

3.

Small Sided Football

The last two Building Blocks are the Playing Building Blocks, **Small Sided Football** and **11 v 11**.



- U/6-U/7 : 4 v 4 (no goalkeepers)
- U/8-U/9 : 7 v 7 (6 outfield players and a goalkeeper)
- U/10-U/11 : 9 v 9 (8 outfield players and a goalkeeper)
- From U/12 : 11 v 11
- Emphasis on fun, freedom of expression and 'learning by playing' instead of 'winning at all costs'
- The game is for the players, the role of coaches and parents is to help, teach, stimulate and praise them so they enjoy playing.

Small Sided Football

A former colleague of mine once came up with this perfect analogy while discussing the rationale of Small Sided Football with someone who disagreed with the concept:

“So then, would you also throw your 3 year old daughter into the deep end of an Olympic Pool to teach her how to swim?”

The motives behind the concept of Small Sided Football (SSF) are numerous and make perfect sense for any right-thinking person:

- For kids aged 5-12 the distances they have to cover on a full pitch are way too big. They are unable to run or pass over big distances and they will be exhausted in no time
- An 11 v 11 game is far too complex for young kids: there are too many rules, options and choices to be made and as a result the success rate will be very low
- The number of ball contacts in a game involving 22 kids and one ball on a big pitch will be very limited so they do not develop and it's not much fun

As a result of the above mentioned points the motivation to play our beautiful game will soon be gone and the kids will turn their interests to other activities! The biggest mistake you can make as a coach is to consider children to be little adults. We have hopefully made this clear by describing the mental and physical development stages throughout the various Building Blocks.

By gradually increasing the number of players as well as the pitch sizes the children learn to play the game in a progressive, logical and stimulating way.

In his book “The Talent Code”, researcher Daniel Coyle describes why **futsal** (which is **Small Sided Football!**) is the secret behind the success of Brazilian football. In futsal players touch the ball on average 6 times per minute more often than in 11 v 11. In addition to this, because of the limited space, quickness of decision-making as well as accuracy improves dramatically. Coyle calls futsal ‘turbo charged football learning’.

This is once again an example of what we call the holistic approach. Brazilian kids do not separately learn how to pass the ball first; then to dribble and then to receive the ball, etc. They develop those technical skills as well as the decision-making skills while playing futsal.

Currently the rationale of Small Sided Football is understood and adopted all over the football world as the best way to make the youngest players familiar with our game.

On the next pages you will find the Small Sided Football formats used by FFA with an explanation of how 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 lead up to the 1-4-3-3 formation in a logical and methodical manner as well as a number of coaching tips.

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Small Sided Football Formats

Playing Format	Under 6 & 7	Under 8 & 9	Under 10 & 11
NUMBERS	4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9
FIELD SIZE	Length: 30m Width: 20m	¼ Full Size Pitch Length: 40m - 50m Width: 30m - 40m	½ Full Size Pitch Length: 60m - 70m Width: 40m - 50m
FIELD MARKINGS	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings
PENALTY AREA	Nil	5m depth x 12m width	5m depth x 12m width
GOAL SIZE	Width: 1.5m - 2.0m Height: 0.9m - 1.0m	Width: 2.5m - 3.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m	Width: 4.5m - 5.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m
GOAL TYPE	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals
BALL SIZE	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
GOALKEEPER	No	Yes	Yes
PLAYING TIME	2 x 15 minutes	2 x 20 minutes	2 x 25 minutes
HALF TIME BREAK	5 minutes	5 minutes	7.5 minutes
REFEREE	Game Leader	Instructing Referee	Instructing Referee

U/6-7

Teams of 4 players (no goalkeepers).

