



Ohio Youth Soccer Association North

## The Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games

# NOT!

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**Perspective....**

**“As a kid you need to touch the ball as much as you can. You should always be with the ball. You should have a feeling that wherever the ball is, you can do anything with it. No matter where it is, where it is on your body, how it’s spinning, how it’s coming at you, the speed it’s coming at you, anything.....”**



**Landon Donovan, USA World Cup hero, in *Soccer America*, July 2002**



**“You can learn the tactical side of the game later. It’s amazing to me that people put so much emphasis on trying to be tactical and worry about winning when it doesn’t matter when you’re 12 years old. We’re going to have big, strong, fast players. We’re Americans, we’re athletes. But if we never learn at an early age to be good on the ball, then it’s just useless.”**

**Landon Donovan, USA World Cup hero, in *Soccer America*, July 2002**

**“Imagine if parents gave their children a toy – a doll, puzzle, or train- and started yelling at them while they played with it. Do you think it would become a favorite toy?”**



**Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain**



**"Unless you feel good about what you do everyday, you won't do it with much conviction or passion."**

**Mia Hamm, World Cup and Olympic Champion**

**1. How can we encourage those people who deal with the very youngest players to be more imaginative and inventive and less prescriptive, directive and intrusive?**

**2. How can we create environments for our youngest players that are less predictable, where adult influence and involvement is kept to a bare minimum and mistakes are allowed?**

**3. How do we create environments for our youngest players that are less judgmental and less threatening, free of adult expectation and authority, where children can be children and play with emotional freedom, learning about the game without the burden of potential.**

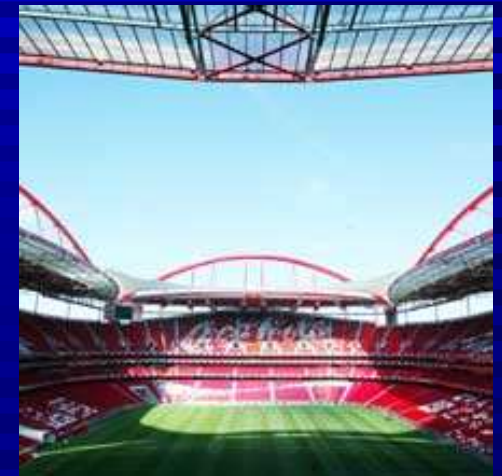
**Developmental challenges posed to candidates at an English Football Association U-11/12-16 coaching course.**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will need more fields.**

**Reality: Communities with ample space have simply configured new fields at the start of each season. Where space is more restricted, communities have marked out their 4v4/5v5 and 6v6 fields inside their 8v8 and 11v11 fields.**

**With U-11/12's playing 8v8, the 80x50 yard fields already exist, so the logistical challenge concerns scheduling. Portable goals on 11-a-side fields provides one solution; multiple markings, another; philosophical acceptance a third; and will-power a critical fourth.**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will need more coaches.**

**Reality: When U-9/10 games are played using the “Split Game” model, this is not true, as the same number of coaches and players are divided on the same field space. Only when single teams are adopted as the U-9/10 model, does the need for additional coaches hold true.**

**With U-11/12's, the smaller communities already have rosters of around 14 players, which is perfect for 8v8. Only when adding U-11/12 players to build a second team would additional coaches be required.**





## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: It's not "real" soccer.**

**Reality: Just as children's books, games, toys, movies and television are produced to appeal to their level of cognitive developmental, attention and interest, so should youth sports. Children want four things from games and sports: Action, Involvement, Excitement and Friendships. They cannot get these when their opportunities to participate in meaningful ways are negated by an adult-imposed format.**

**Because free play has become virtually extinct in most advanced soccer countries, small-sided games have become the soccer norm for players through U-11/12.**



**On playing 11-a-side, Michels says, “We won,” but so what, when (s)he touched the ball three times today. Our responsibility is DEVELOPMENT. So we must play 4 v 4 and 7 v 7 with plenty of time and space – to learn combinations, skills, awareness, and “smartness.”**

