

# Contents

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<b>Introduction - Small Sided Games.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.0 Ethos.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0 Coaching Philosophy .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.0 Motives for Participation in Youth Sport.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4.0 Measurements of Success in Youth Football.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5.0 Operating SSGs.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.0 Parent's code of behaviour .....</b>	<b>15</b>



# Introduction - Small Sided Games

The FAI has developed 2 new coaching workshops – Small Sided Games (SSGs), which will be delivered on a nationwide basis. The reason for the development of these workshops concentrating on the utilisation of SSGs is to promote a more inclusive style of football whereby all players get plenty of touches of the ball (i.e. technical development), whilst also developing tactically as they encounter more instances in a game to attack and defend. The utilisation of SSGs also means that more players can be involved more often, more of the time i.e. a full-sized pitch would allow 22 players to play 11v11, but on the same playing area, a minimum of 64 children can play 4 v 4 or 56 children can play 7 v 7.

4v4 is the smallest model of football that includes all of the qualities found in the bigger game. The shape of the team is a smaller version of what is found in the 11 a side game, in that there is width and depth to the team, with a dynamic shape that allows players to combine and work together successfully with the potential for constant interchanging of positions and roles. A solid understanding of the principles of play found in the basic 4v4 form allows for continued advancement as the players adapt to the added demands placed on them when more players are added to the tactical picture.

7v7 allows the team to have an all round flexibility of roles and positions whether the team is attacking or defending. There is a constant demand on the players to effectively read what their teammates are doing as the players remain mobile and gain an understanding of the importance of maintaining the principles of attacking, defending, and the transition between the two. There is a more complex understanding of defensive shape, with cover being provided wherever the ball is, as well as attacking support and movement; however the fundamental goals of attacking and defending remain unchanged from the 4v4 model.

Both workshops are delivered over a 3-hour period and are inclusive to all club coaches in the sense that the SSGs can be utilised at training and on match days, no matter where their players are on the player development pathway. Dates and locations for your club to attend will be provided.

SSGs are now recognised as the most productive and enjoyable method of introducing football to young boys and girls. SSGs embrace the principles of fun and learning which is vital if all young players are to develop a love for the game in the future.

SSGs make football a better experience for children. More touches of the ball, more opportunities to make decisions, more actual game play. Players will be more active due to playing attacking and defensive roles within a match and will understand the importance of team mates and playing together as a team. Progression from 4v4, 5v5 and 7v7 before 11v11 is the best method and process to educate our players. The progressions help players discover the differences in the size of the pitch, ball and goals and the benefits of having more space. They learn to use different techniques and also develop them by playing the game itself. By playing Small Sides Games children will learn the role of different positions and this will help determine what suits them as they develop.

Young player's development in football is best served in SSGs where:

- They acquire frequent touches during all games.
- Gain extra opportunities to attack and defend.
- Have greater repetition of the skills of the game.
- Realistic demands and challenges regardless of their ability.
- Acquire and develop their skills in appropriate pitch sizes.
- Winning should not be over-emphasised.
- Adults attending SSGs events should always give positive feedback & be patient.
- The importance of Fair Play being a core value in all events.

By playing SSGs all players can be given the opportunity to play the game for enjoyment and development, without any coaching or pressure from the sidelines.



# 1.0 Ethos

People become involved in football for young people for a variety of different reasons. They come from a variety of sporting backgrounds and take on various roles within clubs and other football organisations. Yet irrespective of their role or responsibility, they all share the common goal of providing football opportunities for young people. Coaches, parents and administrators all have an important role to play in promoting good practice in children's sport. They should have, as their first priority, children's safety and enjoyment of the sport.

The FAI wants sport to be safe, to be fun and to ensure that no matter what sport young people are involved in, that it takes place in the spirit of 'FAIR PLAY'. Fair play is the guiding principle of the Irish Sport's Council's Code of Ethics as well as the FAI's Code of Ethics and Good Practice which is designed to provide guidance for those working with young people in football. It outlines the type of issues that need to be discussed and addressed to provide the safest and most enjoyable environment not only for players but also the coaches and volunteers involved.

Coaches achieve satisfaction from working with children and young people. Focusing on the individual participants' needs and performance encourages young people to achieve and demonstrate enjoyment, equality and fair play. They will come to realise that their standards of behaviour are as important as sports performance.

All players should be encouraged to:

- Display Fair Play and sportsmanship at all times;
- Shake hands with the opposition and the referee before and after every game;
- Accept all the referee's and coaches decisions;
- Play to the best of their ability at all times.



# 2.0 Coaching Philosophy

Creating a coaching philosophy is fairly simple. Living up to it all season long is the tricky part. What is a coaching philosophy? Basically, it reflects the standards you have set for yourself and your team, and is the foundation of your coaching values and beliefs.