Coaching tips:

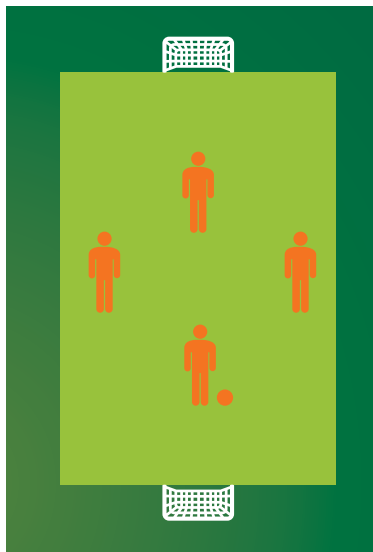
No 'coaching' only stimulating and praising

'Natural' development through just playing and discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error.

Emphasis on fun and building a love of the game.

The best coach is not the one who shouts instructions the whole game, however unfortunately many parents seem to feel that's what good coaches are supposed to do.

- In 4 v 4 football, the 'coach' should not worry about 'tactics' other than encouraging the kids to try and score when they have the ball and win it back when the other team has the ball in order to prevent them from scoring
- Aim for equal playing time.



How NOT to coach Small Sided Football



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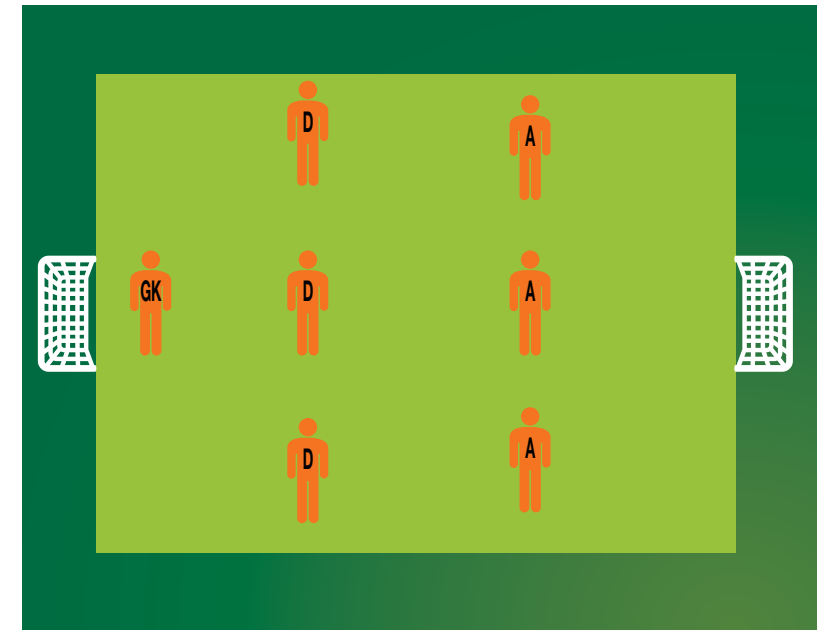
Small Sided Football

U/8-9

Teams of 7 players (one goalkeeper and 6 outfield players)

Coaching tips:

- The players now begin to understand what the game's purpose is (winning by scoring more goals than the opponent)
- There will still be a lot of individual play but the players start to understand that they have to work together in order to be successful
- A basic 'feeling' for team play, direction and dealing with an opponent starts to develop
- Preference and talent for a specific position starts to show: you can start working on a basic organisation (1 in goal; 3 at the back; 3 up front) and a basic understanding of some team tasks (how to defend and attack as a team)
- The coach should still let every player play in every position regularly. One week they want to be goalie, next time the centre forward. Let them!
- Bigger goals with goalkeepers automatically appeal to aiming and shooting: give them all plenty of opportunities to shoot (or be the goalkeeper).
- In 7 v 7 football, the coach should still not be too concerned with 'tactics'. The focus in training is on the individual player, so in the weekend game the players should have the opportunity to apply their skills in a game setting. The coach organises the players into two lines of three with a Goalkeeper behind. The players just need simple tasks so they do not become confused or overwhelmed with information (Examples: 'You three try to defend more than you attack' 'you three try to attack more than you defend' 'let's see if we can always have one of our players pushed right up in the middle of the pitch' 'when the opponent has the ball, can we get one of our team near every one of their players on the goal side', etc)

