



## WHY SMALL-SIDED GAMES?

There is a lot of talk over the last couple of years about the move in the youth ranks to start moving to small-sided soccer when playing games. The following is a summary of some of the history and reasons why this movement has gained ground all over the US.

**BACKGROUND:** RUSC belongs to Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Association which is the state's governing body in regard to youth soccer. The governing body for EPYSA is the United States Youth Soccer Organization (USYSO), which belongs to US Soccer. The USYSO is broken up into four regions and we are in Region-1, which includes 13 state organizations like EPYSA. So, we belong to EPYSA who belongs to Region-1 who belongs to USYSO who belongs to US Soccer.

**HISTORY:** While the talk of making the games at the youth level smaller has gone on for years, the governing bodies took formal action in August of 2002 during the annual meeting of USYSO, which included all four regions in the country. All four regions voted to adopt rules that governed small-sided play starting with U6 through U12. The effective date was to be September of 2003. However, the region gave each state association the power to implement the program as the saw fit. In September of 2003, EPYSA recommended to adopt the USYSO recommendations for small-sided soccer as follows:

- U6: 3 v 3 with no goalkeepers (4 v 4 ok but 3 v 3 strongly recommended)
- U8: 4 v 4 with no goalkeepers
- U10: 6 v 6 with a goalkeeper
- U12: 8 v 8 with a goalkeeper

While the word "mandatory" was used in the directive from EPYSA to all clubs, it was decided by Mike Barr, the EPYSA State Director Of Coaching, and the coaching committee to allow clubs time to implement and not to make it mandatory at the present time. In late summer of 2013 the RUSC Coaching and Payer Development Committees started discussion on moving towards the small-sided format. In January of 2013, we adopted a transition plan to move to the above U6 through U10 recommendations with the final phase being the move of U10's to 6 v 6 by fall of 2014. At the present time this decision does not affect U10 through U12 Travel age groups because these teams compete in the DELCO and PAGS leagues that has not yet adopted the small-sided game format.

**REASONS:** The bottom line is more touches of the ball, less complicated decisions, more scoring, more excitement, more participation and most of all a better environment for player development.



***The following is a summary that was presented by Tom Goodman who is the National Director of Coaching for USYSO:***

As the US Youth Soccer Director of Coaching Education, veteran youth coach and father of three adult children, who used to be little soccer players, I have thought long and hard about the answer to the question, "Why Small-Sided Games?"

Let me make sure that everyone understands the meaning of "Small-Sided Games". These are soccer games with fewer players competing on a smaller sized field. These are fun games that involve the players more because one ball is being shared by fewer players. All ages can play "Small Sided Games", but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players. My recommendations for "number of players" at the various age groups are as follows:

- U6- 3 against 3 no goal keepers
- U8- 4 against 4 no goal keepers
- U10- 6 against 6 with goal keepers
- U12- 8 against 8 with goal keepers
- U13+- 11 against 11 with goal keepers

Here are some of the reasons why I believe we, as soccer coaches, administrators and parents must guarantee that our young soccer players play small-sided games:

1. Because we want our young soccer players to touch the soccer ball more often and become more skillful with it! (Individual technical development)
2. Because we want our young soccer players to make more, less-complicated decisions during the game! (Tactical development)
3. Because we want our young soccer players to be more physically efficient in the field space they are playing in! (Reduced field size)
4. Because we want our young soccer players to have more individual teaching time with the coach! Less players on the field and less players on the team will guarantee this! (Need to feel worthy...need to feel important)
5. Because we want our young soccer players to have more, involved playing time in the game! (More opportunity to solve problems that only the game presents)
6. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunity to play on both sides of the ball! (More exposure to attacking and defending situations)
7. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunities to score goals! (Pure excitement)

These are the reasons why we adults must foster "Small-Sided Games" in our youth soccer programs. The "Small-Sided" environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our young soccer players. It's a FUN environment that focuses on the young soccer player. It just makes sense...doesn't it?

***RUSC's PHILOSOPHY:*** The Ridley United Soccer Club's philosophy is that our goal is to develop our soccer players, not to develop teams. In reality, if you develop the players, the teams will also become strong and continue develop. We want our players to develop in all four components of soccer including **skills, knowledge, fitness and attitude**. When as coaches, parents, and administrators we need to make decisions that have an effect on our program, we need to constantly ask ourselves "What is best for the player(s)?"

We need to remember that this game is foremost for the players...not the coaches...not the parents...not the administrators. It is for the players, and if we believe that our goal is to develop players then the answer as to whether or not to play small-sided games becomes easy. Yes!