weeks ago I asked if any one felt there would be any mileage in a State Director of Coaching Association, to include Club Directors also. I really do believe that if we group together and explore and share our ideas and experiences and then make a loud noise to our governing bodies they may react a little quicker to the ever growing calls from our ranks of Mandating certain policy nationwide.

**Glen Buckley (DOC, NY-W, 11-29-00)**

Our charge has been lead at the club level wherever we have paid DOC's. In fact several major clubs pulled out of the state run fall leagues and ran small-sided games programs both inter and intra club.

This initiative really put the wind up our board who came to realize the program they offered was no longer wanted. Coupled with this the promotion of small-sided games out of my office, Dave Linenberger, etc., has helped a lot of our clubs introduce their own programs. The major sell has been to demonstrate how fields, equipment and general resources can be reformed to pull off an small-sided games program without a lot of grief. Merely stating and demonstrating the value of the program was not enough and so we added the "This is how you do it" component and I believe this is what pushed us over the edge in many areas. It looks like for the Fall 2001 we will have small-sided games for U9\_U12 in state sponsored leagues, if not the membership will do it themselves under basic affiliation. If we do this, and do it well, it sets the stage for the full introduction of a program for Summer 2002 and then we are really off to the races.

Cheers,

**Ian Barker (DOC, MN, 11-29-00)**

As we discussed in Florida, we in New Jersey are on the same line as you, and those who responded to your email – with some slight modifications.

First of all, the word "mandatory" only causes boards, administrators, club reps, etc. to go on the defensive and "put up barriers." I have found that "telling" people how they should do things only creates arguments, for example, one rep told me they had changed their whole format of games for the various age groups based on USYSA's model for 3v3, 4v4 and 8v8. "Now you say, is there a better way?" was his angered query. I told him we would go to his club and show him how it worked. We saw his program and put our model next to it, and his administrators saw the difference. Bottom

line, education and “showing” works better than “telling” and mandating. We have done this for several clubs and we are hearing and seeing the positive outcomes. As such we have put together a series of “3” clinics, where we go out and “show” clubs by modeling our Player Development Model, which stresses “how to” set up economical learning environments in stages:

1. We believe that children are not ready to be in an organized program under the supervision or instruction by a coach/volunteer until age “7.”
2. We recommend that standing, won-loss records or “Tournament Formats” not be utilized until 10 years old. Up until this age we recommend no more than two practices and one scheduled weekend game, or “Festivals” or “Play Days” on weekends.

Here is an outline of our Player Development Model.

3v3 no goalkeeper for 5-6 year olds (if you must start here) (30X20 goals 6-9 feet X 2.5 feet).

3v3 to 4v4 for 7-8 year olds (but add a rotational goalkeeper by age 8 (4+Goalkeeper) (40X35 goals 9 feet X 4 feet with 6 yard box).

7v7 for 9-11 year olds (6+Goalkeeper) (70X50 goals 6 yards X 7 feet) (by age of 10, players should understand soccer requires cooperation within a group of attacking and defending players so we introduce a modified offside line at the top of the 14 yard box. Only (most obvious) flagrant goal-hanging in front of the goal is called).

9v9 for 11-12 year olds (8+Goalkeeper) with modified offside at the top of the 14 yard box. (70X50; goals regular)

11v11 for age 13 and up (all rules, yet smaller field: 90X50-60 yards) until 14 when fields should be 100X70.

Start with “The End in Mind” Philosophy

Tom, we believe the 4-3-3 system of play is best for youth players, as such the learning stages should not only teach the components but also mimic the pieces of the system. This will gradually increase the players’ comprehension and lead to them being able to execute in the game and solve “soccer problems.”