Entering the season without a coaching philosophy is like driving across the country without a road map. Yes, you'd eventually arrive at your destination, but not without wasting a lot of time and energy with wrong turns and dealing with unnecessary problems and aggravation along the way. A well-thought-out coaching philosophy should reflect a number of considerations, such as:

- ◆ Focusing on the best interests and well-being of every player
- ◆ Promoting the respect of players and coaches on both teams, as well as officials
- ◆ Upholding the virtues of fair play, good sportsmanship, honesty, and integrity
- ◆ Placing safety, skill development, and fun ahead of any personal desires to win.

Even with a carefully planned philosophy firmly in place, you will find it pretty challenging adhering to it at all times. This can be particularly true when Billy's mum confronts you halfway through the season about why the team isn't winning more games; or Jennifer's dad questions why the kids with less ability are receiving as much playing time as the team's best players.

Your philosophy is going to speak volumes about you as not just a coach, but as a person. So take the time to put real thought into it. You'll be glad you did. Lead your players in the direction you know is right. Strive to instil in them the values that you want your own kids to exhibit throughout their life.



## Coaching Style - how to be a truly effective football coach

Being a coach, like anything else, is a matter of "wearing a different hat." It is not the same thing as being a parent, a fan or a role model. The coach has responsibilities beyond these. In order to fill them s/he will have her/his own views and they will be filtered through her/his "coaching glasses," a set of assumptions about the children, the game, coaching and her/his role in the process.

The Children Active/Passive	The Game Plan/Vision
The Coach Lead/Guide	Coaching Whole/Part

### The Children

They will either be active, i.e. curious, wanting to figure things out on their own, possibly stubborn, willing to learn through trial and error, needing to find their own answers to problems. Or they will be passive, simply vessels that have to be filled with the correct answers to all of their problems. Willing to accept the adult views as correct and subordinate their own to it.

### The Game

The vision of how the game should be played. Listen to the words that the coach uses regularly, hustle, pressure, go, kick it long and a picture will emerge of what the coach values in the game. Is it a player's game or the coach's game?

## The Coach

The coach can teach by leading, i.e. giving instructions, controlling, being at the centre of the activity and always having the answer. Or s/he can guide by offering ideas in place of answers, encouragement for the players to try their own solutions, covert instead of overt direction.

## Coaching

How do children learn best? By learning the parts and then applying them to the whole? Or, by learning the whole and letting the parts take care of themselves? These questions are the focus of numerous books on childhood education and bring as much debate as how the game should be played.

Effective coaching is similar to being an effective doctor. First is the ability to diagnose the ailment. Next is the ability to prescribe the correct treatment. Finally, how to modify the treatment as the patient improves.

The important point in this model is that the different frames in the "coaching glasses" should support one another. Passive children won't respond to a guiding coach. They'll both wait for the other to take initiative. It is our vision that the children are active; the coach guides; the game is centred on the players; and they learn best by playing the game itself.



## Tailoring your coaching to your age group

Children are continually changing, and one of your responsibilities as a coach is to know what to expect both physically and emotionally from youngsters at various age levels. Being fully aware of these differences enhances your coaching skills and your ability to relate to your team. It also ensures that you don't favour those players on your squad who are more mature and skilled at the expense of those who are less skilled and developed.

No matter what the age or skill level of your players, always be supportive and enthusiastic. Pile on the praise and never stop encouraging them. This approach builds their confidence and self-esteem, regardless of age, and it's a gift that will last for years to come.

While each child has his or her own unique strengths and weaknesses, all youngsters possess general characteristics that are dictated by their age. Good coaches are aware of these traits. The following are general characteristics that are applicable for certain age ranges.

**Age 6 and under:** Children in this age bracket may never have played football, and this season may very well be their first experience in an organised team setting. Your job is simply to introduce them to football's most basic elements and whet their appetite for future participation. Children at this age generally aren't concerned about how well they are performing football skills compared to the others on their team. They are primarily interested in being with friends and having fun discovering and playing the sport. Competition is usually the furthest thing from their minds, which is why score lines and league rankings are often not that important at this level.

**Age 7–9:** Youngsters at this age tend to start focusing on mastering the basics of the sport. They also crave feedback from coaches and parents on how they are performing certain skills and how they are progressing in a new skill. They begin noticing how their teammates are faring while practising these skills. As coaches praise their peers for properly executing a skill, the child will want to earn that same feedback as well. The desire to compete carries much more prominence for some youngsters in this age range than others, particularly if they have older siblings who they have watched compete in football or other sports and now feel it's finally their turn to display their skills.

**Age 10–12:** More than likely, these children have had experience playing football in the past and are continuing with it because it has piqued their interest. Keep the positive momentum going by adding to their foundation of skills and fuel their desire to continue playing by conducting training sessions that are both challenging and fun. Quite often, sports take on added importance at this juncture in their life and they really want to do well. As children reach this age range, many become more competitive and seek to perform better than others of their age. When their ability matches up with their peers, or surpasses it, they feel a real sense of achievement.

