

## Small-Sided Games: Benefits for Team & Player Development

Small-sided games (SSG) are a great tool for coaches to use in training when they want to expose their players to situations that they will encounter during competitive games. Because SSG continually expose players to game specific situations their rules & dimensions can be manipulated to aid the development of a player's decision-making skill, technical skills, tactical knowledge and physical conditioning.

SSG are ideal to aid in the development of your players because they allow players:

- More touches on the soccer ball: by reducing the amount of players in a game it will allow for each player to receive more touches.
- Increased number of game related decision-making opportunities: fewer players mean an increased amount of touches on the ball per player, which in turn means more decisions that need to be made.
- Constant transition from attacking to defensive situations.
- Increased 1 v 1 encounters in both attacking and defending situations.
- Increased opportunities to utilize specific ball skills.
- Increased opportunity to be in a goal scoring position.
- Increased opportunities to be in a 2 v 1 attacking and defending situations.

By the manipulating of rules and dimensions of a SSG, a coach can focus on a specific technical or tactical topic which will indirectly teach players through guided discovery. Guided discovery is when players make their own decisions based on the environment they are placed in, thus when the coach controls the environment they control what players are learning. NOTE: if players within SSG are continually being coached and given advice it limits player decision making, and learning is restricted.

What aspects of SSG can a coach manipulate in order to facilitate different learning outcomes?

- Area dimensions.
- Rules.
- Scoring opportunities.

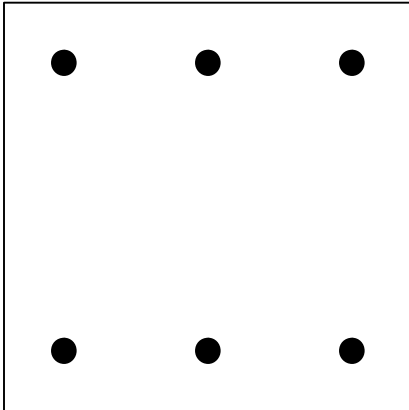
By controlling these aspects a coach can influence how players think about the game without any instruction.

## Passing & Receiving Techniques

General restrictions to encourage passing and receiving:

- Touch restrictions: players only have two touches.
- Restarts: all restarts completed by a player passing the ball into the area.
- Area dimensions: Larger size areas will give players time and space to receive and pass.

### Target Games



**Area:** 30 yard width x 40 yard length

**Organization:**

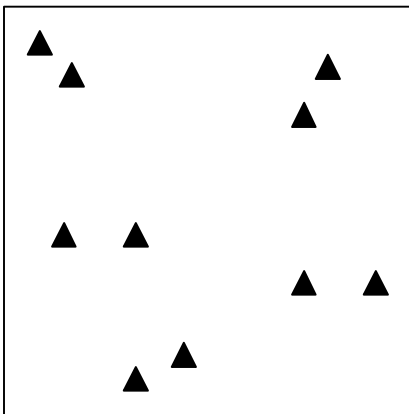
Place 3 soccer balls on cones and place as shown.

Place players into teams of 3.

**Rules:**

Team must knock all 3 soccer balls off to win.

### Multiple Goal Games



**Area:** 30 yard width x 40 yard length

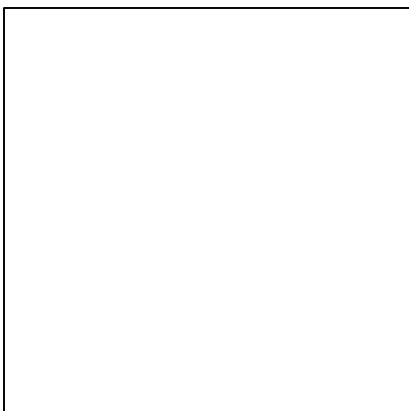
**Organization:**

Place small goals (2-yards) randomly inside the area.

**Rules:**

Players must complete a pass through a gate to a teammate to score a goal.

### Possession Games



**Area:** 30 yard width x 40 yard length

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams.

**Rules:**

Players must complete 5 consecutive passes to score a goal.