For example:

3v3 (triangles)

4v4+Goalkeeper (2 defenders, 1 midfielder, 1 forward) (diamonds)

7v7 (6v6+Goalkeeper) (3 defenders, 1 midfielder, 2 wide forwards)

9v9 (8v8+Goalkeeper) (3 defenders, 3 midfielders, 2 wide forwards)

11v11 (4-3-3)

The bottom line, each stage builds on the components learned in the preceding stage. The game should grow not only with the player's chronological and physical age but also with their ability to understand "the logic of soccer."

Stages 1 and 2 focus on learning how to dominate the ball. Stages 3 and 4 focus on learning to combine and cooperate with teammates. Finally, in Stage 5 players will put it all together and learn how to play against an opponent. Also, our clinics are modeled around each stage and our license courses supplement the coaches' education as well!

**Rick Meana (DOC, NJ, 12-1-00)**

Thank you, again, for stimulating the dialogue on small-sided games. We can only succeed by continuing this type of exchange. I would like to contribute two more items to the discussion. First what is happening in Northern California then what is happening in Northern Ireland. Everyone is currently playing small-sided games in N. California from U-10's playing 8v8 on down. However, the numbers may vary from community to community. We were able to accomplish this through patience, time and education. We patiently taught coaches attending our licensing courses the benefits of small-sided games. In time we found advocates who supported the concept and were anxious to bring it into their communities. Over time we developed a 'District Teaching Staff' consisting of 'D' licensed coaches who became mentors in their local communities. The "D" license coach had to attend an official CYSA orientation meeting before they could qualify to become part of the staff. These individuals were given official CYSA T-shirts and a curriculum that included the benefits of small-sided games. In other words, we recruited the 'traditionalist' to teach our new methodology. It worked!!! However, we have been unable to standardize the numbers because 'leaders' in each community can use another community or state as an example of how it should be done. It will take a National mandate to standardize the small-sided games. Don't despair it is possible-- read on... Late breaking news from..... NORTHERN IRELAND EVERYONE'S A WINNER In terms of the progress of our youth policy, the year 2000 is an important milestone, and could well be described as "the end of the beginning in a development sense. Our four-year youth strategy, launched in 1996, set a series of targets to be achieved by the new millennium. Perhaps the most important of these was a necessary change of culture for the coaching of primary-school children between the ages of 7 and 11 altering a tradition of highly competitive, strenuous and exhausting exercise into "fun football" and the instant appeal and pleasure of mini-soccer. This new concept is now almost wholly established throughout the country, and accepted as a core feature of the primary-school curriculum and of soccer education. As we embark on our second four-year plan, we estimate that 20,000 boys and girls are currently involved in mini-soccer during school hours, as an after school sports activity, in more than 50 specially developed mini-soccer centers, in local summer festivals and in local government-organized "fun weeks" throughout Northern Ireland. Here is hoping that a little of the Irish will rub off on us!!!

**Karl Dewazien (DOC, CA-N, 12-1-00)**

Thank you for all your e-mails and comments regarding our young player development. Keep up the good work. I would like to continue to identify and implement the goalkeeper position in to our young player development programs. I have always said that every young player should be exposed to the goalkeeper position..... NOT made to be a goalkeeper or train formally to be a goalkeeper at an early age (6-13 years of age) but at some time have the opportunity to stop a

goal as well as score a goal!! I have researched this area in depth not only with ex goalkeepers but child psychologists and coaches. Contrary to some peoples believes, (Please note that none of the people who made the original decision to play small sided games ever played the position!!) I have unanimous support to feel comfortable to move forward in this direction as far as US Soccer is concerned. We need to start by identifying the goalkeeping position in our National Youth License and not try to disguise it but make it a "fun" position to play. This is an integral part of the game and should not be ignored. I would like your suggestions and comments regarding my opinions and direction.

