

# WASA Short Sided FAQ

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## **How did WASA come up with these changes?**

Short sided soccer has actually been around for many years. In its most common form you see it played in parks and back yards of kids around the world where kids play on their own. In a more organized fashion, US Youth Soccer has developed an entire program implemented nationally for recreational organizations to follow. WASA has chosen to move forward with implementing these changes with a few modifications. For more information you can refer to the US Youth Soccer website:

<http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/smallsidedgames.asp>.

For those of you who are more mathematically inclined here is an interesting analysis:

[http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/assets/06\\_small\\_sided\\_games.ppt#397,68,COMMON%20SENSE](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/assets/06_small_sided_games.ppt#397,68,COMMON%20SENSE)

## **Why is Short Sided better than WASA's traditional formats?**

The simple answer is to reduce the number of players on a field and create field sizes that are age appropriate. By doing both of these, players get more touches on the ball and advance their skills at a faster pace.

The more elaborate answer is copied here directly from the US Youth Soccer website:

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 (*WASA is considering 6v6 w/ GKs*)
- 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)

These are the reasons why we adults must foster "Small-Sided Games" 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*.

It just makes sense doesn't it?

Here is a great quote from Landon Donovan: *"As a kid you need to touch the ball as much as you can. You should always be with the ball. You should have a feeling that wherever the ball is, you can do anything with it. No matter where it is, where it is on your body, how it's spinning, how it's coming at you, the speed it's coming at you, anything. You can learn the tactical side of the game later. It's amazing to me that people put so much emphasis on trying to be tactical and worry about winning when it doesn't matter when you're 12 years old. We're going to have big, strong, fast players. We're Americans, we're athletes. But if we never learn at an early age to be good on the ball, then it's just useless."*

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

## **Why is WASA not implementing this for all age groups?**

WASA is an all volunteer organization and frankly, any changes we make add to a workload that is already a challenge. WASA has decided to transition the short sided formats in stages so that we can manage the changes more efficiently. Considerations that have to be taken into account include:

- a. The number of coaches needed increases dramatically when we create smaller teams.
- b. Field space is always a challenge given we share all our fields with the community and other sports organizations.
- c. Field sizes are a challenge given the different age group requirements and the requirements of other soccer organizations that utilize the same fields we do.
- d. More teams means more games, scheduling fields and referees becomes more complex.
- e. Did we mention we need more coaches?

## **What WASA age groups are currently using short sided formats?**

U5, U10 Girls, and U12 Girls have used short sided formats for a number of seasons. In fall 2010, we implemented the change in U6 and U7. In future fall seasons, starting in 2011, we will change the remaining age groups.

## **I don't know anything about coaching soccer and am hesitant to coach something I don't know much about.**

Yes, trying anything new can be challenging. Yet, there are a number of great benefits to short sided formats that actually make coaching easier. For one, team sizes are smaller and there are fewer kids to manage. Two, smaller fields make game management easier. Three, the rules of short sided soccer put less emphasis on the fine points of tactics and strategy and focus younger players on the only thing they care about; just being involved, having lots of opportunities to touch the ball, and score! As a coach you only have to direct them to stay on the field, not commit fouls, and learn how to put the ball into play. Other than that, you can stand back and encourage them to run around and play the ball. Being involved and playing the game teaches them the rest of basic skills they'll need to develop their game for the future. Besides, how many other great opportunities are there to spend quality time with your child and be outdoors away from the distractions of TV and video games?!

## **Does this format create enough competition for my child to truly learn the game?**

Sorry to answer one question with another question, but did you know that most select soccer programs actually use short sided formats?

## **Are the fields are too small for this to work?**

Field size has been a big topic of conversation in our staff meetings. While technically the field sizes we used in the fall (2010) are within the guidelines set out by US Youth soccer, we do understand that for U7 it is the minimum recommended size. We knew this could become an issue. The reason we chose to have U5, U6, and U7 on the same field size was to reduce one of the biggest challenges we face as a soccer organization: field management. By making the change to short sided formats, we not only change to smaller fields but we now have many more fields to manage. This past season we had 44 fields for all of WASA.

We have analyzed the fall 2010 games and agree that the field size can be improved for the U7 age group. It certainly did not help that there was not much grass on the fields either. This past fall was one of the drier seasons we can remember. In fact, on a number of our larger fields there was an increase in the amount of balls out of play, the balls just keep rolling and rolling! Hopefully, the water and grass levels will be back to normal and balls will have some resistance on the fields. None the less, we will increase the size of the U7 fields.

## **Why can't coaches be on the field to help direct players?**

Allowing coaches on the field has also been discussed at length. Given the smaller field sizes we feel it is better to keep coaches off the field to free up as much space for the kids as possible. Plus, on the smaller fields, the coaches aren't that far away from the kids. Verbal directions can be given, although admittedly it can be more difficult compared to physically moving kids around. After lengthy debate of the issue within our staff, we ultimately felt it is better to follow the USYSA guidelines and keep coaches off the field during the games.

## **Doesn't the short sided format allow skilled players just to dominate more?**

Skilled players present a challenge no matter what format is being used. Certainly a player can dominate more with fewer players on the field, but the real deficiency is that we have a limited number of dominant players and this limits our being able to spread them equally across all teams. We do try to balance teams, but as you have likely experienced, recreational leagues always struggle with having even teams. It is almost impossible in the younger age groups. Usually we suggest that coaches find creative ways for skilled players to learn about the game, like finding ways to pass, play defense, or score with only the left foot (or right if they are left footed).

We have seen that as players discover that they can dominate play, they and their parents will typically choose a more structured team like those provided by the many select soccer clubs in the area. We certainly welcome anyone and everyone to play in WASA but we are steadfast in our policy to just provide a fun outlet to play with no promises as to the level of soccer that will be played.

## **Why don't short sided formats teach real positions? How can kids learn soccer if they don't learn the positions?**

Spacing on the field is one of the areas that short sided formats tend to deemphasize. By having kids spread out and play positions, and having more kids on the field, they simply get fewer touches on the ball. In the younger age groups, US Youth Soccer and many FIFA organizations across the world have focused the game in short sided formats in order to allow players more opportunities to touch the ball and get the experience of being around it. This fosters better ball control and the ability to make decisions on what to do with the ball once they have it in control. Understand that this is a process spread over many seasons and years. The reality of U8 and below is that kids at these ages just simply can't process much more than the thought "see ball, kick ball, score goal!"

The intent of short sided formats at U5, U6, U7, U8, and even U10, is to promote easy understanding of a simplified game and to promote better ball control. By developing these skills, players do not have to worry as much about ball control when they get to U12 and up. They are now able to execute a variety of passes and to understand the strategy of moving to an open position to accept a pass. The rest of the finer points of strategy can then be introduced and developed.