



Small-Sided Games HANDBOOK



FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION  
AUSTRALIA



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**Football Development, sits at the heart of Football Federation Australia's (FFA) strategic direction and is truly the cornerstone of Australian Football's future success.**

The objectives of the Talent Development & Identification Review and National Football Development Plan can only be achieved through a fundamental transformation of Australian football.

A key initiative of the TDIR was the staged implementation of small-sided games (SSG). SSG are a modified version of association/club football, structured to suitably address the needs of

young players. Commencing in 2008, a nationally consistent format of SSG will be introduced as the standard football format for children between six and twelve years old throughout Australia.

In promoting SSG, it is important to emphasise that their purpose is skill development through fun. They benefit children by making their early contact with the game more enjoyable while simultaneously providing an environment that will facilitate greater skill development.

FFA are committed to working together with Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs to commence the roll-out of SSG and recognise and appreciate the hard work of many staff and volunteers within grass roots football in this country that will significantly contribute to this.



Ben Buckley  
Chief Executive Officer  
Football Federation Australia



### Rob Baan, National Technical Director

#### The evolution from street soccer to small-sided games (SSG)

Street football has always been the basic developer of all of the top talented players. Replicating this by playing SSG is the only solution to producing creative players. As a Dutchman, I like to mention Robin van Persie (Arsenal) as one of the most recent examples of Dutch street footballers, and Johan Cruyff as the greatest icon of all time.

Why small-sided games (SSG)? You do not throw your child into the big ocean to teach them how to swim. You also do not teach young children between six and twelve years of age how to play football in a 11-a-side game, where they, like the swimmer in the ocean, may "drown" without touching a ball.

All of the most talented players have learnt how to play either in the street, in the park or on the beach – the Brazilians on the beach (Ronaldo), the Argentineans on the streets (Maradona) and the African players, many of whom are forced to play on rough lands in their early playing years (Drogba).

When I was a young man we used to put our clothes on the street to form two goal posts and used a ball formed by elastic bands and played small-sided games before and after school hours. The only time we stopped playing was when the policeman came – we had to hide or otherwise we might lose our ball!

With the present traffic problems it is very clear that there is no room for children to play in the streets. Unfortunately, finding a big park in the big cities is also becoming more and more difficult. Therefore, we need to, bring the children together, play SSG and give them a safe ground where they can experience the fun and joy of touching the ball many times and scoring many goals.

SSG is about learning, self-experiencing, having a lot of touches on the ball and above all, as David Beckham said recently: "a lot of FUN!".

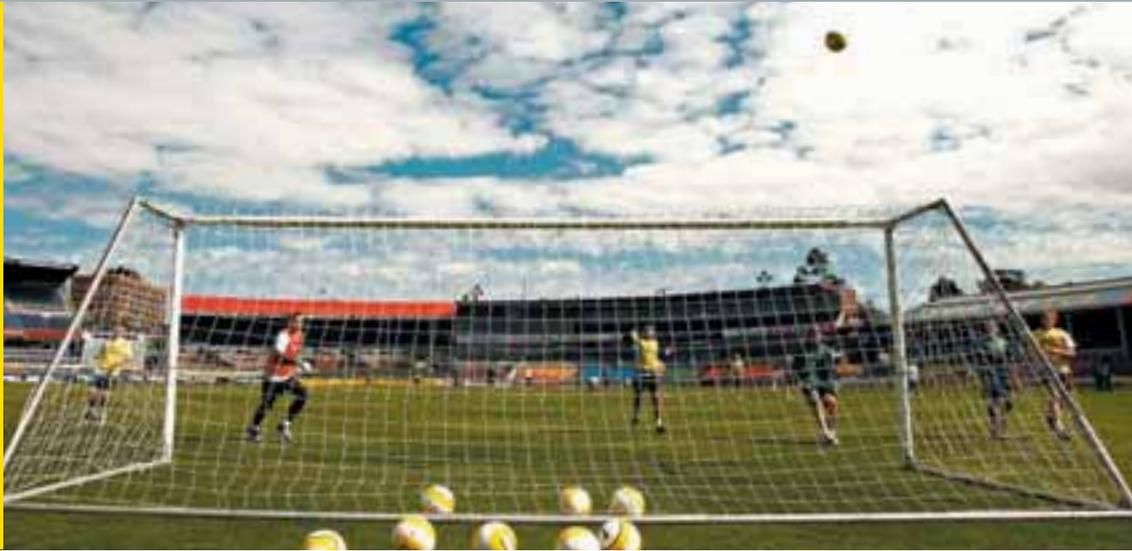
The future of your son or daughter or pupil, as a "player for fun" or as a future Socceroo or Matilda, must begin with SSG. As always,

Member Federations, associations, clubs, coaches and officials will play a key role in revolutionising the playing environment for our young players.

Quote from David Beckham: England, Manchester United, Real Madrid, LA Galaxy

**"After attending the Bobby Charlton Soccer School at aged 11 and impressing coaches with my natural ability and also becoming "Skills Champion" for this age group, my future was secured when I signed for Manchester United."**

**The David Beckham Academy was established to give young aspiring athletes the chance to develop skills, learn about teamwork, healthy lifestyle and above all understand the importance of having fun every time they step on the pitch."**



SSG are modified forms of 11-a-side football, designed to meet the needs of players under the age of 13, who have very different developmental characteristics and needs to adult players. The philosophy of SSG focuses on enjoyment and freedom of expression with limited emphasis on coaching per se, particularly in the formative years of a player's development.

Almost without exception, young players in the major footballing nations of the world are introduced to the game through SSG. Brazil, France, England, Scotland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Germany, Japan, USA and Korea all introduce their young players to the game using this approach. Considerable research has been conducted into the benefits of SSG in many of these countries. Overwhelmingly, the findings have shown that SSG are enjoyed more by children and are a more effective method of improving their technical ability as footballers (compared to 11-a-side football).

Whilst there are exceptions, in most parts of Australia Rooball has been the widely-accepted format of the game for new players up until the age of eight or nine. The rules and regulations of Rooball vary in terms of field size and goal size as does the age at which players progress to 11-a-side football. At the age of 9 or 10, the general trend is for these players to then move to 11-a-side football on a full-size field where they compete against other clubs in the local area.

There has also been an inconsistent approach in terms of the philosophy of football at this age, with the emphasis or otherwise on competition, winning, points tables, finals and the like, with variations depending upon the particular state or territory and/or association. Whether players compete and/or play against other clubs or within their own club is generally decided on a local basis.

