

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 "Small Sided Games", but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players. US Youth Soccer recommendations for "number of players" at the various age groups are as follows:

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

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)

## **U6 Modified Rules**

### **US Youth Soccer Official Under 6 Playing Recommendations**

US Youth Soccer recommended modifications to the FIFA Laws of the Game. FIFA Laws of the Game can be found at [www.ussoccer.com/referees](http://www.ussoccer.com/referees).

**Please also note the U6 addendum and appendix.**

#### **Law 1 – The Field of Play:**

Dimensions: The field of play must be rectangular. The length of the touchline must be greater than the length of the goal line.

Length: minimum 20 yards maximum 30 yards

Width: minimum 15 yards maximum 25 yards

Field Markings: Distinctive lines not more than (5) inches wide. The field of play is divided into two halves by a halfway line. The center mark is indicated at the midpoint of the halfway line. A circle with a radius of four (4) yards is marked around it.

The Goal Area: None.

The Penalty Area: None.

Flag posts: None.

The Corner Arc: Conform to FIFA.

Goals: Goals must be placed on the center of each goal line. They consist of two upright posts equidistant from the corners and joined at the top by a horizontal crossbar. The recommended distance between the posts is eighteen (18) feet and the distance from the

lower edge of the crossbar to the ground is six (6) feet. Goals may be smaller in dimension.

Safety: Goals must be anchored securely to the ground. Portable goals may only be used

if they satisfy this requirement.

**Law 2 – The Ball:** Size three (3).

**Law 3 – The Number of Players:** A match is played by two teams, each consisting of not

more than three players. There are NO goalkeepers.

Substitutions: At any stoppage and unlimited.

Playing time: Each player SHALL play a minimum of 50% of the total playing time.

Teams and games may be coed.

**Law 4 – The Players Equipment:** Conform to FIFA. Non-uniform clothing is allowed based on weather conditions, but uniforms must still distinguish teams.

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**Law 5 – The Referee:** An OFFICIAL (Game Manager or Coordinator or Parent or Coach or Grade 9 referee) may be used. All infringements shall be briefly explained to the offending player.

**Law 6 – The Assistant Referees:** None.

**Law 7 – The Duration of the Match:** The match shall be divided into four (4) equal, eight (8) minute quarters. There shall be two (2) minute break between quarters one and two and another two (2) minute break between quarters three and four. There shall be a halftime

interval of five (5) minutes.

**Law 8 – The Start and Restart of Play:** Conform to FIFA, with the exception of the opponents of the team taking the kick-off are at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 9** – The Ball In and Out of Play: Conform to FIFA.

**Law 10** – The Method of Scoring: Conform to FIFA.

**Law 11** – Offside: None.

**Law 12** – Fouls and Misconduct: Conform to FIFA with the exception that all fouls shall result in a direct free kick. The referee/coach/parent must explain ALL infringements to the offending player. No cards shown for misconduct.

**Law 13** – Free Kicks: Conform to FIFA with the exceptions that all free kicks are direct and opponents are at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 14** – The Penalty Kick: None.

**Law 15** – The Kick-In: A kick-in is considered as a direct free kick with the opponents four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 16** – The Goal Kick: The goal kick should be taken within 2-3 yards of the goal line anywhere across the width of the field of play at the nearest point from where the ball was retrieved. Opposing players must be four (4) yards away from the ball until it is in play. It is suggested that if necessary that opponents are in their own half of the field until the ball is in play.

**Law 17** – The Corner Kick: Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents remain at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

## **U6 ADDENDUM**

### **MODIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GAME FOR U6**

**Law 1** The Field of Play: the dimensions are smaller to accommodate the three-versusthree game and are appropriate for the movement capabilities of four- and five-year-old children. These adjusted dimensions provide more practical space allowing players to be successful. Field Markings: the center circle gives the players a concrete marking on where to be for the kick-off. The corner arc gives the young player a concrete place to put the ball to kick it back onto the field of play. While kids this young will not execute corner kick plays taking a kick from the corner is a reasonable way for them to put the ball into play and provides continuity with all other age groups. However, the center circle and the corner arc for U6 Small Sided Games are not mandatory field markings. Cones may be used in lieu of corner flag posts if desired. Neither cones nor corner flag posts to mark the corners of the field are mandatory for this age group. Goals: the goal, 6 x 18 feet or smaller, is the same for the U6 to U8 age groups. By using the same size goal for these age groups clubs will have to buy fewer goals and there will be greater flexibility in the use of fields. A big goal without a goalkeeper should mean a few more goals for kids whose shooting technique is primitive along with their eye-foot coordination. Let's give them the broad side of the barn at which to shoot, the more goals the merrier. Finally the shooting odds for the U6 age group are one versus five, so let's give them a chance by having a larger target. However, manufactured goals are not mandatory for U6 Small Sided Games.