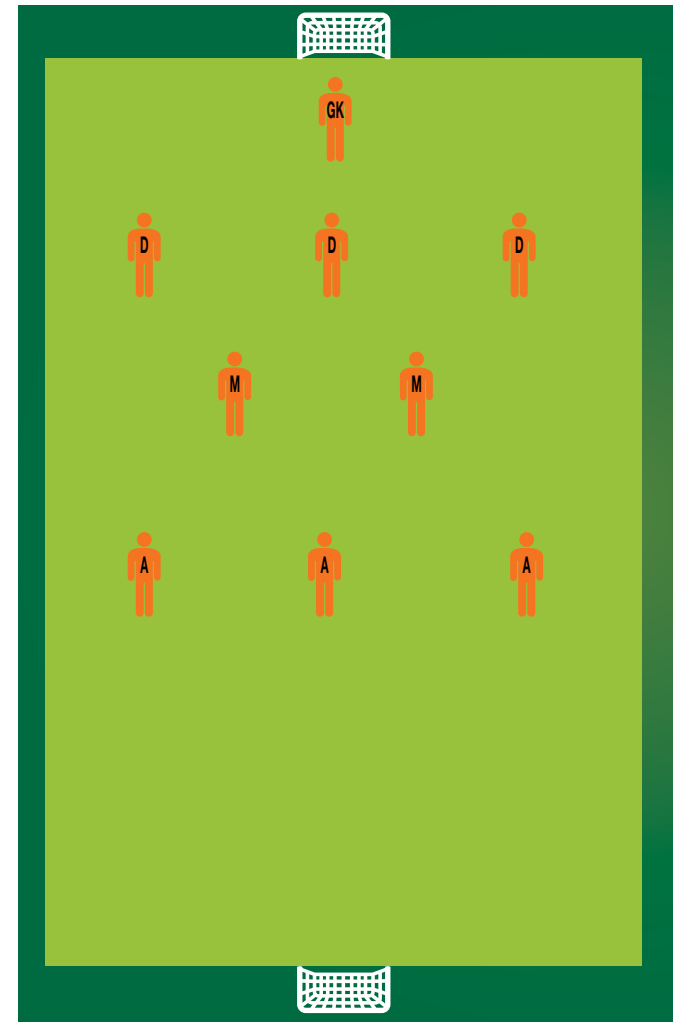


- At half-time, the coach should rotate players around to experience different aspects of the game (e.g. the three defenders become the three attackers)
- Aim for equal playing time

U/10-11

Coaching tips:

- The understanding of working together as a team develops more and more
- The awareness of the individual roles in relation to teamwork is also developing as well as the understanding for acting without the ball both in defence and attack
- With 8 outfield players a tighter and more strict task allocation and use of space is required
- Preference/ability for specific positions becomes more and more clear
- At this age the kids are very competitive and clever and very quickly develop their motor skills
- All the above means that the coach can raise the bar on all these aspects but:
 - Avoid an information 'overkill'
 - Keep it simple (speak their language)
 - It's their game, it's not about the coach
- In 9 v 9, the coach organises the players into three lines with a goalkeeper behind, preferably in a 1-3-2-3 formation as a guide for team shape
- The coach is still not too concerned with tactics or obsessed with results
- The players still just need simple tasks on match day
- The players should still be regularly rotated, either at half-time or from game to game
- Avoid playing the best players in central positions, and 'hiding' the weaker players out wide
- Aim for equal playing time