**Peter Mellor (USSF, 12-1-00)**

Concerning goalkeepers, I agree with much of what you (Peter Mellor) have mentioned. But, what is the proper age to INTRODUCE goalkeeping. I still like 9 or 10 versus 6-8. The skills of the field players are at a much slower learning curve than the skill set for learning how to play goal. I think starting goalkeeping in matches too early tends to create full time goalkeepers at an earlier age, which invariably, stunts their development in the long run as a soccer player and a goalkeeper. Create soccer players first! 9 or 10 years of age is the very earliest I would use goalkeepers in matches. Keep up the good work

**Tony DiCicco (Commissioner, WUSA, 12-2-00)**

I would agree with this philosophy completely and note that many of the best goalkeepers did not play that position until well into their teens.

**Jim Launder (DOC, WI, 12-6-00)**

In our National Youth License modules, I make a point of taking 15 minutes to do an experiment with the coaches present. All the kids that we bring in in the afternoons want to scrimmage, so, after the age appropriate training; I set them up for 5 minutes playing 8v8 on a large field. I have the coaches (candidates) all take a player and record how many times that player touches the ball. I tell them I can pretty much guarantee that there will be at least 1 player who doesn't touch the ball once (they never believe you). Anyway, after that rings true, I set up 2 small fields and play 2 games of 4v4 for 5 minutes. Each coach again records the number of touches for their assigned player. The difference is incredible. Through this method we try to educate the coaches that small-sided games are better for the development of players through number of touches, simplicity etc. This approach is working slowly but surely. Our biggest problem (of course) are the coaches who know it all and do not come to clinics. We are slowly trying to implement the USSF recommendations regarding coaching license requirements to ensure continuing education. How is this going elsewhere? We are also having increasing success with our Coaches Association providing extra educational opportunities with guest coaches from outside the state.

**Mike Smith (Recreation DOC, OR, 12-1-00)**

This bottom up approach is the method I used to introduce small-sided games to both Arkansas and to Mississippi. After a period of 'selling' the idea and 'proving' the case it was easy to pass a 'mandate' at the respective AGM's. **Nigel Boulton (DOC, MS, 12-1-00)**

Here is a copy of a proposal that is going out to my BOD in Washington State tomorrow. My hope is that it will be approved next week at our BOD meeting or in January. I'll keep you posted.

To: WSYSA Board of Directors

From: Dave Schumacher, WSYSA Coaching Director  
Kathy Liebman, WSYSA V/P of Development  
Dan Steelquist, WSYSA Recreation Director  
Subject: WSYSA Micro-Mod Small-Sided System Proposal

## WSYSA Micro-Mod Small-Sided System

Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe introduced the concept of small-sided games for young soccer players to Washington State Youth Soccer Association in 1989. This idea also spread nationwide. In 1993 Bobby Howe, WSYSA Coaching Director, created the Optimum Training System, and that year WSYSA Board of Directors recommended that all Association members use this format for training young soccer players. Over the past ten years many of the Associations in Washington State have implemented the use of the small-sided game for players ages six to 11 years.

Those Associations that have implemented the small-sided game approach firmly believe that it has improved the soccer experience for players, coaches and parents. The benefits to the new player and coach are also now well accepted. The use of small-side games has led to increased enjoyment of the game and enhanced the development of young children.

It is important that all children and coaches in our state be able to experience the advantages of this format. The WSYSA Micro-Mod Small-Sided System is a modification of the Optimum Training System created by Bobby Howe. It is modeled after the successful format used by a number of Associations throughout Washington State during the past ten years. This format increases the number of players on the field by one each year from U-7 through U-10. This is done for a number of reasons:

The number of players on the field is developmentally appropriate for children to experience and develop the motor skills necessary in soccer. It exposes the players to appropriate tactical decisions for their age. It also meets the needs of the player's social development.

The system creates a comfortable environment for the new youth coach. By increasing the number of players incrementally each year, the new coach is able to focus on creating developmentally appropriate practice sessions without the fear and need to focus on teaching specific field positions. With the emphasis on teaching the individual player, the concern for team results is minimized.