Clubs are free to use cones, pop-up goals or other items to designate the goal for this age group. Indeed, even the entire goal line could be considered the 'goal' and a ball kicked over the goal line is considered a goal. Any goal must be properly anchored to the ground.

**Law 2** The Ball: must be a size three. The smaller ball is lighter and more easily kicked, received, dribbled and passed.

**Law 3** The Number of Players: there are no goalkeepers in the U6 age group so that all of the players may chase the ball around the field. The kids want to be where the action is and at this age it is around the ball. This will provide the opportunity for the children to further develop their running, jumping and kicking coordination. These are valuable traits for all soccer players to develop. The smaller number of players takes into account the egocentrism of this age group and therefore allows each child more opportunities for kicking and dribbling the ball. With fewer players on the field each child has an increased number of contacts with the ball and has more actual playing time. Additionally the players will be required to make more decisions and experience repeating game situations frequently. The work rate and involvement of players will be more consistent. While learning both offense and defense, players will become well rounded and will understand more readily the roles and importance of teammates. There should not be a minimum for U8 and U6 and clubs, administrators, coaches and referees should be encouraged to allow players from the team with sufficient numbers to 'loan' a player or two to the team that is short players and then PLAY.

**Law 5** The Referee: a referee is not really needed for this age group. Instead a parent or a coach should supervise the game for safety sake. All rule infringements shall be briefly explained to the offending player. 'Do-overs' should be a regular occurrence allowed by the adult(s) supervising the U6 game. It is strongly recommended that the adult officiating the U6 game attend the Grade 9 referee course.

**Law 6** The Assistant Referees: none are needed.

**Law 7** The Duration of the Match: the game is divided into four quarters. Clubs may make the quarters shorter in duration if necessary. Quarters are played in the U6 age group to accommodate the attention span and physical limitations of the children.

**Law 10** Goal Scored: shall conform to FIFA.

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**Law 11** Offside: there shall be no offside called during these games.

**Law 12** Fouls and Misconduct: no caution or send off shall be issued to players. If a child is being too rambunctious then the game official will ask the coach to make a substitution of that player to give the child a chance to calm down before returning to play.

**Law 13** Free Kicks: all free kicks shall be direct. This should keep the game flowing and keep the attention of the kids.

**Law 14** The Penalty Kick: for this age group there will not be any penalty kicks called.

**Law 15** The Kick-In: most U6 players do not yet have the eye-hand coordination to execute a throw-in to the letter of the law. This leads to endless retakes from one team to the

other. Additionally with a kick-in the ball is on the ground and stationary so the U6 player has a better chance of striking it correctly. This may lead to some intentional passes. However, this is still unlikely given that whether it is a throw or a kick all of the kids on the field will be yelling for the ball at the same time and the child putting the ball into play will be confused.

**Law 16** The Goal Kick: the kick should be allowed to be taken from anywhere along the goal line over which the ball traveled. This is so the ball can be put back into play quickly. The ball should be placed two or three yards into the field of play to make it easier for the child taking the goal kick to get the ball well into the field of play once it is kicked. The defending players must stand at least four yards away from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 17** The Corner Kick: per FIFA. The defending players must stand at least four yards away from the ball until it is in play.

- Roster Size: Under the single field method the recommended minimum roster size is four players and the maximum roster size is six players. Under the dual field method the recommended minimum roster size is eight players and the maximum roster size is ten players. This range of roster sizes allows for a club to use either the single field or dual field set up.
- Playing Time: A minimum of at least 50% playing time is required. The goal of the U6 facilitator is to achieve 100% playing time for each child.
- Split-Field Model: See appendix for options.
- No score or standings should be kept.

#### **ADVANTAGES OF PLAYING SMALL SIDED GAMES**

- More time with the coach/facilitator
- Energetic workouts due to playing both offense and defense
- More efficient use of field space
- Matches can be played simultaneously across a full size field
- Children are physically more efficient in smaller space
- Children are actively involved for a longer period of time
- It takes less time to score a goal or advance to goal
- Greater success rate for the players

#### **US Youth Soccer Recommendations**

- Opposing coaches, players and parents should shake hands after each match.
- Parent/coaches, non-participating players and spectators should be there to enjoy and encourage the activity of the youngsters.
- Spectator and team benches should be on opposite sides of the field.
- No alcoholic beverages or tobacco products will be consumed or allowed near the playing area.
- No slide tackles to be allowed in this age group.
- Coaches of U6 teams should attend the U6/U8 Youth Module coaching course and the Grade 9 referee course.