Around three years ago, ACT's Capital Football and Football Federation Northern Territory decided to begin the process of implementing SSG within their respective regions. The staged implementation process was completed in 2007 so that all players up to Under 12 are now playing SSG in the Northern Territory and the ACT. In 2007, Ku-ring-gai District Soccer Association also began to roll out SSG for all of their Under 6 and 7 players.



One of the key recommendations to come out of the recently concluded Talent Development and Identification Review (TDIR) is the need to introduce SSG as the standard playing format for children under the age of 12 in Australia. The justification for taking such an approach is based on the following criteria:

- 11-a-side football is in essence an adult game devised by and for adults to play
- more fun and individual enjoyment due to smaller fields and simplified rules
- more playing time, which maximises individual participation and involvement
- far more repeated touches of the ball by all players on the field
- more shots on goal
- more involvement leads to greater improvement in fitness.

Whilst the recommendation for the implementation of SSG in the context of the TDIR has as an underlying motivation – the development of players with better technical

skills – there are certainly many other associated benefits that will be realised as a direct result of their inception, as follows:

- First and foremost, SSG are truly aimed at young people of all abilities, not simply the more talented players in each age group.
- With the emphasis on participation and enjoyment, and an associated removal of the current emphasis on the importance of winning, children are much more likely to enjoy their football playing experience, will be keen to play more often and are less likely to drop out of the game.
- Parents who are new to the game are likely to be more comfortable playing the role of “game leader” or “supervisor” of teams playing SSG. Given that children playing at this age do not need to be “coached”, and by extension, these adults don’t need to have a great understanding of the game to be able to carry out this role effectively, finding parents to volunteer for these roles should become significantly easier.

- SSG also make more efficient use of facilities, given there can be multiple games on one standard-size field.

Importantly, a significant amount of research has been conducted in countries where SSG are prevalent, which overwhelmingly highlights benefits such as more touches, greater participation as well as more enjoyment for the children.



### Scotland

SSG are designed to meet the needs of children aged between five and twelve years. These games are the preferred method of training by professional players and are the most appropriate way of acquiring skills and developing young players.

All research into how young people learn about sport confirms that the well-being of the child and the good of the game are best served by the use of modified games and a sensible approach to competition.

Appropriate sizes of goalposts, ball and playing field, allied to simple rules and tactics contribute to improved development within the game.

Too often, the focus within children's football has been the result of the game and winning the tournament, cup or medal. An ethos which promotes fun and learning, and measures success in terms of enjoyment as well as fostering skills development, is more likely to interest and motivate a young player and enhance his/her progress.

### USA

US Youth Soccer has thought long and hard about the answer to the question, "Why small-sided games?".

What does "small-sided games" mean? These are soccer games with fewer players competing on a smaller-sized field. These are fun games that involve the players more because fewer players are sharing one ball.

All ages can play SSG but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players.

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

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 and 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 SSG 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.

### England

The main theme throughout mini-soccer (SSG) is to meet the needs of children. Eleven-a-side football does not meet those needs. We need a modified game that fits the needs of children: too often children are modified to meet the requirements of the game. Mini-soccer modifies 11-a-side football without losing the essence of the game.

Mini-soccer is the appropriate introduction to football. All available research and observation shows that children will have more fun and learn more playing a game with smaller teams and modified rules. Mini-soccer is, therefore, a game children can actually play, rather than struggle to understand a game that was created for adults.

### Statement of FIFA (Andy Roxburgh – UEFA Technical Director)

**“...for many reasons (i.e. weather, size of population etc.) few countries in Europe can replicate the Brazilians’ natural football environment. But lessons can be learned nevertheless. Football associations that are serious about the game’s health and growth are duty-bound to promote mass participation and interest. Grassroots football (SSG) which acts as a vehicle for social integration, health and happiness is the aim and as a by-product talents will emerge.**

**In Brazil, a love of the ball, expression through SSG and the sheer joy of playing have been cultivated to such an extent that football passion and creativity have become part of the nation’s DNA”.**



Studies of young footballers playing SSG have proven the following when comparing 4 v 4, 7 v 7 and 11 v 11:

- Players touch the ball five times more in 4 v 4 and 50% more in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- Players attempted three times more 1 v 1s and two times more 1 v 1s in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- Goals were scored an average of every 1.5 minutes in 4 v 4, 3.6 minutes in 7 v 7 and 8 minutes in 11 v 11.
- Technical skills performed by a goalkeeper were between two and four times more in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- The ball is out of play 8% of the match in 4 v 4, 14% in 7 v 7 and 34% in 11 v 11.

Other demonstrated benefits of SSG over the 11 v 11 game based on observational research are as follows:

- far more repeated touches of the ball by all players
- more touches throughout all areas of the pitch
- more passes attempted and in a forward direction
- more attacking 1 v 1s, final third and penalty area entries
- repeated decision-making experience
- the ball is in play far more often
- repeated experience of basic tactical situations
- active participation is directly related to increased fitness and enjoyment
- more experience in all phases of the game. There is less hiding or dominant player “hogging” the ball. Every child has to participate in all facets of the game, attack and defend. The emphasis is on **player development**
- better success rate leads to improved quality of play, self-esteem and player retention
- the game is easier to understand
- freedom of expression – no positions in early stages
- less perceived stress on the player
- 80% of children believed that they touched the ball more often in SSG
- less perceived pressure from coaches and parents
- children enjoyed the progressive and sequential game formats.

### 6 and 7-year-olds

At this age children are “playing” all day long. They like to be “superstars” and live in a dream world where they feel they are playing for Barcelona against Real Madrid and imagine they are Ronaldinho, and after scoring copy his way of celebrating a goal.

They have a short concentration span and cannot focus on only one target. They see the world as an open space and they can watch the ball coming or forget the ball and follow the flight of a butterfly!

Children in this age group need short breaks, but can play for a long time. They know exactly when to take their rest and sit down on the field, but a few moments later start to chase the ball again.

They can be trained and coached in skill development by dribbling the ball from “Africa to America” or from “Sydney to Melbourne”. They like to try to juggle the ball, dribble the ball or pass or shoot. They are not very accurate, make mistakes, but go on with the next exercise or next step – they are not concerned about their mistakes. They want to enjoy themselves, are looking for a challenge, but losing or winning is of little importance. They are always positive.

Skill training should be the only part of the training. There should be no stretching and no training without the ball, and exercises should not be too complicated.

Dribble the ball through cones, or pass the ball through poles, touch the ball with all their toes etc.

**Main training items:** dribbling, passing and receiving, ball feeling, juggling and shooting.

### 8 and 9-year-olds

This is an age group where children like to play continuously, in fact it seems that they never get tired. They are very mobile, well coordinated and are looking for a challenge. Who is the fastest, who is the strongest, who can jump the highest, who dare to climb into this tree etc. They want to be praised and/or learn. “How can I do it better?”; “Can I try it again?”. They like to see “the whole picture”; they like to copy and behave as their hero.