By increasing the number of players on the field and rosters incrementally, it is easier for the coach to deal with the challenge of new players being added to the team. Often times, the new players added to the team are playing team soccer for the first time. The use of small-sided games maximizes player contact time with the ball, which aids in the improvement of these new players and their integration into the team.

The use of smaller field sizes has reduced the strain on field space in many Associations. Several age groups are able to share the same space, or, in almost all cases, more teams can play

in the existing field space. The demand for field space for practices has been reduced because many teams are able to practice in neighborhood open spaces and/or in an individual's backyard.

The system is also easier on the Association registration process. New players entering the Association are added to existing teams without the need to add teams. It has also reduced the need to dismantle teams and create new ones, which can be experienced under the format of larger sided teams.

A number of Clubs and Associations have adopted similar types of small-sided formats for their players aged U-12 and below. However, in order for all players in Washington State to have the benefit of this format, all Clubs and Associations not operating under this system will need to modify their programs over the next several years.

Having the same environment statewide will facilitate a positive experience for all young players, their coaches and parents. In addition, when players move from one Club or Association to another, they will experience the same training format.

Implementation of the system will take place over the next five years. Starting in 2001, all U-7 teams will play 3 v 3. In subsequent years, these teams will move through the format of the WSYSA Small-Sided System. By the year 2006, the system will be fully implemented throughout Washington State. Those Clubs and Associations not currently operating under the Small-Sided format will be able to adopt the system gradually over the next several years.

Clubs and Associations individually will make the determination whether teams will be co-ed and/or gender specific. It is recommended that teams be formed gender specific whenever possible.

WSYSA will support implementation of the Small-Sided System by providing "Modified Rules of Play" for those Clubs and Associations in need. A parent's guide will also be available for distribution to new youth soccer parents. The existing WSYSA Coaches Handbook provides the youth soccer coach with Coaching Objectives for ages six to 12. The WSYSA Coaching Education program will be modified to provide age appropriate certificates based on 2 ½ hours of instruction to aid in the education of the coaches operating under this system.

#### Under 6 Programs

There are several Associations that have U-6 Programs. Of these programs, the ones that utilize a clinic/jamboree format are more developmentally appropriate than those that focus on competition in a traditional league format. The clinic type programs normally include a trained coaching staff that presents age appropriate activities for the players. In several cases, the parents are also included in the program, creating a one with one approach: Tony Waiters originally presented this concept in his development program for players under the age of 12. The sessions usually conclude by playing 3 a-side.

Clubs or Associations that have U-6 Leagues should be encouraged to establish a clinic/jamboree type of approach for five year olds. However, if the Club or Association decides

to continue their U-6 Team format, they will operate under the same system designated for U-7 players.

## Summary

Attached are a number of letters from a variety of sources that support the concept and use of small-sided games. As a governing body of soccer for children, we have a tremendous opportunity to improve the playing environment for all players in our state. This is a choice that can be made knowing that all the young players in Washington will be the real winners.

**Dave Schumacher (DOC, WA, 12-1-00)**

Some more input into the small-sided games implementation. I received a call from Ian Bradley asking if I, and possibly our Executive Director, would write a letter of recommendation approving the Iowa proposal to introduce small-sided games into the Iowa soccer league i.e. along the Illinois-Iowa state line, specifically the quad cities area. I was obviously all for the joint venture and when I broached the subject with our Executive Director she too responded in a very positive manner and even ventured to say that it is about time the coaches had a national voice to get the recommendations we have been discussing via e-mails into the public forum as we were the most qualified people to decide what was best for our youth soccer players development.

So I tentatively enquired about a state mandate to introduce the small-sided games format into our competitive leagues to which she replied that I should put the proposal together for the next board meeting but that it would be better if the mandate came from USYSA through our recommendations. I will of course use all the information amassed through your initial e-mail to present my case to our "league president" dominated board. The recreational leagues seem to be another issue altogether as they are controlled for the most part through the park districts and are immune from any state mandate we may eventually make! So it's a case of convincing them individually that this is the way to go which I will attempt to do using Mike Smith's experiment. Then follow up with a mass demo at our state expo under the working title of "The case for small-sided games" as I thought that was brilliant on his part.