### **U8 Modified Rules**

#### **US Youth Soccer Official Under 8 Playing Recommendations**

US Youth Soccer recommended modifications to the FIFA Laws of the Game.

FIFA Laws of the Game can be found at [www.ussoccer.com/referees](http://www.ussoccer.com/referees).

**Please note the U8 addendum and appendix.**

**Law 1 – The Field of Play**

Dimensions: The field of play must be rectangular. The length of the touchline must be greater than the length of the goal line.

Length: minimum 25 yards maximum 35 yards

Width: minimum 20 yards maximum 30 yards

Field Markings: Distinctive lines not more than (5) inches wide. The field of play is divided into two halves by a halfway line. The center mark is indicated at the midpoint of the halfway line. The center mark is indicated at the midpoint of the halfway line. A circle with a radius of four (4) yards is marked around it.

The Goal Area: A goal area is defined at each end of the field as follows: Two lines are drawn at right angles to the goal line three (3) yards from the inside of each goalpost.

These lines extend into the field of play for a distance of three (3) yards and are joined by a line drawn parallel with the goal line. The area bounded by these lines and the goal line is the goal area.

The Penalty Area: none.

Flag posts: none.

The Corner Arc: Conform to FIFA.

Goals: Goals must be placed on the center of each goal line. They consist of two upright posts equidistant from the corners and joined at the top by a horizontal crossbar. The recommended distance between the posts is eighteen (18) feet and the distance from the lower edge of the crossbar to the ground is six (6) feet. Goals may be smaller in dimension.

**Law 2 – The Ball: Size three (3).**

**Law 3 – The Number of Players:** A match is played by two teams, each consisting of not more than four players. There are NO goalkeepers.

Substitutions: At any stoppage of play and unlimited.

Playing time: Each player SHALL play a minimum of 50% of the total playing time.

Teams and matches may be coed.

**Law 4 – The Players' Equipment:** Conform to FIFA. Non-uniform clothing is allowed based on weather conditions, but uniforms must still distinguish teams.

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**Law 5 – The Referee:** An OFFICIAL (Game Manager or Coordinator or Parent or Coach or Grade 9 referee) may be used. All infringements shall be briefly explained to the offending player.

**Law 6 – The Assistant Referees:** None.

**Law 7 – The Duration of the Match:** The match shall be divided into four (4) equal, twelve (12) minute quarters. There shall be a two (2) minute break between quarters one and two and another two (2) minute break between quarters three and four. There shall be a half-time interval of five (5) minutes.

**Law 8** – The Start and Restart of Play: Conform to FIFA, with the exception of the opponents of the team taking the kick-off are at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 9** – The Ball In and Out of Play: Conform to FIFA.

**Law 10** – The Method of Scoring: Conform to FIFA.

**Law 11** – Offside: None.

**Law 12** – Fouls and Misconduct: Conform to FIFA with the exception that all fouls shall result in a direct free kick. The referee/coach/parent must explain ALL infringements to the offending player. No cards shown for misconduct.

**Law 13** – Free Kicks: Conform to FIFA with the exceptions that all kicks are direct and all opponents are at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 14** – The Penalty Kick: None.

**Law 15** – The Throw-In: Conform to FIFA with the exception that an improperly performed throw-in can be retaken once.

**Law 16** – The Goal Kick: Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents must remain outside the goal area and at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

**Law 17** – The Corner Kick: Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents remain at least four (4) yards from the ball until it is in play.

