

Empirical Support for Small-Sided Games

Study #1

The following data were collected in a 2002–2003 study conducted for **Manchester United Football Club** by Dr. Rick Fenoglio, a lecturer in Exercise Science at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Fifteen 4v4 and 8v8 games were videotaped and analyzed for the study. The players observed were primarily **U-9 boys**.

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

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

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

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

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

Study #2

The following conclusions were reported in 2001 by John Weinerth as part of a 4v4 vs 8v8 pilot study for the **California Youth Soccer Association – South (CYSA-S)**.

The players observed were **U-8 girls**.

1. In the 4x4 game on a smaller field (35x25 yards), most of the players (88%) touched the ball 3–4 times more in several different categories such as: goals, shots on goal, completed and lost passes and total passes while still maintaining similar completion ratio of 31 vs 35%

Total Player Development 25

2. When no positions were given to the players (the player's were free to move around the field), the results were that they were much more involved & subsequently touched the ball 3–4 times more.

3. In the 8x8 game (80x50yard field), two or three players dominated the game in passes and dribbles.

4. The observation of the game by several people was that the 4x4 game flowed with little breaks compared to the 8x8 game which had many breaks due to

restarts from goals, shots on goals, throw-ins and dribbles by 2–3 dominating players.

5. Based on the oral survey, 88% of the players answered the oral survey questions #2 and #3 (Which game did you have more fun playing (on the small field or the bigger field)? & Which game allowed you to touch the ball more 8v8 or 4v4?) in favor of the 4v4 small-sided game.

The individual Player Performance Analysis clearly illustrates a much more active

involved player in the 4v4 game in comparison with that same player that seemed hidden and uninvolved in the 8v8 game.

Study #3

This study was conducted by the **German Football Association**, in conjunction with **The Sports University of Cologne**.

The players observed were **6–10 year olds**.

Observations on the question, **What Game Format and Development Model is Best?** were as follows.

1. Children like to compete with each other
2. Skills need to be developed in playful environment
3. Players can't learn when game demands skills or tactics they haven't yet learned
4. If they encounter the same situation many times over, they learn to deal with it
5. Complicated rules, such as offside detract from the ability to learn fundamentals
6. Commonly accepted now that ages 8 to 12 are ideal for developing technique and coordination
7. In spite of this many coaches continue to implement adult rules and strategies, which hinder this development
8. It's not enough to merely substitute smaller games for 11v11
9. Basic concepts such as passing, control, dribbling and ball possession must be taught
10. Players should not be forced into rigid positional responsibilities until they have mastered the basics
11. Development is a long term process, and the player's enjoyment should take precedence over that of the parents - games that teach soccer fundamentals may not be the most exciting to watch
12. By changing conditions and variations of the training games, the coach can alter the playing style of the children.

Total Player Development 26

A word of caution

What are generally good and reasonable recommendations for young players are often tempered by the negative attitudes and behaviors of the adults surrounding the game.

For players in the U9 through U-12 age groups, in particular, the naturally healthy response to competition is being questioned at the highest levels in light of the **win-at-all costs attitude** displayed by many coaches.

This pressure is amplified at the **pay-to-play levels, where results influence revenues**.

In addition, the subtle and not-so-subtle emotional pressure to perform exerted by parents has brought, and continues to bring, the wisdom of the following recommendations into question: all too often, it seems, adults are forgetting the true value and purpose of youth sport.