They want to wear his shirt (i.e. Messi, Ronaldinho, Beckham, Kewell, Cahill etc.).

They all want to be a “striker”, very few a defender and some might like to be a goalkeeper but very soon find out they prefer to play on the field.

**Main training items:** ball feeling, juggling, dribbling and fainting, passing, receiving and controlling the ball, simple heading and shooting.

All kinds of SSGs: 1 v 1, 2 v 2, 3 v 3, 4 v 4, 5 v 5, very often played with one extra player (the coach!) or one or more “neutral” players. On most occasions, the coach will divide the team into small groups of two or a maximum of three players.

Physically, players should play a lot of “tag games” for speed development and “relay race” with hurdles, poles etc. for coordination.

### 10 and 11-year-olds

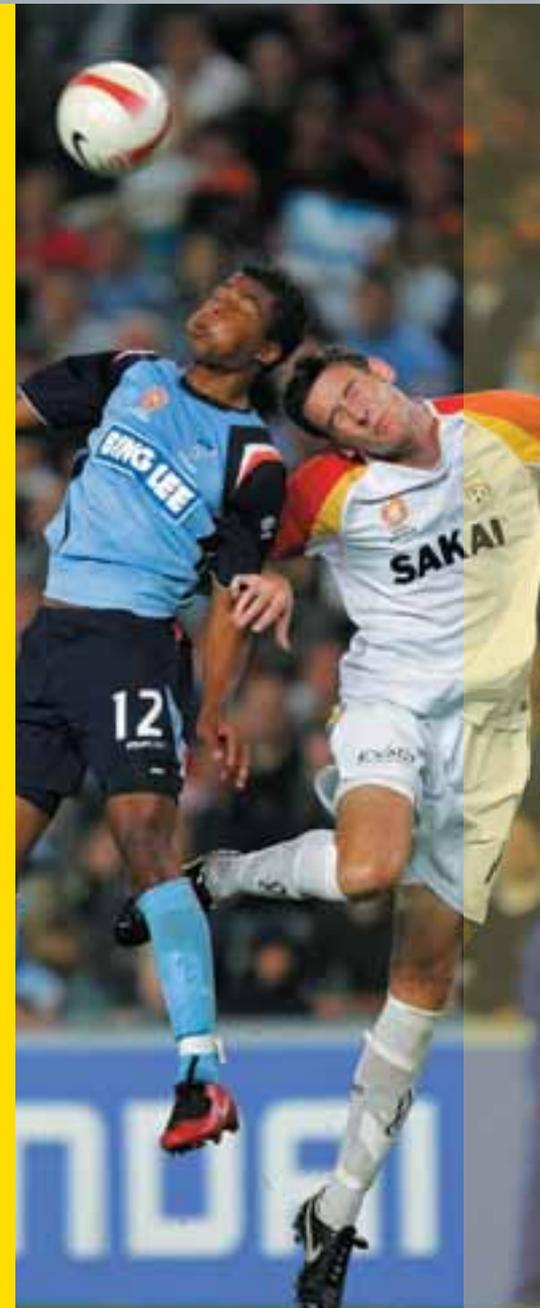
This age group is one of the best at learning all kind of skills. They want to try and try again. They are well balanced, with good coordination and want to find out their physical limits. “How fast can I be?”; “How far can I jump?”; “How high can I jump?”; or “Can I win this ‘fight’”?

Players are recognising a preferred position. They want to play as an attacker, defender or midfield player. I want to be: “right full-back” etc.

Training should be demanding and with a lot of variations and combinations, such as passing, receiving and shooting on goal and simple combinations with two or three players and finishing on goal.

The players gain an understanding of how to keep the ball in possession through position games such as 3 v 1 and 4 v 2.

All kinds of speed games with coordination skills should be used. All kinds of tag games and relay race games are used to warm up the players and to get them into the right mood.



Small-sided games are a key initiative of the National Football Development Plan and Member Federations in conjunction with FFA will commence the staged implementation of small-sided games within associations and clubs throughout Australia from 2008.

The small-sided games playing formats can be seen below;

Playing Format	Under 6	Under 7 & 8	Under 9 & 10	Under 11 & 12
Numbers	4 v 4	5 v 5	7 v 7	9 v 9
Field Size	30m x 20m	30m x 20m	40m x 30m	60m x 40m
Field Markings	Markers or painted line markings	Markers or painted line markings	Markers or painted line markings	Markers or painted line markings
Penalty Area	Nil	Nil	8m length x 16m width	8m length x 16m width
Goal Size	Min: 1.80m x 0.90m Max: 2.00m x 1.00m	Min: 1.80m x 0.90m Max: 2.00m x 1.00m	Min: 4.80m x 1.60m Max: 5.00m x 2.00m	Min: 4.80m x 1.60m Max: 5.00m x 2.00m
Goal Type	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals
Ball Size	Size 3	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
Goalkeeper	No	No	Yes	Yes
Recommended Playing Time	2 x 15 minutes	2 x 20 minutes	2 x 25 minutes	2 x 30 minutes
Half Time Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	7.5 minutes
Referee	Game Leader	Game Leader	Instructing Referee	Instructing Referee
Competition	No	No	No	Optional

Within each format the recommendations provided in regards playing numbers, field, goal and ball size, goalkeeper, competition and referee should be strictly adhered to and are crucial to upholding the philosophy of the move to Small-sided games.

Depending on the model that member federations, zones, associations and clubs choose to implement small-sided games, the recommendations of how fields are marked, goal types and playing time are flexible to best suit the implementation needs.

## The field of play

### Dimensions

The field of play should be rectangular in shape. Sizes for each age group are as follows:

Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age .....	30m x 20m
Under 9 and 10 years of age .....	40m x 30m
Under 11 and 12 years of age .....	60m x 40m

### Markings

Markers or painted line markings.

**Note:** Field markings and layouts of fields are shown later in this Handbook

### Goal size

The size of the goal should be:

Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age .....	Minimum 1.80m x 0.90m Maximum 2.00m x 1.00m
Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age .....	Minimum 4.80m x 1.60m Maximum 5.00m x 2.00m

### Penalty area

Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age .....	No penalty area
Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age .....	Rectangular – 8m length x 16m width

### Goal type

Goals, markers or flags can be used as goals.