I think the next natural course of action is to get our voice heard in the mainstream which may in itself be a headache in the making; maybe, we do it first by region, find/appoint a spokesman for each region and then find a national spokesperson hopefully the National Director of Coaching, to present our case to the powers that be. (even writing this is a headache) I must state that I have never been in favor of a split between USYSA and USSF, but I get the impression that our National Director of Coaching (USCF) would have a tough time being heard trying to implement a mandate to USYSA. Do you think that USYSA would like a National Director of its own? A road I would not like to see us go down! If I am off base here please let me know as I am still trying to get a grasp of the inner workings of soccer throughout the U.S.

**Ian Mulliner (DOC, IL, 12-2-00)**

I just received from the (English) FA some info on their player development. I will copy and send if you would like. There are some very interesting items in this info and some that are a little strange but all in all very, very good. Some examples. 1. No players play organized soccer until the age of 7. 2. Field sizes: U-10 & U-9 is 30-40 wide and 50-60 yards in length, U-8 & U-7 is 20-30 yards wide and 30-50 yards in length. 3. Number of players: U-6 & U-8 4v4 - 5v5, U-8 & U-10 6v6 - 7v7 4. Game length: U- 7 & U-8, 10 minutes a half no more than 45 minutes a day, U-8 & U-10, 15 minute a half and no more than 60 minutes a day.

**Brett Thompson (DOC, NE, 12-5-00)**

Thanks for sharing all the information on this very important issue with all of us. Here in Georgia, we have been very lucky to have a State Board that is committed to doing the right thing for player development. We have mandated 3v3 for U-6, 4v4 for U-8 and 8v8 for U-10 since 1994, and have completed the process of transition by 1995, so basically 99% of our clubs play small-sided games per USYSA's recommendations. We started the 'educating' process in 1993 by incorporating the small-sided games rationale and answers to commonly asked questions/objections in our 'F' courses and, since we also mandated that every recreational and select coach must have a minimum license, they are all exposed to the small-sided games philosophy through our coaching courses. It is now pretty much an accepted play format here. We also used the State's newsletter to promote small-sided games via articles and prepared a small-sided games package which was sent to all the leagues and sent our instructional staff to do free clinics on small-sided games. After doing all of the above promotion in 1993 and 1994, the State Board formed a small-sided games Committee which put together a transition plan and got the clubs to approve its implementation in our 1994 AGM. I agree that there is no need to play 11-a-side until U-14 and that 5v5 or 6v6 is best for U-10's. However, I think that there is a bigger problem at the U-6/U-8/U-10 ages that needs to be addressed. I am attaching a copy of a letter I sent to one of our leagues so that you can see what I mean. I am currently working on a program to tackle this problem and will share it with you once it is ready.

#### MEMO

TO: XXX XXXX, Assistant Director of Coaching, XXXXXXXX XXXXXXX SC  
FROM: Jacob Daniel, Director of Coaching  
RE: Summary of Observations of Your League's U-8 through U-12 Recreational Play  
DATE: October 10, 2000

As you know, we are in the process of designing a 'League Player Development Manual' that will be made available to all our member leagues for implementation by January 2001. To that end, Thomas Finlay and I are making an effort to visit a number of leagues during scheduled practices and games, to observe the logistics, organization, and the level of play. This information gathering will assist us in designing our manual for the benefit of the leagues. On Saturday, September 30, I visited your game complex and observed some of the games in the U-8, U-10 and U-12 Recreational age groups. I wanted to relay to you some of my observations and make some suggestions in advance of the official distribution of the manual.