**Rinus Michels, Dutch Master Coach.**

**It's all about Touches and Opportunities....**

## **4v4 versus 8v8**



**Passes: +135% or 585 more passes in 4v4 games**

**Shots Taken: +260% or 481 more shots in 4v4 games**

**Goals Scored: +500% or 301 more goals in 4v4 games**

**1v1's: +225% or 525 more 1v1's in 4v4 games**

**Tricks, Turns and Moves: +280% or 436 more tricks, turns, and moves**

**These data were collected in a 2002-2003 study conducted for Manchester United Football Club by Dr. Rick Fernoglio, a lecturer in Exercise Science at Manchester Metropolitan University. Fifteen (15) 4v4 and 8v8 games were videotaped and analyzed for the study. This study was reported on page 6 of the March 2004 edition of Success in Soccer magazine.**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will need more referees.**

**Reality: Referees are not necessary or preferred for recreation level soccer through U-8, so the additional referee (1) needed for the “Split Game” model at U-9/10 would be taken from the lower levels.**



**There is no need for additional referees at U-11/12 playing 8v8, unless additional teams are formed and more games are scheduled.**



**“Because they are so egocentric, few seven and eight year-old beginners are capable of successfully playing team games.”**

**Horst Wein, in *Developing Youth Soccer Players***



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: The ball is always going out of bounds in small-sided games.**

**Reality: On a 55x40 yard field for U-9/10's and an 80x55 yard field for U-11/12's, there is plenty of room to play soccer, but not to “whack” the ball as far and as hard as possible. This is not soccer, it will never develop competent soccer players, and passing the ball over short distances is something novice coaches must learn to appreciate in order for the game to grow.**



**“My ideal football is 70 percent technical and 30 percent physical. There’s too much running about in football today. Basis technique is essential. We don’t concentrate on improving it. You’ve got to start with youth teams.”**



**Johan Cruyff, Dutch Soccer Legend and Coach**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: The field is too small; some of my players can kick the ball from one end to the other.**

**Reality: True, but can they dribble the ball and keep possession? Can they pass to a teammate and receive a return pass? Can they circulate the ball between teammates, particularly those at the back of the team and on the opposite side of the field? Can they possess the ball in a purposeful way, or are they limited to kicking the ball away because their close dribbling and passing skills have never been developed?**

**Just as throwing every pass long in football, or trying to hit home runs on every plate appearance in baseball, or driving the ball 300 yards from the tee on every hole in golf are not always the best strategies, kicking the soccer ball 50 or 60 yards to the opponent is equally suspect as a basic tactical approach. Few coaches appreciate this.**



**“It’s possible at any time during a player’s career to get into top physical shape, but you can’t teach skills to an old player. Youth coaches should keep in mind that individual skills need to be nurtured from an early age. Players who haven’t mastered the fundamental skills become frustrated because the game gets too difficult for them as they move into higher levels.”**



**Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth:** How am I going to coach my team when they are playing in two games?

**Reality:** In the “Split Game Model,” each coach sees half of his/her players every game. Since the games are supposed to be for the players, this is not something to fret over. There is too much coaching in youth soccer and novice coaches must learn to give the game back to the players.

**Practice is for coaching; games are for players.**

**In the “Single Game Model,” this argument is not applicable.**

**If you've ever driven a car with three kids screaming and fighting in the backseat, think about this: Does it tend to pull your attention away from the task at hand? Do you ever feel overloaded? If you add more pressure to that car ride, such as an icy road, can you handle all that at once?**



**That's exactly what coaches do when they yell at kids to do something: They distract them. They create "cognitive overload."**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: The small-sided games are OK for practice, but not for games.**

**Reality: Formal contests should match the developmental level of the participants.**

**U-9/10's are just beginning to appreciate spacing, so games of seven or more players are too complicated, because they force coaches to organize a midfield line. This is too confusing for the vast majority of U-9/10's and, because there are more players on the field, the quantity and quality of their participation is reduced.**

**By U-11/12, players are much more spatially aware and therefore much better able to understanding the functions and purpose of a midfield line. However, 11v11 is too cluttered for all but the most advanced players and with participation a necessary prerequisite for learning and enjoyment, 8v8 is a much more fun game to play.**

**“With most players under age 12, an 11-on-11 game on a full-sized field defeats much of the purpose of learning basic skills and having fun. It’s also much harder to coach.”**



**Bobby Clark, Head Coach, University of Notre Dame, in *The Baffled Parent’s Guide to Coaching Youth Soccer***

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: Parents won't drive their kids to other communities to watch "little kids" soccer.**

**Reality: Motivated parents will drive their children wherever and whenever they have games and practices scheduled. Also, change is only painful while, "This is always the way we have done things around here" lingers.**

**Experience has clearly shown that kids love competing in smaller-sided games and when the players are happy, so too are their parents.**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth:** The players won't learn positions, so when they get to high school, they will be at a disadvantage.