## Emphasising teamwork

While football is a sport that allows individuals plenty of opportunities to be creative and to run with the ball on their own, you and your team are much better off if you can get everyone to work together as a cohesive unit. Of course, this is easier said than done. Imagine having 10 kids in front of you. You have one really good toy that they are all eyeing. You give the toy to one child and ask that they share it with everyone. This is tough to achieve, eh? The same goes for football. There's one ball that they are all going to have to share in order for the team to be successful.

*So how do you get the team to that point?*

Sure-fire routes to fostering the essence of teamwork among your players don't exist, but the following are some pointers to assist you in your efforts and get the players to begin to see the enormous benefits that accompany working as a team rather than a bunch of individuals.

**Give touchline support.** Encourage players not in the game to stay involved by cheering and supporting their teammates. This keeps them involved in the action instead of glancing over to see what their parents are doing or what kind of food their friends are eating.

**Allow individual freedom – at times.** While you should allow players individual freedom to run with the ball, it must be done within the confines of the team setting. There will certainly be points during the game where a player's close control skills and ability to dribble the ball down the pitch may be called for, and that's part of the game. But when that player then ignores teammates and isn't willing to pass the ball, the team chemistry is threatened. Remind players that they have teammates for a reason and must be sure to look out for them.

**Avoid the captain syndrome.** Continually relying on two or three players to serve as team captains throughout the season puts them on a platform above the rest of the squad. By giving every player the opportunity to lead warm-ups in training or be first in a drill infuses the team with that sense that everyone is equal.

**Praise team efforts.** During training sessions, make it a point to recognise the efforts of the team whenever possible. For example, if you're conducting a 3-on-1 drill and the attacking players score a goal, you may feel a natural tendency to applaud the end result and acknowledge the youngster who scored at the expense of the others involved in the drill. Be sure to acknowledge the perfectly executed pass that began the move, or the pass that found the unmarked scorer. If your admiration is spread among all the players who played a role in the goal, players begin to understand that setting up a goal is just as important as scoring in the team framework.

Get the kids praising one another. Encourage the kids who score goals to acknowledge the pass from their teammate that led to it. If you get kids into the habit of giving one another high-fives, or telling one another 'great pass', this forges a bond and strengthens the idea of everyone working together for the benefit of the team. Recognise the non-scoring contributions after the game. The kids who scored the goals don't need additional praise after the game because their shot generated cheers and applause from the spectators. How about giving out post-game prizes to the player who began the move with a great pass out of defence? After all, there never would have been a goal without the effort of that child, and it's well worth mentioning that whether the team wins, draws or loses, the whole team deserves the credit and not just any one player.

## Motivating players

Regardless of the age or experience level of your players, they arrive at the pitch with vastly different motivations for playing the game. While some will be strongly motivated individuals who will be real gems to work with, others may benefit from your inspiring words.

Some players should respond positively to the challenges you issue, such as seeing whether they can deliver 10 accurate passes in a row. With others, this approach may actually detract from their motivation to participate. Each youngster you come into contact with is different. Discover for yourself what works for each child to help get the best out of them.

*Here are a few general tips that you can employ to help spur your players on to become the best they can be.*

Share your love of the sport. If you have a sincere passion for football and for passing this on to children, your excitement and enthusiasm should rub off on the team.

Set attainable goals for youngsters. By having reasonable expectations for the kids you are coaching, and setting goals that are within their reach, you will stimulate and encourage them to keep working because the goals are within sight. If a child senses that your expectations are impossibly far-fetched, they are going to wonder - what's the point of trying and their play on the pitch could suffer tremendously.

Recognise the good things happening on the pitch. Stop training to point out when a player has done something really well, not when he's made a mistake. Praise is simply one of the best motivational tools around. Think about it. If your boss tells you that you have done a great job on a presentation in front of your colleagues, you are going to give even more effort on your next presentation. The same goes for kids performing skills on a football pitch.

Do not motivate through fear or threats. Making a child run a lap for failing to perform at an expected level has no place in youth football. These types of approaches typically handcuff a youngster's ability to perform because they're now afraid of making a mistake that is going to translate into punishment. Children have to feel free to make mistakes in order to improve. Plus, this motivation-through-fear tactic has a strong probability of putting them off of the sport in the years to come.

*"Winning isn't everything, but trying to is!" – Rainer Martens, sports psychologist*

## 3.0 Motives for Participation in Youth Sport

### Suggestions for Parents

- Remember the truths and talk to your children with them in mind. After a game, ask questions about fun, skill improvement, learning experiences and having a good time with friends.
- See yourself as part of the team and supportive of the coach; avoid setting up a conflict in your child's mind between his or her parents and coaches. If you want to affect the coaching, volunteer to help.
- Develop perspective: remember what you could do at your children's ages; don't judge them by what you can do now. Kids will not become great players overnight.
- Develop an understanding of what your children want from sports—not all children want the same things. Determine if they want to be involved at all.