**Adaptations:**

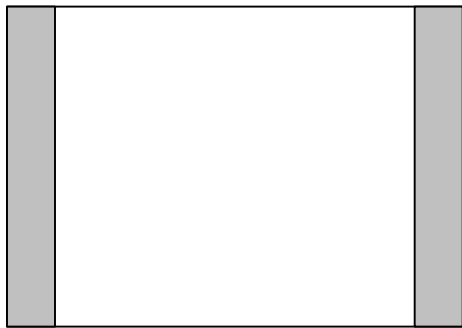
Add neutral players to aid the team in possession

## Dribbling, Moves & Turning Techniques

General restrictions that will encourage the above aspects include:

- Players must take 3 touches on the ball before releasing: this restriction has a lot of implications for the game and can highlight all areas of dribbling.
- Restarts: all restarts should be completed by a player dribbling into the area.
- Area dimensions: Bigger length than width, e.g. 40 x 20 yards. This type of area will isolate players into 1 v 1 situations, which will encourage all aspects of dribbling.

### N-Zone Games



**Area:** 20 yard width x 40 yard length

**Organization:**

Place a 5 x 30 yard N-Zone at each end of the area

Place players into two even teams

**Rules:** Dribble into the n-zone and stop the ball to score.

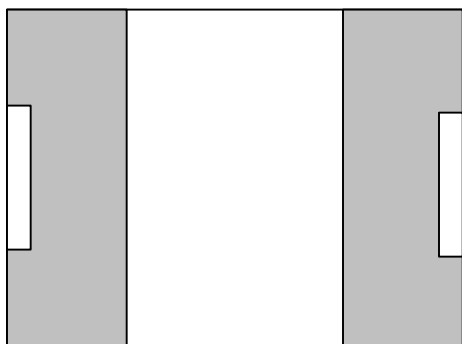


**Area:** 20 x 40 yards with two goals

**Organization:**

Place a 10 x 20 yard area in the center of the field. Players cannot pass out of this area, they must dribble.

**Rules:** Finish in the goal to score.



**Area:** 20 x 40 yards with two goals

**Organization:**

Place a 10 x 20 yard area at each end of the field. Players cannot pass when inside this area. They must beat players and shoot.

**Rules:** Finish in the goal to score.

## Multiple Goal Games

Same as passing & receiving game BUT

Area: 20 x 40 yards.

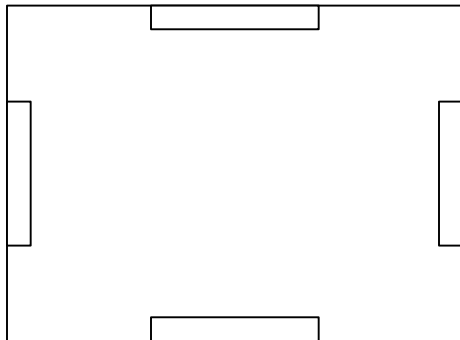
Rules: A player scores by dribbling through a gate.

## **Finishing Techniques**

General restrictions to encourage finishing on goal include:

- Area dimensions: small areas with regular goals. The closer players are to goal the more shots they will take.
- No GK's. Playing with no goalkeepers will encourage shooting.
- Place a cone 1 yard away from each post. Players can only score in between the cone and the post. This will encourage shooting accuracy into the corners.
- Zones with no defensive pressure, e.g. no defensive pressure inside the 18-yard box.

## Multiple Goal Games



**Area:** 30 x 30 with a goal on each side line.

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams no GK's.

**Rules:** Finish in the goal to score.

**Adaptations:** Place a GK into each goal.



**Area:** 20 x 30 yards with four goals as shown.

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams, one GK per team.

GK has to defend both goals.

**Rules:** Finish in goals on one end line to score.

## Large Goal Games

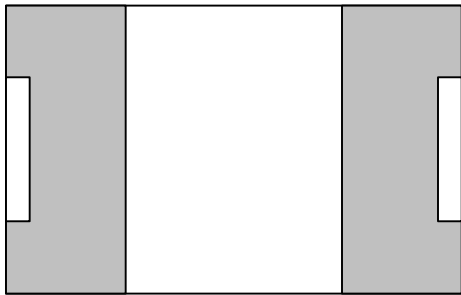


**Area:** 20 x 25 with large goals

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams with GK's.

**Rules:** Finish in the goal to score.



**Area:** 20 x 40 with large goals and 10-yard end zones

**Organization:**

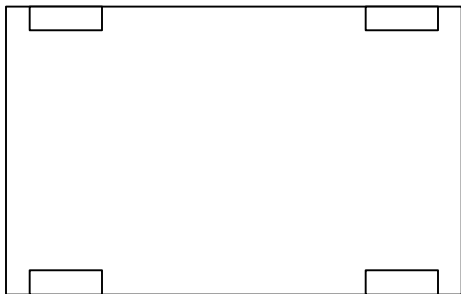
Place players into two even teams with GK's.

