

NSCAA Position Statement - Small Sided Games

Small-Sided Games

The NSCAA supports the concept and implementation of small-sided games for youth development for the following reasons:

1. Less players on the field translates into more touches of the ball for the players playing.
2. Less players on the field simplifies the tactical environment making the game visually clearer for players.
3. Small-sided games are played on small fields which increases the incidence of goal-mouth activity (shots, crosses, saves, etc.)
4. Several small-sided games can be played on the same size area as a full game.
5. It is easier for coaches to read a small-sided game than the 11v11 game. This is an important skill for the novice coaches to develop.
6. The utilization of small-sided games for young players accentuates the need for adults to remember the developmental focus of youth soccer.

Coaches do need to be aware of the limitations of small-sided games.

1. Certain important techniques are rarely used. Ex. heading and long distance passing, receiving balls out of the air, etc.
2. Certain positional responsibilities therefore, are not realistically practiced (ex. center back challenging center forwards for long vertical high balls, central midfielder changing the point of attack).
3. It is sometimes difficult for the coach to translate small-sided games into the 11v11 game.
4. Many organizations, clubs or teams use small-sided games exclusively for try out purposes. This ignores the fact that some players have characteristics which are more suited to the 11v11 game than a small-sided game (Ex. Alexi Lalas).

The NSCAA's position on small-sided games is flexible. Countries have many different positions on small-sided games. The NSCAA has studied the positions of the following countries: Italy, Denmark, England, Norway, France, Mexico, Brazil, Belgium, Northern Ireland, Argentina, Holland and Turkey.

By far the most common feature of all these countries is their emphasis on four outfield players as the basic building blocks of small-sided games and young player development. Other than this, there is a wide range of philosophies and applications of small-sided games.

The NSCAA offers the following guidelines to its members regarding small-sided games;

1. Objectives

Small-sided games should have a purpose and a very definite objective. We suggest that the coach considers the following:

- A. Number of players on each team - The number of players on each team should have a developmental purpose. See "Technical and Tactical Purposes of Small-Sided Games"
- B. Method of scoring - The coach should have a working knowledge of how the goal of small-sided games emphasizes the training theme. Here are some different kinds of goals coaches use to practice various themes.

- i) Dribble the ball over a line – encourages dribbling and ball possession
 - ii) Large goal – Attacking – encourages shooting, Defending – encourages pressure on ball to prevent shot.
 - iii) Score in two small goals split apart – encourages changing the point of attack
 - iv) Kicking the ball in the air for target to catch - emphasis on long distance passing and defending by pressing
 - v) Number of passes ex. 6 consecutive passes equals a goal
Emphasis – accurate passing, movement by support players, visual and verbal communication, thinking ahead, defending as a group
- C. Size and shape of goal - Size of field and shape of field is used to develop certain training themes.

Long and narrow to practice long distance passing and receiving long balls in air

Short and wide to practice shooting, crossing and goalkeeping

D. Touch Conditions on Players

i. One-touch restriction – players are only allowed to one-touch the ball to another teammate

- Encourages movement off the ball. Support players move into position to receive a pass to help the one-touch player

- Speed and accuracy of pass

- Encourages players to keep their head up prior to receiving the ball to establish the options available if the ball comes to them.

- Verbal communication – players alert each other as to their positions

THIS IS A VERY DIFFICULT CONDITION RARELY USED WITH YOUNG PLAYERS. ONLY EXCEPTIONALLY SKILLED YOUTH PLAYERS CAN BE EXPECTED TO PLAY ONE-TOUCH FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

ii. Two-touch restriction – players are only allowed a maximum of two touches, one to receive, one to pass. Some coaches impose a mandatory two-touch condition, “You cannot take one, you cannot take three, it must be two!” This condition encourages mainly receiving and controlling the ball. The condition emphasizes the importance of the first touch.

iii. Three-touch restriction – players must take three touches before passing the ball. Emphasis is on shielding the ball and composure. The more touches a player has to take the more the opponent can pressure for the ball and the more the attacker will have to shield it. Conditional touch soccer should only be used for a limited time and only with players who are relatively advanced.