## The ball

Under 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 years of age .....	Size 3
Under 11 and 12 years of age .....	Size 4

## The number of players

Under 6 years of age .....	4 v 4 – no goalkeeper
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Maximum of two substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

Under 7 and 8 years of age .....	5 v 5 – no goalkeeper
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Maximum of two substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

Under 9 and 10 years of age .....	7 v 7 – inc. goalkeeper
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Maximum of three substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

Under 11 and 12 years of age .....	9 v 9 – inc. goalkeeper
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Maximum of three substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

## Duration of the game

Under 6 years of age .....	2 x 15 minutes (half-time break 5 minutes)
Under 7 and 8 years of age .....	2 x 20 minutes (half-time break 5 minutes)
Under 9 and 10 years of age .....	2 x 25 minutes (half-time break 5 minutes)
Under 11 and 12 years of age .....	2 x 30 minutes (half-time break 7.5 minutes)

## Referees

Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age .....	Game leader
Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age .....	Instructing referee

Further information about the role of the referee will be provided in a subsequent section of this Handbook.

## The start of play

### Under 6 years of age

It is important that parents/teachers/coaches who start with this age group have minimal involvement in the actual game – all they need to do is tell the players which goal they need to score in! Let them have fun and assist them where necessary to enjoy the game even more.

In principle there are no rules, just a ball and eight players running and trying to get the ball into the opposition's goal!

### Under 7 – 12 years of age

Kick-off is determined by a choice between the “captains” as to which hand the “match leader” has his or her whistle in, or coin, or grass with soil or any other alternative.

A game is started with a kick forward to a team-mate from the middle of the halfway line. The opposition must be 4.5m away from the ball at this time. **Note:** If the player kicks the ball into the goal without a team-mate touching the ball, it is no goal; when it deflects off a defender into the goal, it is a goal.



For the Under 7 and 8 years of age group only, when a goal is scored, there is no kick-off but a restart from the back line. For the Under 9 age groups and above, the restart takes place at the halfway line with the side conceding taking the kick.

### Ball in and out of play

The ball is out of play when it has wholly crossed the goal line or the back line, or when play has been stopped by the referee.

#### Ball crossing the side line

**Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age**

No throw-in but a kick from behind the sideline. To encourage quick restarts and decision-making under pressure, the team in possession has three seconds to recommence the play from a restart. This can be done by the match leader having a countdown of "Ready-set-go!". When the match leader shouts out: "Go!", the ball is deemed to be in play and the defending team can encroach within the 4.5m zone and attempt to win the ball.

**Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age**

Throw in: Player faces the field of play, part of each foot either on or behind the touch line, uses both hands and delivers the ball from behind and over his or her head. The thrower may not touch the ball again until it has touched another player. If he/she does, then a free kick is rewarded against him/her.

#### Ball crossing the back line after touching the defending team last

**Under 6–12 years of age**

Corner kick.

#### Ball crossing the back line after touching the attacking team last

**Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age**

Goal kick off the ground from the back line.

**Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age**

Goal kick from anywhere inside the penalty box.

### Method of scoring

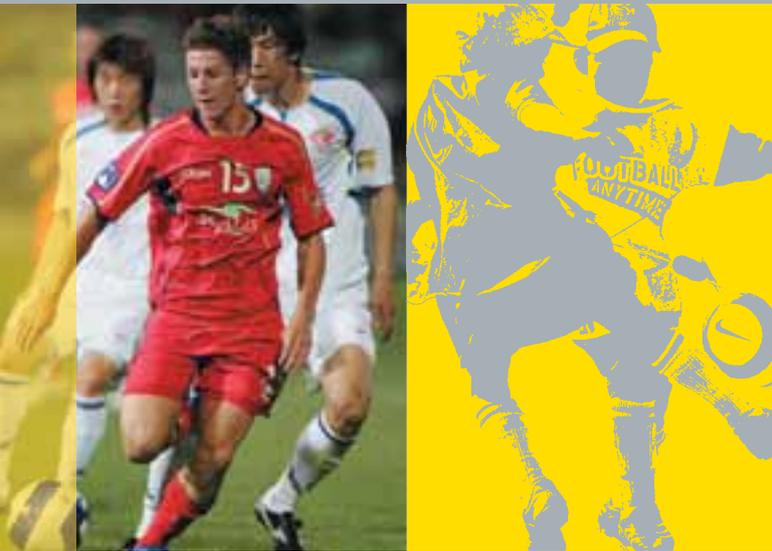
A goal is scored when the whole ball crosses the line. When original goals or goal posts (poles) are not available and cones are used for goals then a goal is scored when the ball passes between the cones without knocking them over.

### Offside

There is no offside for the Under 6–12-year-old age groups.

### Fouls and misconduct

There are only indirect free kicks with the exception of a penalty kick (refer below). All indirect free kicks within the penalty area shall be taken outside the 8m penalty box line.



Fouls and misconduct are:

- kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- jumps at an opponent
- charges an opponent
- strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- pushes an opponent
- tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball
- making contact with the opponent before touching the ball
- holds an opponent
- spits at an opponent
- handles the ball deliberately
- plays in a dangerous manner
- impedes the progress of a player.

In Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age groups, no player is allowed to deliberately handle the ball with his or her hand and or arm anywhere on the field.

In Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age group, no player is allowed to deliberately handle the ball with his or her hand and or arm anywhere on the field. Only the goalkeeper inside their penalty area is allowed to handle the ball.

A penalty kick is given because of deliberate “hand ball” in the penalty area or when the opponent commits a deliberate serious foul such as: kicking an opponent, striking an opponent, tackling an opponent in a dangerous manner etc.

In Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age, the penalty kick is taken from an 8m spot with an empty goal – all other players must stand behind the halfway line.

In Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age, the penalty kick is taken from behind the 8m line with a goalkeeper in position – all other players must stand behind the halfway line.

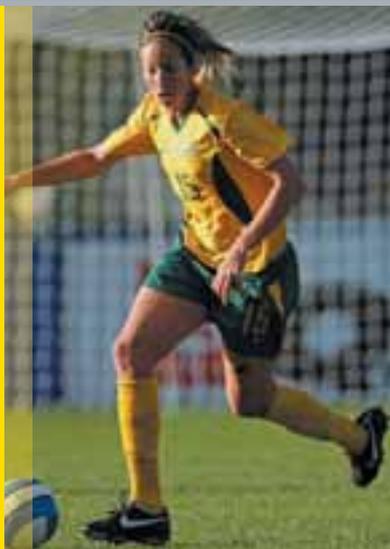
When a penalty kick is taken, the next penalty kick has to be taken by another player until all players have been used.

### Some practical recommendations

- All players must get an equal amount of playing time.
- Three-goal margin rule: When the difference in score between the two teams reaches three or more goals at any point during the match the losing team is allowed to restart from the middle line when a goal is scored against them instead of from their own back line – Under 8 years of age and below.
- When an individual player is completely dominating the game and has already scored three goals and their team is winning by a three-goal margin, he/she can only score another goal when one of their team-mates has scored a goal.