**Rules:** Finish in the goal to score. Defending players cannot enter their defensive end zone.

## Possession Tactics

There are a number of restrictions you can add to SSG to get a desired aspect of possessions. These are:

- Switching Play: General rule is to make the field wide and short. EG:



**Area:** 40 x 25 with four goals as shown.

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams.

**Rules:** Score by passing into a small goal.

**Adaptation:** Place a line down the middle of the area. Teams must pass the ball across the line before they can score.

- Possession with penetration:



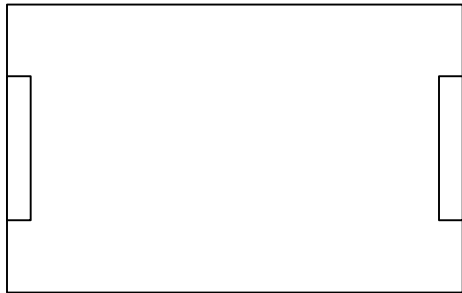
**Area:** 25 x 40 with two 5 yard n-zones

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams.

**Rules:** Score by passing the ball to a teammate inside the n-zone. Player must time their run onto the passed by, cannot just stand in the area and receive the pass.

- Speed of Play: General rule is to reduce the size of the area the players are playing in and / or reduce the amount of touches players have on the ball (1 or 2 touches).
- Passing Combinations: In order to encourage passing combinations, such as a give and go, have the combination be the way of scoring.



**Area:** 20 x 30 with small goals

**Organization:**

Place players into two even teams, no GK's.

**Rules:** Players can score by passing into the goal (1 point) or completing a give & go (5 points).

- General Possession: To encourage general possession, and to give the team in possession success, do the following:
  - Give the team you want to possess numbers up on the defending team. How? A coach can provide numbers up by adding attacking neutral players or reducing the number of player from the opposition that can defend.
  - Change the way players score goals. By giving teams a number of passes that they must complete to score will encourage them to possess the ball. For example: a team must have 5 consecutive passes to get a goal OR a team must get 25 passes to score.

## Defending Tactics

To encourage defending in a small sided game you could make the following restrictions:

- Reduce the size of the playing area. By reducing the space you will encourage players to be in closer proximity which will require one team to defend.
- Place a man to man marking rule on the players. By giving every player a man to man marking assignment you will guarantee that players will be put into defending situations.

Even though conditioned SSG provide great benefit to coaches who wish to work on specific soccer topics, are they the real game of soccer? Technically, NO! They have restrictions and rules which a real soccer game does not have. Do they have benefit? Definitely, they teach different aspects of soccer in a competitive game environment.

Some of you may be thinking, why did he ask this question? I asked this because I would like to discuss the idea of street soccer. Street soccer is a game that is created and managed by the players,

without any restriction or supervision. The best / most creative soccer players in the world were not necessarily created and developed by coaches, clubs or structure but instead were nurtured by the streets. "Their vision of the game was the consequence of the experimentally free environment of the streets" US Youth Soccer.

My challenge to you is to create this environment for your players! American sports in general are coach orientated. In American Football, Baseball and Basketball the coach can have a great influence on the game BUT not in soccer. A coach's job in soccer is primarily done in practice, this is because the actual game of soccer is ever changing and fluid, and there are no real opportunities for a coach to influence the game. As a soccer coach we must create an environment where players are making their own decisions, this will then transfer to our competitive games.

How do we create a street soccer environment? US Youth Soccer gives the following characteristics for free play:

- **No Coaching:** This of course defeats the purpose of 'street' soccer. Adults should be present in supervisory roles to protect the safety of the players. They should not interfere with the play.
- **No parents:** We love you, but go shopping!
- **No referee:** Let players determine what a foul and how to settle borderline disputes.
- **Players are responsible to organize the game:** Who plays where? How should we defend, who marks who? Players need to make, perhaps for the first time, elementary decisions about how to play.
- **Players keep and report their own score.**

Good luck in your sessions. If you have questions about this article or any other soccer coaching topics please feel free to contact me Paul Thomas @ paulthomas\_08@yahoo.com.