2. Use of a Goalkeeper

There are wide-ranging philosophies regarding the introduction of goalkeepers into small-sided games. Some countries introduce them immediately, others do not. Thought should be given to the following considerations:

i. Until the age of 13, the goalkeeping position should be rotated

ii. Having a goalkeeper in goal affects how far back the last defender goes and may effect the restarting position for a team which has conceded a goal or is taking a goal kick. For example, in a non-goalkeeper 4v4 game, where goals are restarted in the goalkeeper’s box, the attacking team is effectively playing 3v4 making it more difficult to get out of their defensive area than when using a goalkeeper.

iii. Goalkeepers should be instructed how to distribute the ball to teammates. Many goalkeepers throw the ball out too awkwardly for their teammates. Goalkeepers should learn to roll the ball like a bowling ball or put it on the ground for inside-of-the-foot passes up until 6v6.

iv. The goalkeeper must be given a great deal of flexibility with regard to their attacking contribution and should not be restricted to standing on the goal line simply trying to stop shots.

3. Rules

Rule modification is critical for small-sided games to maximize their potential. When fields get shorter and narrower the normal laws of the game are affected. Coaches and rules administrators should consider the following:

- i. On narrow fields replacing throw-ins with “indirect” kick-ins.
- ii. On narrow fields taking corner kicks from half-way line
- iii. Restricting opposing player entry into the defensive third of a team taking a goal kick, especially for the very young players.
- iv. Careful consideration of where kick offs should be taken from following the scoring of a goal.
- v. Method of providing relief to teams who are being badly outclassed. Ex. reducing numbers of players when goal differential hits eight, putting outstanding player in goal, etc.
- vi. Giving coaches “timeouts” to instruct players.
- vii. Limit squad size to maximize participation.

4. Three Units

The full game of soccer is fluid and somewhat chaotic. In an effort to simplify the game educators have divided team functions into three units, allowing of course, for the function of a goalkeeper.

i. Back Player(s)

Whether employed zonally, man-to-man or a combination, there are generally a group of players who play close to their own goal whose function is:

- a. Prevent opposing players who operate close to their goal from scoring
- b. Initiate attacking movements and, when appropriate, push into forward positions to shoot or cross the ball.

ii. Midfield Player(s)

Commonly called “the engine room,” these players connect the back players with the front players. Their main functions are:

- a. Relay ball from back players to front players by passing or running with the ball. Midfield players frequently shoot and score themselves and run beyond the forwards.
- b. To act as a cushion to the back players defensively and try to win the ball from opponents before they get into dangerous attacking positions.

iii. Forwards

- a. Primary responsibility is to score goals and help others score goals.
- b. Forwards are also expected to defend and try to defensively win the ball especially from the opposition’s back players.

It should be noted that we do not refer to back players as defenders because when the opposition has the ball everyone is a defender. Also, forwards or “front players” are expected to defend as well as attack so they are not called attackers. Fullbacks are also attackers when they are in possession of the ball.

All small-sided games other than 3v3, should reflect the three units of a team.

Technical and Tactical Considerations in Small-Sided Games

<u>Age</u>	<u>Outfield Players</u>	<u>Goalkeeper</u>	<u>Field Size</u>	<u>Ball Size</u>	<u>Duration</u>
5-6	3	No	30 x 20 yds	3	2 x 20
7-8	4	Optional, rotating if used	35 x 20 yds	3	2 x 25
9	5	Optional, rotating if used	45 x 25 yds	4	2 x 30
10-11	7	Yes, rotating	50 x 35 yds	4	2 x 30
12+	10	Yes	100-120 x 60-75 yds	5	2 x 35

Playing Recommendations

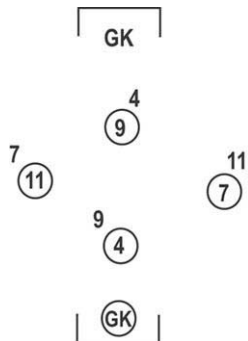
3v3

This should be a free-flowing game. Score does not need to be kept. There is no positioned play in 3v3.

4v4 (5v5 including goalkeepers)

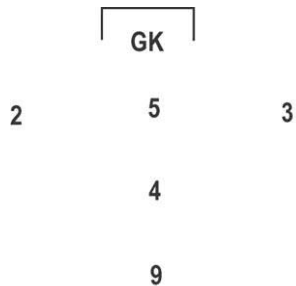
The four outfield player game is the first small-sided game where major connections with the full game are possible to distinguish:

- Players have the three passing directions of soccer (forward, backward and sideways)
- Some positional play is introduced as the players adopt a diamond formation. This diamond formation is recommended for teaching visual cues and decision making to the players.
- The three team units, backs, midfielders and forwards, are present. This is by far the most widely used game for player development around the world. For more information on 4v4 please access the NSCAA DVD, "Club Tactical Development."