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## **U8 ADDENDUM**

### **MODIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GAME FOR U8**

**Law 1** The Field of Play: dimensions are smaller to accommodate the four-versus-four game and are appropriate for the movement capabilities of six- and seven-year-old children. These adjusted dimensions provide more practical space allowing players to be successful. Field Markings: the center circle gives the players a concrete marking on where to be for the kick-off. The corner arc gives the young player a concrete place to put the ball to kick it back onto the field of play. While kids this young will execute corner kick plays to a modest degree taking a kick from the corner is a reasonable way for them to put the ball into play and provides continuity with all other age groups. However, the center circle and the corner arc for U8 Small Sided Games are not mandatory field markings. Goals: the goal, 6 x 18 feet or smaller, is the same for the U6 to U8 age groups. By using the same size goal for these age groups clubs will have to buy fewer goals and there will be greater flexibility in the use of fields. A big goal without a goalkeeper should mean a few more goals for kids whose shooting technique is primitive along with their eye-foot coordination. Let's give them the broad side of the barn at which to shoot, the more goals the merrier. Finally

the shooting odds for the U8 age group are one versus seven, so let's give them a chance by having a larger target. However, manufactured goals are not mandatory for U8 Small Sided Games. Clubs are free to use cones, Pug goals or other items to designate the goal for this age group. Any goal must be properly anchored to the ground.

**Law 2** The Ball: must be a size three. The smaller ball is lighter and more easily kicked, received, dribbled and passed.

**Law 3** The Number of Players: there are no goalkeepers in the U8 age group so that all of the players may chase the ball around the field. The kids want to be where the action is and at this age it is around the ball. This will provide the opportunity for the children to further develop their running, jumping and kicking coordination. These are valuable traits for all soccer players to develop. The smaller number of players takes into account the egocentrism of this age group and therefore allows each child more opportunities for shooting, passing and dribbling the ball. With fewer players on the field each child has an increased number of contacts with the ball and has more actual playing time. Additionally the players will be required to make more decisions and experience repeated game situations frequently. The involvement of players will be more consistent. While learning both offense and defense, players will become well rounded and will understand more readily the roles and importance of teammates. Children in the U8 age group will intentionally play in pairs. The smaller number of players on the field will make it easier and more likely that passing and receiving will occur.

There should not be a minimum number of players for U8 and U6 and clubs, administrators, coaches and referees should be encouraged to allow players from the team with sufficient numbers to 'loan' a player or two to the team that is short players and then PLAY.

**Law 5** The Referee: a referee is not really needed for this age group. Instead a parent or a coach should officiate the game. All rule infringements shall be briefly explained to the offending player. It is strongly recommended that the adult officiating the U8 game attend the Grade 9 referee course.

**Law 6** The Assistant Referees: none are needed.

**Law 7** The Duration of the Match: the game is divided into four quarters. Clubs may make the quarters shorter in duration if necessary. Quarters are played in the U8 age group to accommodate the attention span and physical limitations of the children.

**Law 10** Goal Scored: shall conform to FIFA.

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**Law 11** Offside: there shall be no offside called during these games.

**Law 12** Fouls and Misconduct: no caution or send off shall be issued to players. If a child is being too rambunctious then the game official will ask the coach to make a substitution of that player to give the child a chance to calm down before returning to play.

**Law 13** Free Kicks: all free kicks shall be direct. This will keep the game flowing and keep the attention of the kids.

**Law 14** The Penalty Kick: there will not be any penalty kicks called.

**Law 15** The Throw-In: some U8 players do not yet have the eye-hand coordination to execute a throw-in to the letter of the law. However, some U8 players have sufficient eye-hand coordination to attempt the throw-in. One ‘do-over’ per thrower should be the normal response if the throw-in is incorrect. The adult officiating the match should explain to the child how to execute the throw-in correctly.

**Law 16** The Goal Kick: per FIFA. The defending players must stand at least four yards away from the ball until it is in play. The ball is in play once it has left the goal area.

**Law 17** The Corner Kick: per FIFA. The defending players must stand at least four yards away from the ball until it is in play.

Roster Size: Under the single field method the recommended minimum roster size is six players and the maximum roster size is eight players. Under the dual field method the recommended minimum roster size is ten players and the maximum roster size is twelve players. This range of roster sizes allows for a club to use either the single field or dual field set up.

Playing Time: A minimum of at least 50% playing time is required.

Split-Field Model: See appendix for options.

No score or standings should be kept.

#### ADVANTAGES OF PLAYING SMALL SIDED GAMES

- More time with the coach
- Energetic workouts due to playing both offense and defense
- More efficient use of field space
- Matches can be played simultaneously across a full size field
- Children are physically more efficient in smaller space
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- Greater success rate for the players

#### US Youth Soccer Recommendations

- Opposing coaches, players and parents should shake hands after each match.
- Parent/coaches, non-participating players and spectators should be there to enjoy and encourage the activity of the youngsters.
- Spectator and team benches should be on opposite sides of the field.
- No alcoholic beverages or tobacco products will be consumed or allowed near the playing area.
- No slide tackles to be allowed in this age group.
- Coaches of U8 teams should attend the U6/U8 Youth Module coaching course and the Grade 9 referee course