This is to encourage good players to include other members of their team and to force them to create opportunities for others. If the particular player scores a fourth goal before any of his team-mates has scored and the goal margin is three or more goals, the goal does not count and play is restarted with a goal kick/dribble.

- The game leader must use common sense to ensure that the game flows as much as possible. He or she must assist the players in getting the game moving quickly. He or she should try to encourage as many players as possible to get involved. The idea is that the game leader is not punishing players but “instructing” them and helping them to enjoy the game all of the time. Most fouls and hand balls at this level are committed through lack of coordination. There is rarely any intent. Try to give advantage to the attacking team when you can. Be fair to both sides.
- Once a player has been allocated to a team of five players on game day, he/she cannot be transferred across to the other field to help out a losing team, unless a player on the other field is unable to continue due to an injury and not transferring the player would result in a team being one player short.



### Warm-up

The following are recommended:

- Before the match starts the “coach-parent” will have to do a short warm-up. This can be done by starting with a small-sided game or position game between the members of the team (3 v 3, 4 v 3, 5 v 2.)

Or,

- Put the players in a circle of 10m and let them dribble the ball to a team-mate and take his/her position. Later pass the ball and take his/her position, or the coach stands in the middle and passes the ball to a player and receives it back and the player runs around the circle until he/she is back in his/her own position etc.

**Note:** Directly after each match each player is allowed to take a “penalty” from the 8m spot. First, all players of the A-team and second, all players of the B-team take their penalty kicks (free shot from 8m spot – no goalkeeper).

### Note for the coaches/team leaders/parents

It is advised by FFA to use the breaks to make some internal changes to the team when one team is far too strong and leading with more than three or four goals.

It is a good measure to create more equal teams and play 2 x 20 minutes but start the second half again with a blank score, so there might be two winners that day. The same option is open to start a “new match” every 10 minutes (even more fun for the children).

### Role of the referee

#### Under 6, 7 and 8 years of age groups

We advise that a club member or parent assist the players during the game. His or her main role is to keep the game moving fluently and with minimal breaks. He or she is more of a game leader than a referee.

Their main role as game leader is to explain to the children that when the ball goes behind the back line or when a goal is scored the game is restarted from the back line. Keep the opponents 4.5m away from all restarts.

**Note:** Football is a contact sport and each action is dealt with at the time it occurs. Explain the foul in simple terms, restart and let the game continue!

#### Under 9, 10, 11 and 12 years of age group

The referee should act as an “instructing referee”. The club can appoint a club member to act as the referee, a beginning referee or may get an official referee from the association. This person’s “official” role is to control the game to ensure it is played fluently and instruct the players on how to behave, what a foul is, what a free kick is and how to throw in etc. He or she can correct the players without blowing their whistle and stopping the game. If it occurs a second time, the referee should stop the game and let them do it again. Keep the opponents 4.5m away from all restarts.

**Note:** Football is a contact sport and each action is dealt with at the time it occurs. Explain the foul in simple terms, restart and let the game continue!



### Competition

To ensure that SSG are played in the correct spirit and give all players the best possible chance to develop, FFA advises that Member Federations, associations and clubs adopt and promote the following guidelines:

**Under 6, 7, 8, 9,10** ..... No competition or official recording of tables, results, finals and statistics. Games focus on player development.

**Under 11 and 12**..... Competition is optional. Recording of tables, results, finals or statistics can be done. Games focus on player development.

### Role of Coach / Parent Helper

The major role of the coach / parent helper is to make the football experience of every player and their families in their team as enjoyable as possible. This person will provide the best environment for children to learn and enjoy the game through organising fun game based practices. Having good personal and organisational skills are most important for coaches and parent helpers working with children in this age group to allow them to learn through playing the game with minimal instruction and a focus on player development.

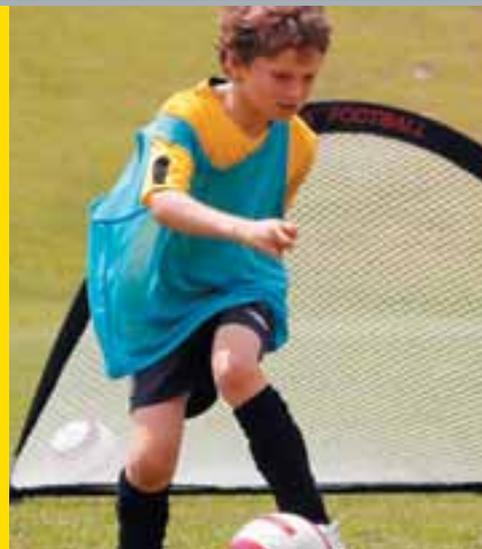
Clubs should service their coaches, parent helpers, game leaders and volunteers through the Grassroots Football Certificate. This course is of three hours duration and is aimed at beginner coaches and teachers

of players up to 10 years of age. It is designed to give them a basic understanding of their role and to provide them with practical ideas for training sessions. Clubs can contact their association or state federation to organise the FFA Grassroots Football Certificate Course.

For more information go the coaching section of;  
[www.footballaustralia.com.au](http://www.footballaustralia.com.au)

The FFA official introductory program Telstra Football Anytime is available for clubs to host and conduct. The program consists of six sessions with each session lasting 75 minutes. The program can be conducted for boys and girls 5 – 8 years or girls only 5 – 12 years as either six weekly sessions or as a condensed school holiday program. The TFA program will be an ideal small-sided games training program focusing on age appropriate activities servicing and developing both children and volunteers and parent helpers who deliver the program under the instruction of a qualified head coach. For more information on how your club can host a TFA program email,

[communityfootball@footballaustralia.com.au](mailto:communityfootball@footballaustralia.com.au)



From 2008, FFA will be working closely with Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs on the phased implementation of SSG throughout the country. SSG will replace Rooball as the playing format for six to nine-year-olds and by the time it is completely rolled out it will be the format played by all players up to the Under 12 age group.

Whilst the success of this implementation is based on the adoption and use of the standard game formats and rules described in earlier sections, there is some flexibility with respect to the delivery or operational model which associations and their clubs choose to adopt.

In essence there are two alternatives when considering the most appropriate method of organising SSG. The first is the intra-club option where teams are arranged from within a club's membership. These teams then play against each other on a weekly basis. The other option is the inter-club model where teams from within clubs play against other teams from other

clubs on a weekly basis. The two should not necessarily be seen as mutually exclusive given that they could both be used simultaneously for different age groups within a club or association.

**The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of these two options together with an outline of the most effective “game day” approach to organising SSG, including field layouts, operational issues and codes of behaviour.**

#### Intra-club model

Capital Football, the governing body for football in the ACT, began introducing SSG back in 2004. In 2007, the roll-out of SSG in the ACT culminated in the Under 12 age group playing SSG for the first time.