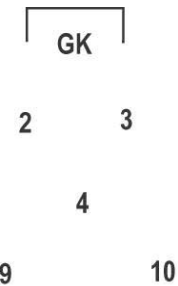
5v5 (6v6 including goalkeepers)

Good shape for teaching:



-Overlapping

- Pressure, cover and balance
- Combination Play (5-9-4), (5-4-2)

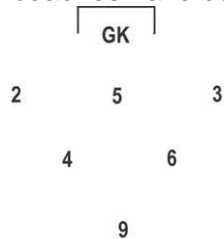


- Good shape for teaching 2 and 3 to press and cover

- Good shape to teach 9 and 10 to combine
- Good shape to teach 4 to help 2 and 3, 9 and 10 and receive ball from deep position

7v7

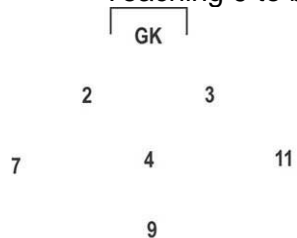
It is hard to achieve a balanced shape using six outfield players. Here are some different ways coaches have used 7v7.



This leaves space on the flanks for 2 and 3 to advance into. The combination possibilities between 4, 6 and 9 should be emphasized.

The 1-2-3-1 is a good shape for teaching:

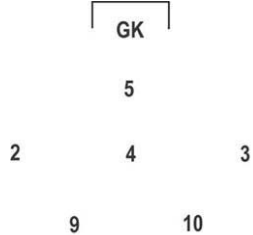
- Two center backs to pressure and cover
- Teaching 2 and 3 when to pass ball vertically to 9 and when to pass to 4, 7 and 11
- Teaching 7 and 11 how to attack and defend on the flanks
- Teaching 4 to play through 360 degrees
- Teaching 9 to be a striker and rebound or combine with other players



In this shape the 5 player acts as a sweeper staying in a line between the ball and the middle of the goal.

Good shape for teaching:

- Distribution by 5, especially to 9 and 10
- Teaches 2 and 3 to operate on flanks
- Teaches 4 to relay ball from back to front
- Teaches 9 and 10 to combine with each other and midfield players to shoot



8v8

8v8 is the final category of small-sided games. Games played with eight outfield players approximate the 11v11 game too closely to be considered small-sided games. The seven outfield player model is one highly recommended as a team frequently carries 16-18 players on the squad so almost the entire squad can be utilized in a structured game, which to a large extent, resembles a full game. The 8v8 systems shown here represent a smaller version of an 11v11 system, which is notated in the box and can be used to teach many of the principles which the layers will utilize in the 11v11 system.

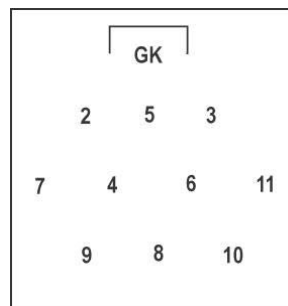
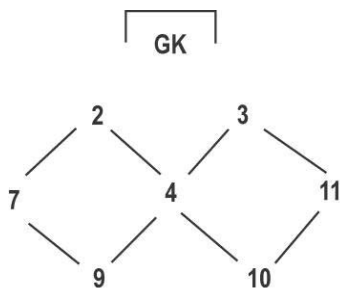
The coach can structure the 8v8 game in several ways depending upon the desired training or playing emphasis.

1-2-3-2

This system gives the players many of the same visual cues as the 4v4 except there are two diamonds. It is a logical progression from the four outfield player game.

Teaching possibilities:

1. Training two center backs to cover and balance
2. Training two center forwards to combine and score
3. Training flank players to play in three thirds of the field
4. Training same visual cues as four outfield player diamond



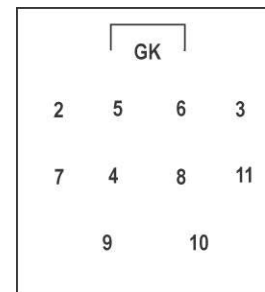
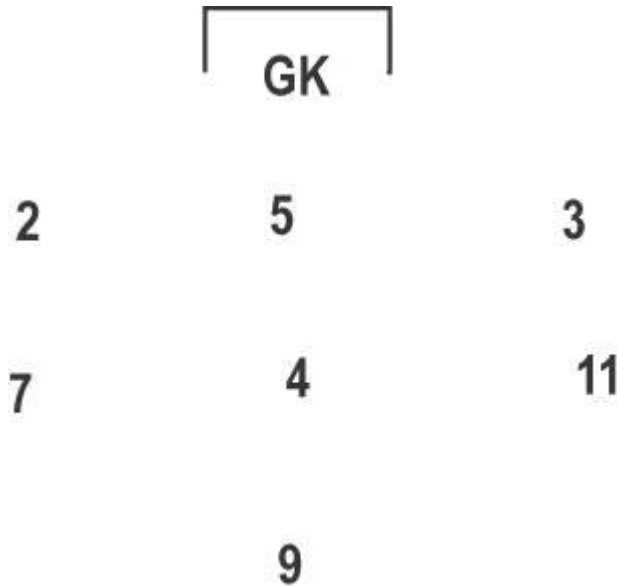
1-3-4-3