U-8 GAMES

Your U-8 teams played 4v4 in fields approximately 20yds by 40yds, with small goals and no keepers. Games duration were 4 times 12 minute quarters. One coach from each team was inside the field, helping his team during play. Squads comprised of 6-9 players and every team had a uniform. The fields were marked by cones and there were sufficient goals for all the games.

The general impression was very favorable. All the coaches were very supportive and positive. The players seemed to enjoy themselves, there was a festive atmosphere and everything was well organized. From a 'bird's eye view' it all looked quite impressive. However, looking at the games with closer scrutiny, there were some features of the organization that, in my opinion, tend to stifle the development and the enjoyment of the players. Before I continue, it's important to note that these 'unwanted features' are common to most of the leagues that I observed, not just in your league.

#### First Touch Must Be a SOFT TOUCH

The players were encouraged by both the parents on the sidelines and the coaches in the field to 'boot' the ball up the field. Shouts of "get rid of it" and "kick it" etc., were all too common. Players are so indoctrinated to "kick it forward" that very few players tried to get out of pressure by dribbling. Players were controlled like puppets by the adults to a point that they were scared to do anything but kick it. Even throw-ins were farcically thrown forward, straight to the other team, by confused players who are conditioned to play the ball forward, no matter what. The kick-offs were no better, with players kicking the ball straight to the other team. Players, who clearly had plenty of time on the ball with no pressure anywhere near them, were kicking it forward without any thought or skill. And this sort of thing was not corrected by anyone and was allowed to occur time and again.

At the U-6 and U-8 levels, players must be encouraged to dribble, dribble and dribble. Their first touch must be a soft one. There should be very little coaching done by the coaches, just the occasional reminder to "dribble" and, when close enough to goal, to "shoot". The shout to "kick it" should NEVER be hollered by the adults. Dribbling out of pressure should be the goal and emphasis of these age groups. Results don't count and 'booting it' should not be an option. The players must be allowed to be creative and solve the problems of pressure and space by themselves, using dribbling technique. Passing is an impossible skill to master if players cannot dribble. The better players, once they learn to dribble out of tight areas, will be able to create space for themselves with the dribble and will then start to look up and pass the ball. But that will come by itself. Success is measured by how many times a player can dribble past players – game result are not important!

#### Parents Are TOO CLOSE to the fields

The parents were too close to the field. Their shouting was too intimidating to some of the players. Parents need to sit 30 yards from the field. Parents should be instructed to refrain from coaching. They can certainly cheer when something good happens, such as a goal or a successful dribble, but no coaching. The further away the parents, the better. Your league has the facilities and space to make this happen. A list of do's and don'ts can be distributed to the parents before the season with an explanation of the objectives. You will need to prepare the parents to accept that the majority of the dribbling will not be successful and that, nevertheless, they will have to bite their tongues and let the players try again and again. Parents who think that the kids will get discouraged if they don't succeed need to be educated. These young players do not possess the analytical thought process to look back or think ahead. They live for the moment, in the here and now, and the fact that the last time they tried to dribble it didn't work will not even enter their minds. And, besides, players who cannot dribble for sure cannot pass and all they will do if told to pass is kick it aimlessly. Bob, Thomas and I will be available to speak to the parents or to send you a sample handout for the parents if you need any assistance.

### The Warm-Ups Were TOO STATIC

The usual line drills with the parent coach serving one ball at a time to a line of players who shoot on goal. I also saw calisthenics used for a warm up. The warm up should involve dribbling the ball in the area with one ball per player and using other, fun types of dribbling games.