In implementing SSG, Capital Football effectively chose to use both of the models described

previously. For Under 9 years and below, the majority of clubs use the intra-club model where teams from within the club play against each other. Where clubs are unable to do this due to insufficient numbers, they combine with another smaller club and play against each other. From the Under 10 age group upwards, Capital Football fixtures matches for all clubs against other clubs on a home and away basis.

With regard to the intra-club model, the individual clubs are responsible for putting players into teams and organising games between those teams each week. This can either be done at the beginning of the season so that a player remains with the same team for the whole year and know in advance which team they are playing against each week, or alternatively, some clubs choose to allow the children to “turn-up” each week, be put into a team and then arrange who plays against who. This flexibility easily allows players to be moved between teams if required.

In view of the fact that no points tables are kept at these ages, the intra-club model is simply a case of grouping players into teams, assigning a parent/volunteer to be game leader and organising a draw which is either done over a season or is developed each week.

#### Characteristics of the intra-club model are:

- Parents only need to travel to the same location each week (which is very likely going to be in close proximity to where they live); they do not have a “home and away” situation.
- There is less emphasis on competition given the games are not against other clubs.
- There is flexibility in terms of being able to move players or parent helpers between teams if required.
- The club can provide a greater level of support to game leaders as they are all at the club’s home ground rather than travelling to other clubs. In this way, these people can be “mentored” by other more knowledgeable and experienced coaches from within the club.
- There is likely to be a greater number of people at the ground each week to help out in various roles as well as generating more sales at the canteen.
- Responsibility for organising draws and field allocations rests with the club as opposed to the association.

#### Inter-club model

As previously mentioned, Capital Football has adopted an inter-club model of SSG for their older age groups whereby they fixture games throughout the season and clubs play against other clubs on a home and away basis. Football Federation Northern Territory (FFNT), as well as the Ku-ring-gai District Soccer Association (KDSA) in Sydney, have also adopted the inter-club model, however, their model begins at the Under 6 age group and extends to the Under 12 age group.

In contrast to the Capital Football home and away model, both FFNT and KDSA use a “hub model” where clubs travel to a centralised location each week and play against other clubs. For KDSA, they have eight dedicated SSG venues where only Under 6 and 7 age groups play. The club whose ground is used has overall responsibility for the operational aspect of the day. However this is generally shared between clubs.

The fact that these venues are not used for any other football means that they can be permanently marked for SSG and the particular age group that plays at that ground.

There are a number of differences between the inter-club model in which clubs are required to travel and the hub model where the venue is the same each week. Generally speaking, the advantages of the inter-club (hub) model are similar to those of the intra-club model.

#### Characteristics of the inter-club model are:

- Games are played against other clubs as opposed to other teams within the same club (some parents believe this is particularly important and as players get older they also share this view).
- There is likely to be less work for the club in terms of organising draws; this would instead be carried out by the association.
- All clubs can derive benefits from their canteen given that SSG will be played there every second week.

#### Characteristics of the inter-club (hub) model are:

- Parents only need to travel to the same location each week (in contrast to the intra-club model, in which the venue may not be quite as close to their residence).
- There is flexibility in terms of being able to move players or parent helpers between teams if required.

- SSG ensure a more efficient use of fields in general, however, having dedicated venues for SSG means that open spaces that may not be suitable for full-size fields can still be used for football.

#### Which is the best model?

There is no best model, however there is almost certainly a model that best suits the particular needs and circumstances of an association and their clubs. The idea of using a combination of models depending upon age groups is likely to be the best approach.

For clubs that have enough players, the intra-club model has many advantages for the younger age groups though this becomes more difficult in smaller clubs. This model would also be ideal for regional and remote clubs where the option of playing against other clubs can involve considerable travel.

The inter-club (hub) model has very similar advantages to the intra-club model because it also maximises open space which may only be suitable for SSG. It also consolidates activities into dedicated venues which has some benefits and some possible drawbacks.

When players get older the inter-club model is probably the best approach so that players are playing against other clubs. This also places the responsibility for draws and ground allocation back on associations.

What is critical is that an association takes a standard approach to the delivery of SSG within their member clubs. It becomes very confusing if, for example, clubs use different models.

Whilst associations are able to choose the model/s that best suits them, FFA recommends the intra-club or inter-club (hub) model for Under 6 to Under 10 age groups and the inter-club model for Under 11 and Under 12 age groups.



### Game day requirements

Regardless of the type of model that is chosen, the requirements of a club and/or association on game day are going to be very similar. It is important to emphasise that the organisational requirements of SSG are not vastly different from what clubs need to undertake at present (through Rooball and other junior football), though there are obviously going to be more players, more games and more fields. FFA would certainly encourage clubs and associations to approach SSG with the view to minimising both the number of extra volunteers required and the expectations placed upon them.

This section discusses some of the factors that need to be considered in relation to SSG, such as field layouts, ground management, equipment and participant codes of behaviour. Through your Member Federation, FFA is able to provide ongoing advice and support from individuals and clubs that have already successfully implemented SSG. If required, they can offer practical suggestions based on their “real-life” experience.

### Accommodating multiple fields

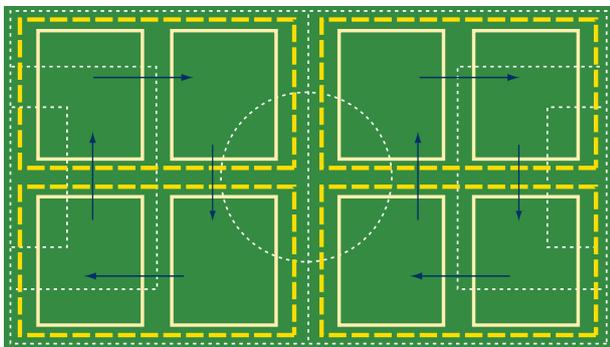
Recommendations for the layout of the small-sided fields appear below. Obviously they may differ according to the available space, however this information should be useful when dealing with “standard-sized” fields.

Remember, SSG can be played on any suitable open grass area and does not necessarily have to take place on a dedicated football pitch.