1-3-3-1

Teaching possibilities:

1. Training overlapping, especially 2 and 3 around 7 and 11
2. Teaching zonal defending and double teaming
3. Teaching counter attacking
4. Changing the point of attack

Numbers even. Players further forward develop faster than back players because they operate under pressure and need to be technically cleaner.

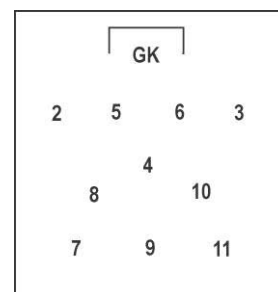
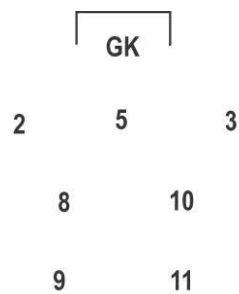


1-4-4-2

1-3-2-2

Teaching possibilities:

1. Overlapping of 2 and 3
2. Training two center midfielders
3. Training two center forwards

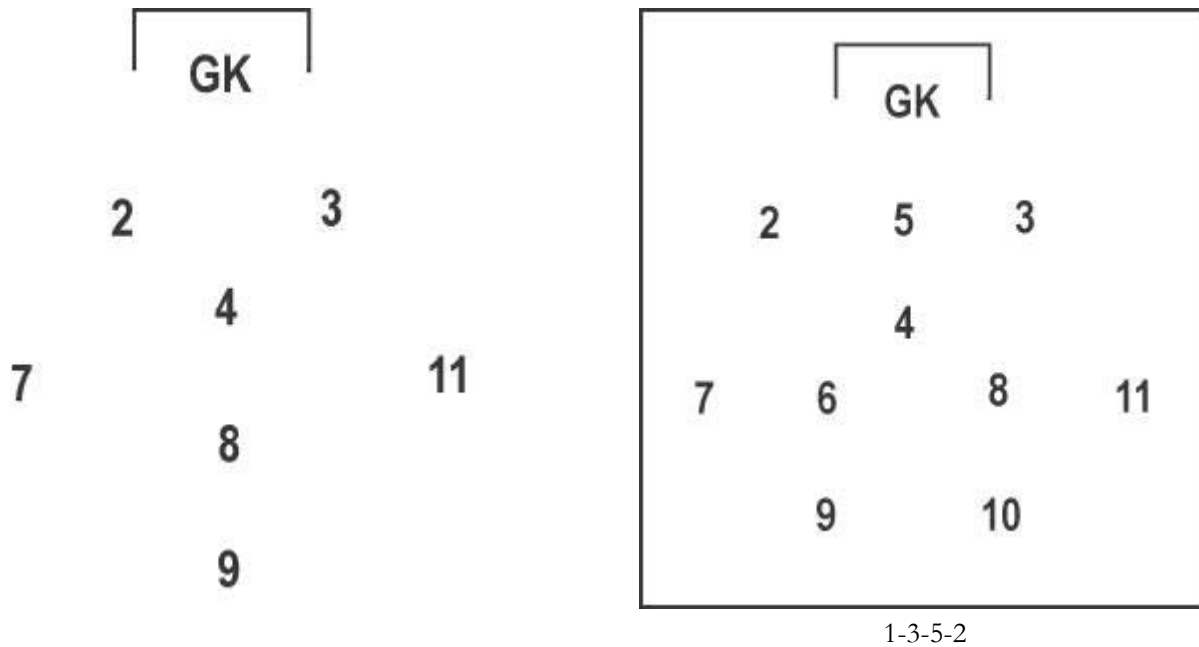


1-4-3-3

1-2-4-1

Teaching possibilities:

1. Training two center backs to pressure and cover and work with defensive midfield player.
2. Training changing the point of attack.
3. Training the counter attack
4. Training 7 and 11 to operate down the length of the flank
5. Training 8 to coordinate with 9 and 4



The NSCAA encourages coaches to explore the many different ways small-sided games can be utilized to train players of all ages. The NSCAA offers a special topics course in small-sided games and covers the subject more thoroughly in the Advanced Regional Diploma. Coaches can also purchase the NSCAA DVD "Club Tactical Development" which deals with this topic.