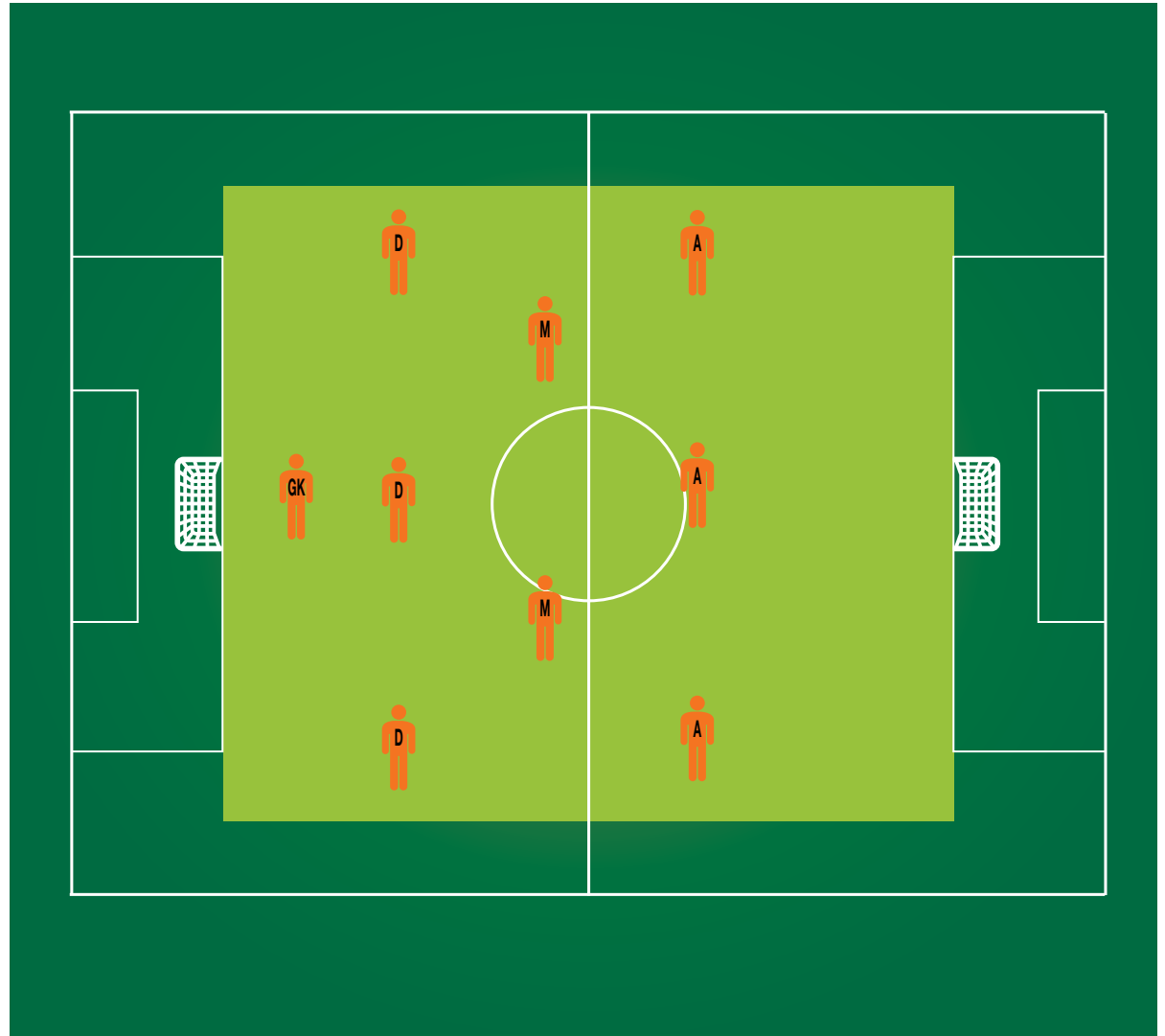


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U/11

- With the U/11's it is FFA's preference to play box to box and narrow the field approximately 5m each side. Playing in the length of the pitch is a totally new experience with a different perception and more complexity. As a last step towards the real, full pitch game this format offers the ideal link.



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