**Field layouts**

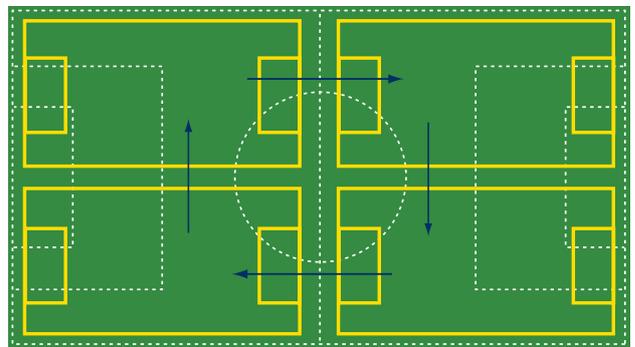
**Under 6**

Six to eight SSG pitches per full-size pitch if required. SSG pitches to the correct dimensions can also be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



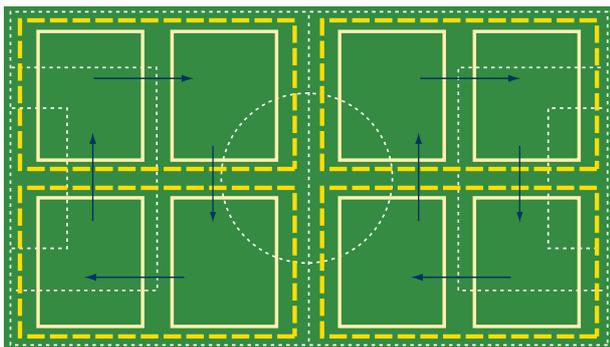
**Under 9 and 10**

Two to four SSG pitches per full-size pitch if required. SSG pitches to the correct dimensions can also be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



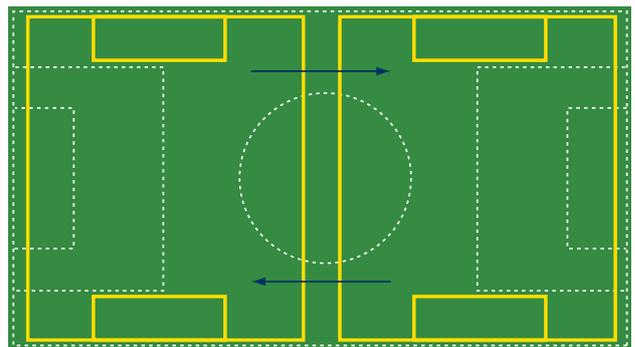
**Under 7 and 8**

Six to eight SSG pitches per full-size pitch if required. SSG pitches to the correct dimensions can also be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



**Under 11 and 12**

Two SSG pitches per full-size pitch if required. SSG pitches to the correct dimensions can also be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



## Equipment requirements

### Players

Players will need to wear all of the same clothing/equipment that they would currently do at this age – shorts, shirt, socks, boots and shin pads. In the event that a club chooses the intra-club model, coloured bibs would need to be supplied to differentiate teams.

### Club

The best case scenario would be for clubs to be able to provide pop-up or portable goals for their games as well as fields that are permanently marked. However this should absolutely not prevent them from being able to offer SSG. In fact, a number of the clubs in Australia that already play SSG use markers for both their goals and to mark out the lines on the field.

#### For each field you will need:

- a pair of goals or four poles/markers
- a marked field with lines or sufficient markers to be able to do this
- a whistle for the game leader or instructing referee
- adequate balls – at least two to three
- drinks for players (should be provided by parents).

#### For each venue you will need:

- a large whiteboard or equivalent showing a “field map” as well as a daily draw
- a horn or equivalent to signal the start of play, half-time and full-time in each game
- a central position with table to assist in the administration of the day
- a first aid kit/s



- adequate parking given that there is likely to be an increased volume of both players, parents and spectators. One solution is to schedule sufficient gaps between age groups/time slots so that one group of people can leave and the next can arrive. In the inter-club (hub) model, part of the criteria for selecting grounds may be the amount of available parking.

### Ground management

Regardless of the model that is chosen, each venue needs to have at least one ground controller or manager who has overall responsibility for what occurs on game day. This includes monitoring the timing of games, ensuring teams are aware of who and where they are playing, recording results (if appropriate), coordinating the setting up of fields and dealing with any issues that may come up from time to time.

One of the most crucial tasks is to ensure that the fields are set up (and removed) in a timely manner. This should be delegated to a small group of people and is probably best allocated to representatives of the particular age group that is playing and can be shared between teams throughout the season. In an inter-club (hub) model, it needs to be allocated both to an age group and to a club given that there will be multiple clubs sharing a venue.

Team managers/supervisors/game leaders also need to understand their role on the day ranging from determining where they are playing to what is acceptable behaviour. Team managers should be briefed by the ground controller before matches begin each week.

Note that the team manager can act as game leader (referee) though this role is perhaps best undertaken by a beginner referee or young player from within the club who has no connection with either of the teams.

The behaviour of players, their parents, spectators, officials and administrators is absolutely critical in ensuring that our young players enjoy an appropriate environment in their formative years of playing football. Bearing in mind that the whole philosophy of SSG is based on replicating street football, where children play without adults and referees, the major focus should be on letting the children play with minimal instruction and plenty of encouragement.

Below are a series of codes of behaviour that all people involved in junior football, and in particular SSG, must be aware of and abide by. Some clubs who already conduct SSG require team managers to exchange a Code of Behaviour before every game with each person giving an undertaking, on behalf of their players, parents and spectators, to behave in an appropriate manner. If this does not eventuate, the other team manager is entitled to refer the other person back to the Code, and if inappropriate behaviour persists club representatives (probably the ground controller) would need to become involved.

### Players Code of Behaviour

- Play by the rules.
- Never argue with an official. If you disagree, have your captain, coach or manager approach the official during a break or after the competition.
- Control your temper. Verbal abuse of officials, sledging other players or deliberately distracting or provoking an opponent are not acceptable or permitted behaviours in any sport.
- Work equally hard for yourself and/or your team. Your team's performance will benefit and so will you.
- Be a good sport. Applaud all good plays whether they are made by your team or the opposition.

- Treat all participants in your sport as you like to be treated. Do not bully or take unfair advantage of another competitor.
- Cooperate with your coach, team-mates and opponents. Without them, there would be no competition.
- Participate for your own enjoyment and benefit, not just to please your parents and coaches.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### Coaches Code of Behaviour

- Remember that young people participate for pleasure, and winning is only part of the fun.
- Never ridicule or yell at a young player for making a mistake or not coming first.
- Be reasonable in your demands on players' time, energy and enthusiasm.
- Operate within the rules and spirit of your sport and teach your players to do the same.
- Ensure that the time players spend with you is a positive experience. All young people are deserving of equal attention and opportunities.
- Avoid overplaying the talented players; the "just average" need and deserve equal time.
- Ensure that equipment and facilities meet safety standards and are appropriate to the age and ability of all players.
- Display control, respect and professionalism to all involved with the sport. This includes opponents, coaches, officials, administrators, the media, parents and spectators. Encourage players to do the same.
- Show concern and caution towards sick and injured players. Follow the advice of a physician when determining whether an injured player is ready to recommence training or competition.
- Obtain appropriate qualifications and keep up to date with the latest coaching practices and the principles of growth and development of young people.