*"We are asking our players to compete before they have learned how to play." – Jay Miller, U.S. U17 Men's National Team coach 2001*

In general the benefits of youth sports for children include character building, humility in winning, leadership growth opportunities, cooperative skills, social skills and dealing with obstacles, losing and competition. We employ football to develop well adjusted, good citizens.



## 4.0 Measurements of Success in Youth

### Football

#### Short-Term

- Fun - Do the players smile and laugh? Do the players look forward to playing? The first question from the player's family should be, "Did you have fun today?"
- Fair Play - Does a player demonstrate a sense of sportsmanship through words and actions?
- Laws of the Game - Do the players know and follow the rules of football?
- Friendships - Are the players creating new friends within the team and with players from other teams?
- Skills - Are the players demonstrating a growing number of ball skills and are they gradually becoming more proficient in those skills?

#### Long-Term

- Commitment - How do the players answer when asked at the end of a game, "Did you try your best?"
- Roles in the Team - More important than learning a position, are the players learning about positioning? Knowing where the right back or the centre forward spot is on the field is important, yet learning how to move tactically within the game is far more important. Do all of the players get exposed to playing all of the positions?
- Leadership - Are players being given the opportunity to take on leadership roles and responsibilities? Are the coaches and team managers teaching leadership?
- Tactics - Are the players experimenting with new tactics in matches? The coaches must teach new tactics to the players in training sessions and then allow them to try out the tactics in a match, regardless of how that might affect the outcome!
- Retention - Do the players come back year after year?

## 5.0 Operating SSGs

- The purpose of SSGs is to provide opportunities to boys and girls to participate. It is an excellent environment to introduce them to football.
- All games must comply with the Laws of SSGs.
- The facility must be safe and hazard free. Ensure the playing surface is safe and goalposts are safe and secure, as per the FAI Goalpost Safety guidelines.
- Ensure there are suitable changing facilities and toilets for both sexes.
- Have relevant First – Aid persons available.
- Have a Code of Conduct for all players / coaches and parents.
- Have appropriate Public Liability and Personal Accident Insurance for the event.

### Guidelines for 4v4 Games

- Passing   - Dribbling   - Shooting   - Long / wide passing

- 10 minute games.
- Pitch dimensions to be 30m x 20m.
- There will be a solid half way line, and two broken lines to break the pitch into 'thirds'. This line is known as the retreat line, opposition players must be behind this when the goalkeeper has possession.
- There will be no 'offside' rule.
- Ball is put back into play with a pass, dribble or throw, when it exits play over the sideline.
- Balls used are size 3 or 4.
- Unlimited substitutions.

## Guidelines for 7v7 Games

- Games will be 40 minutes – 2 x 20 minute halves.
- Pitch dimensions to be 50m x 40m, or 60m x 50m.
- Pitch length – min. 50m, max. 60m
- Pitch width – min. 40m, max. 50m
- There will be a solid half way line, and two broken lines to break the pitch into ‘thirds’. This line is known as the retreat line, opposition players must be behind this when the goalkeeper has possession.
- There will be no ‘offside’ rule.
- Ball is put back into play with a pass, throw or dribble when it exits play over the sideline.
- Balls used are size 4.
- Unlimited substitutions.



## 6.0 Parent's code of behaviour

Parents need to understand the philosophy of the SSG and it will be through your support, assistance and positive behaviour the right environment will be created for your child to enjoy participating in the sport he loves.

### Moving the focus away from winning or losing

The emphasis of SSG is on participation and enjoyment and an association removal of the current emphasis on the importance of winning. Children are much more likely to enjoy their football playing experience and will be keen to play more often and are less likely to drop out from the game.

#### As a parent always remember

- Children participate in sport for their own enjoyment, not yours.
- Encourage children to participate, do not force them.
- Let children play and learn from doing, limit constant instructions.
- Focus on your child's efforts and performance rather than if they win or lose.
- Encourage children to play according to the rules and spirit of the game.
- Ensure that the players time spent with you in a positive experience.
- Never ridicule or shout at a child or team for making a mistake.
- Remember that kids learn best by example, appreciate good play and good performance by all players.
- Smart supporting- not loud and intense but calm and positive.
- Respect official's decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- Show appreciation to volunteers, i.e. coaches, officials and administrators as without them there may be no football.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their age, ability, gender, background or religion.

## What Parents Can Do

- Talk positively with their children before and after activities
- Supply transportation
- Assist with supervision
- Officiate games
- Help with administration
- Assist with the organization of special events