### UNEVEN SQUADS

Some teams had as little as 6 players and some had as many as 9 players. It was very difficult for the 9 players to get enough playing time and the player rotation system was awkward. Either eliminate 9 player squads or create a mechanism by which teams who show up with 9 players lend one player to the other team for the whole game. I know that the parents are conditioned to the 'team' concept and the thought of lending one of their own players to the other team will meet with some resistance. The team mentality is already strong at the U-8 level, as evidenced by the sharp uniforms and organization, so you will have a fight on your hands to change that mentality. But it's our job to educate them that at these age groups the team concept is irrelevant. There were definite signs of 'team building' by some coaches which needs to be addressed. Every season should see the creation of new teams using a draft system that is handled by non-parents such as yourself. This will stop the parent coaches from recruiting players to strengthen their teams and build a future 'Gatorade Championship Team'. There was one team of U-8 that contained some studs (they wore a red top and black shorts) and were coached by three fathers already intent on building a 'dynasty'.

### U-10 & U-12 GAMES

Again, the overall atmosphere was good and festive. The skill level was mixed. Some of the players were good enough to play select soccer. The question is: Are they playing recreational soccer because they prefer to stay recreational or are the coaches holding them back to help the teams win?

The emphasis here was also the long kick up the field. But at this age, playing on a big field, it's too late to teach them to dribble or to expect them to play any creative soccer. The bad habits were allowed to develop at the U-6 and U-8 levels and the natural instinct to dribble was already coached out of them. This is why it's so important to change the emphasis and insist on players dribbling at U-6 and U-8. It's the only answer.

### COACHING METHODOLOGY

Bob, let me suggest the following progression of skill priorities that you should try to implement at your club:

<u>Age group</u>	<u>Skill priorities</u>
U-6	Dribble out of trouble Soft first touch No kicking allowed except when shooting on goal
U-8	Dribble out of trouble Soft first touch No kicking allowed except when shooting on goal Introduce passing only to the players who can dribble out of trouble (you can do this by inviting the best players to a special, once a week, skill clinic)
U-10	Dribbling and/or passing out of trouble encouraged but players must be allowed to decide when to dribble and when to pass and learn from mistakes Aimless kicking discouraged

Bob, both Thomas and I are available to come and work with your league to implement these suggestions, to talk to the parents and coaches and help monitor the program. Please let me know what you think. We feel that you have brought the program forward and are going in the right direction. These issues that I raised are common across the state and, in fact, across the country. We must try to implement the correct program at these crucial ages. I believe that starting at U-10 is already too late – by then we have already coached the creativity, comfort and ‘feel’ for the ball out of them. Regards.

Cc: Thomas Finlay  
GYSA Board

**Jacob Daniels (DOC, GA, 12-5-00)**

Will your U-10's go from playing 5v5 to 11v11 at U-12?

**Ajit Korgaokar (DOC, TN, 12-5-00)**

Gary Allen sent me a copy of your article "Space: The Tactical Frontier". It confirmed many of my concerns with the way soccer programs in my area (Washington DC) are structured. Although for younger ages there is lip service paid to 3 v. 3 and 4 v. 4, whenever I see younger kids playing, coaches are just crowding more and more players onto small fields.

I happen to be focused not on U-10 and below, however, but what occurs after U-10 because my current team will be moving to 11-a-side next year. I despair that I will spend the next couple of years working to overcome the difficulties of the big field for small boys rather than challenging them to play creative and skillful soccer.

I am attempting to drum up support for continuing to play 7-a-side for 1 or 2 more years. I have already circulated your article to all of the coaches of the 63 U-10 teams in my league. I have two questions for you: (1) Do you know of anything written on the value of small-side soccer for 11 and 12 year-olds? and (2) Do you know of any leagues (particularly, travel leagues) that have instituted small-sided play at U-11?

Any ammunition or contacts you could provide me with would be greatly appreciated.

**Jon Fleuchaus (Coach, VA, 12-6-00)**

One more thing. I wanted to call your attention to a book I have found very interesting. It is by Horst Wein and is called "Developing Youth Soccer Players." It was recently published by Human Kinetics. He describes his training approach which is very much linked to children's developmental stages. I have attached a review of the book that Wein sent me. **Jon Fleuchaus (Coach, VA, 12-6-00)**