- Any physical contact with a young person should be appropriate to the situation and necessary for the player's skill development.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### Parents Code of Behaviour

- Remember that children participate in sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- Encourage children to participate, do not force them.
- Focus on your child's efforts and performance rather than whether they win or lose.
- Encourage children to play according to the rules and to settle disagreements without resorting to hostility or violence.
- Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing a competition.
- Remember that children learn best by example. Appreciate good performance and skilful plays by all participants.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.
- Respect officials' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- Show appreciation for volunteer coaches, officials and administrators. Without them, your child could not participate.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### Officials Code of Behaviour

- Modify rules and regulations to match the skill levels and needs of young people.
- Compliment and encourage all participants.
- Be consistent, objective and courteous when making decisions.
- Condemn unsporting behaviour and promote respect for all opponents.



- Emphasise the spirit of the game rather than the errors.
- Encourage and promote rule changes that will make participation more enjoyable.
- Be a good sport yourself. Actions speak louder than words.
- Keep up to date with the latest trends in officiating and the principles of growth and development of young people.
- Remember, you set an example. Your behaviour and comments should be positive and supportive.
- Place the safety and welfare of the participants above all else.
- Give all young people a “fair go” regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

#### Administrators Code of Behaviour

- Involve young people in planning, leadership, evaluation and decision-making related to the activity.
- Give all young people equal opportunities to participate.
- Create pathways for young people to participate in sport, not just as a player but as a coach, referee, administrator etc.
- Ensure that rules, equipment, length of games and training schedules are modified to suit the age, ability and maturity level of young players.
- Provide quality supervision and instruction for junior players.
- Remember that young people participate for their enjoyment and benefit. Do not overemphasise awards.
- Help coaches and officials highlight appropriate behaviour and skill development, and help improve the standards of coaching and officiating.
- Ensure that everyone involved in junior sport emphasises fair play, rather than winning at all costs.

- Give a Code of Behaviour sheet to spectators, officials, parents, coaches, players and the media, and encourage them to follow it.
- Remember, you set an example. Your behaviour and comments should be positive and supportive.
- Make it clear that abusing young people in any way is unacceptable and will result in disciplinary action.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

#### Spectators Code of Behaviour

- Remember that young people participate in sport for their enjoyment and benefit, not yours.
- Applaud good performances and efforts from all individuals and teams. Congratulate all participants on their performance, regardless of the game's outcome.
- Respect the decisions of officials and teach young people to do the same.
- Never ridicule or scold a young player for making a mistake. Positive comments are motivational.
- Condemn the use of violence in any form, whether it is by spectators, coaches, officials or players.
- Show respect for your team's opponents. Without them, there would be no game.
- Encourage players to follow the rules and the officials' decisions.
- Do not use foul language, sledge or harass players, coaches or officials.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### What are small-sided games?

They are football games with fewer players competing on a smaller-sized field. They are fun games that encourage players to have more contact with the ball because fewer players are playing in a smaller playing area. SSG have a definite developmental impact on younger football players.

### Why change to small-sided games?

It makes the game of football a better experience for children. More touches on the ball, more opportunities to make decisions, more actual play. Players will be more active due to playing both attacking and defensive roles and will become all-rounded and understand the importance of team-mates and playing and working together.

### Do other countries play small-sided games?

SSG are played and endorsed throughout England, Ireland, The Netherlands, Scotland, Germany, France, Korea and USA, to name a few. The idea of SSG is not new.

### What is the best way to implement small-sided games?

There is no best model, however, there is almost certainly a model that best suits the particular needs and circumstances of an association and their clubs. The idea of using a combination of models depending upon age groups is likely to be the best approach. These will include intra-club, that is association or Member Federation-controlled, or inter-club using hubs or regular age group draws that are association or Member Federation-controlled.

### How will they learn to play 11 v 11?

Progressing from 4 v 4, 5 v 5, 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 BEFORE 11 v 11 is a sound educational method and process. The progression helps players discover the differences in the size of the field and size of the goal, and the benefits of having more space, learn to use different and better developed techniques to play a more tactical game, and learn the role of different positions and determine what best suits them.

### Why no goalkeepers until Under 9s?

The role of the goalkeeper in football is uniquely specialised and typically players develop as keepers at a later age. In the youngest age groups, keepers can be uninvolved in the game for long periods which can be uninteresting and means they are not part of the team for long periods of the game. Most goalkeepers have played for many years as field players before deciding to become goalkeepers.

### Where can I get more information on SSG?

You can contact your Club officials, Association or State Federation. Your State Federation contact details are in this handbook. FFA has dedicated state based Regional Participation Managers that you can also contact through your State Federations to assist in the implementation of SSG.

### Will a club need lots of equipment for SSG?

Equipment will not be a barrier to not conduct SSG. There is no need to purchase new goals should your club not wish to or be able to. Many clubs that have already implemented SSG using markers both as goals and to set out the field and have found that it has worked really well, at minimal cost.

### Do I need to know a lot about football to be a parent helper or supervisor?

SSG relies on parent helpers as coaches, supervisors and game leaders. The main focus of SSG is enjoyment and to let the children experience the game through participation with minimal instruction. There is plenty of help to assist you with training ideas and advice on SSG from FFA, State Federations, Associations and most importantly your club.

Organisation	Telephone	Email Address	Website
Football Federation Australia 	02 8354 5555	communityfootball@footballaustralia.com.au	www.footballaustralia.com.au
Capital Football 	02 6260 4000	info@capitalfootball.com.au	www.capitalfootball.com.au
Football Federation Northern Territory 	08 8941 2444	info@footballnt.com.au	www.footballnt.com.au
Football Federation South Australia 	08 8354 1422	info@ffsa.com.au	www.ffsa.com.au
Football Federation Tasmania 	03 6273 3299	admin@footballfedtas.com.au	www.footballfedtas.com.au
Football Federation Victoria 	03 9474 1800	info@footballfedvic.com.au	www.footballfedvic.com.au
Football Queensland 	07 6420 5866	admin@footballqueensland.com.au	www.footballqueensland.com.au
Football West 	08 9422 6900	info@footballwest.com.au	www.footballwest.com.au
Northern New South Wales Football 	02 4964 8922	admin@northernnswfootball.com.au	www.northernnswfootball.com.au
Football New South Wales 	02 8814 4400	info@footballnsw.com.au	www.footballnsw.com.au



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The Football Association

Scottish FA

US Youth Soccer

Canadian SA

Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB)





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