## Soccer Drills

- Comment:** This is a great game & teaches many basic skills. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball.
- Teaches:** Control dribbling, using bottom of foot to stop, pullbacks, using outside of right foot & left foot.
- Set-up:** Use disk cones to outline a 20-yard x 20-yard "field". (Smaller or larger, depending on age & numbers of players, but not too small or they will collide. Better for this game to be on the larger size at first).
- The Game:**
- "This is Driving School & I'm your Instructor. I'm going to teach you how to drive but you must listen carefully & do exactly what I say."
  - Each player has a ball & must stay inside the cones.
  - Coach uses a ball to demonstrate what each of the instructions means:
    - a. **"Go"** - Start dribbling ("Keep the ball near your feet & look up while you dribble so you don't run into someone").
    - b. **"Stop"** - Put foot on top of ball to stop it
    - c. **"Slow"** - Dribble slow
    - d. **"Speed Up"** - Dribble faster but keep looking up & don't "wreck".
    - e. **"Turn right"** - Use the outside of the right foot to push the ball to the right & then dribble in that direction. (This teaches them to stop & turn the ball using the outside of the foot). Be sure they know which is the right foot.
    - f. **"Turn left"** - Use the outside of the left foot to push the ball to the left & then dribble in that direction. (If U-6 get confused about which is right & left, it's okay. Don't stop the game).
    - g. **"Pull back & go the other way"** - Use the bottom of foot to pull the ball back (i.e., flick it backward) & then turn around & go the other way.
    - h. For U-10 & up, include "Steparound" when the ball is stopped or going slow. (See "Steparound"

game for how to do it).

- Tell them to be careful & not have a "wreck". As they dribble they must look up to see where they are going. If they intentionally have a wreck or have too many wrecks, they may have to go to Jail (i.e., make them go outside the cones & dribble a lap around the outside of the cone field to practice dribbling; tell them to look up while they dribble this lap & go slow & keep the ball close to their feet).

Time:

- Do this for 2 minutes & then evaluate & give any driving "tips" needed. Then continue the class for 2 or 3 more minutes & then stop, give "tips" & encouragement (tell them they are really improving & they can all become great drivers), & then another round of 2 - 5 minutes.

At The  
End:

- Tell everyone they did great & if they keep coming to class they will become a good driver.

Comments:

Whether children continue to play soccer will have a lot to do with whether it is fun at early ages. SoccerHelp Practice Games are designed to be fun, to teach important skills and concepts, and to keep players active. We don't use "knock-out" or elimination games which leave kids standing on the sideline and we don't use games such as "Crab Soccer" which are fun but have many kids crawling on the ground instead of learning to play soccer. There are thousands of drills on the Internet, but most are not well thought out, efficient, effective or fun. Most drills and games do not provide enough touches on the ball or the activity level is too low (i.e., there is too much standing around) to meet SoccerHelp standards. SoccerHelp Practice Games are selected from hundreds we have tried and less than 5% of the games we evaluate are selected for SoccerHelp Premium. We believe in positive motivation and don't believe in punishing a child who has tried their best but lost a Practice Game. Thus, we do not recommend punishing the losers or making the losers leave the game.

Teaches: Dribbling, kicking & teaches the Coach how to be funny

Comment: A simple, fun game for U-6

Set-up: 

- Each player has a ball

The Game: 

- Players stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing Coach who is about 5 steps away
- On "Go", the Coach runs slowly away while players dribble to chase him & try to hit him with the ball by shooting at him
- They get 1 point each time they hit him
- Recruit parents to help & split into 2 games or even 3, so it is less crowded
- Stay in a small area & have fun with this game <P.
- Play for about 5 minutes

Variation: 

- Before starting, tell the players that if they hit you 5 times (total) you will make the sound of their favorite animal, like a dog or a cow, etc. When you are hit 5 times, stop & let them choose a sound. Then start all over.
- Try to stop about every 60 seconds. You can adjust by changing the number of required hits to 3 or 4

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Most drills and games do not provide enough touches on the ball or the activity level is too low (i.e., there is too much standing around) to meet SoccerHelp standards. SoccerHelp Practice Games are selected from hundreds we have tried and less than 5% of the games we evaluate are selected for SoccerHelp Premium. We believe in positive motivation and don't believe in punishing a child who has tried their best but lost a Practice Game. Thus, we do not recommend punishing the losers or making the losers leave the game.