**Reality:** Organized youth sports are not good for skill development and creativity. In natural environments, children learn passion, skills and tactical insight in small groups games first, and then they learn positional responsibilities and how to compete to win as a team later.

In Brazil, they play unorganized soccer games through age twelve. Brazil is the world's leading developer of creative soccer talent and they have won more World Cup's (4) than any other country.

In baseball, American players are being supplanted by Latinos who grew up playing improvised games without coaches on sand lots with friends and family.

**“The amount of space in 11-a-side is not good for young kids. You spend too much time running around without the ball. I think the best way to improve your skills is to play football on a smaller pitch. I didn’t play 11-a-side football until I was 13. In Brazil, most kids play futebol de salao, which is similar to five-a-side. In futebol de salao, you are always involved.”**



**Juninho, Brazilian World Cup winner**



Bangsbo and Pietersen reported that for a major international tournament with FIFA substitution rules, the individual time of possession for 90-minute games ranged between 20 seconds and three minutes, with an average of one and a half to two minutes possession time per player.

“Offensive Soccer Tactics,” Bangsbo and Pietersen (2004) Human Kinetics.



# Over-coaching at the Youth Level is a Cancer on American Player Development





**“Too often, we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.”**

**Roger Lewin, US Humorist, Author**



**The most important thing is that to be  
a good player you need to train and  
have the opportunity to practice.**

**Tord Grip, England Asst. Coach**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We're not interested in developing national team players; we're only here to develop players for our high school team.**

**Reality: Our job as coaches is to maximize potential; every player deserves the opportunity to reach the highest level possible.**



Tom Latch, US Paralympic Team



Freddy Adu, US U-21 National Team

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth:** In the 11-a-side game, the weakest players can hide. When they are placed in a smaller-sided game, they will get exposed and embarrassed and quit.

**Reality:** Kids quit because they are not being taught the necessary skills and tactics to enjoy the game; because they feel pressured by adults to win, or not make mistakes; because they are not allowed to express themselves and play on their own terms; because they are not allowed to participate in meaningful ways; because they do not develop ownership and therefore do not develop a passion; and because they are not having any fun.

**“For some reason, adults – some who can’t even kick a ball – think it’s perfectly okay to scream at children while they’re playing soccer. How normal would it seem if a mother gave a six-year-old some crayons and a coloring book and started screaming? “Use the red crayon! Stay in the lines! Don’t use yellow!” You think that child would develop a passion for drawing? Most important, parents must realize that playing sports is a way for children to express themselves.”**

**Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain**



**"A champion is passionate, loves what they do and always wants to bring out that passion in everything they do."**



**Tiffeny Milbrett, World Cup and Olympic Champion**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will need more paint to line the fields.**

**Reality: True, but this is America. Field paint is cheap and the returns far outweigh the costs!**



## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will need more goals.**

**Reality: True, but only at U-9/10 and only if a “Split Game” model is adopted. With the “Single Team” model, the issue becomes scheduling!**



**For U-11/12's, the fields markings and goals are already in place.**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: We will lose more players as the roster sizes increase from 12 to 14 to 18.**

**Reality: Most communities cut players to make select teams at U-9. From a base of hundreds of entry-level players to perhaps one U-14 team suggests that we are extremely wasteful of our resources.**



**One alternative...**

**Start with a base of ~40 players at U-9.**

**At U-9, four 6v6 teams with rosters of 8-10 can be formed (32-48).**

**At U-11, three 8v8 teams of 12-14 players can be formed (30-42).**

**At U-13, two 11v11 teams of 14-18 can be formed (28-36).**

## Best Arguments Against Small-sided Games-NOT!

**Myth: Before players quit soccer, they should experience the 11v11 game.**

**Reality: The game form matters much less than the quality of the emotional experience. If the players are learning and enjoying the challenge, they will stay in the sport.**



**“The first duty to children is to make them happy. If you have not made them so, you have wronged them. No other good they may get can make up for that.”**

**Charles Buxton, Author.**







**Are we having fun yet?**