

## **Four Versus Four - The Great Small Sided Game.**

### **HYSA – Hawaii Youth Soccer Association Coaches Education**

Welcome youth soccer news readers! This column will provide players, parents, coaches, and fans useful information that will improve playing ability for the game of soccer.

The game of soccer is the best teacher, in other words the more soccer that you play and watch at a higher level the better player you will become. Of course, a coach's technical and tactical guidance is very important for player's development. A coach is usually teaching his or her players two to three times a week. Even though anyone can play soccer the game requires a higher skill level and greater tactical knowledge, as players play against older, more experienced opponents. How can players practice together and gain in skill and tactical knowledge? It's simple play small-sided games. Let's use Four versus Four as an example. Get eight friends together and set up a field 20-25 yards wide and 35-40 yards long.

Use cones, shirts, or almost any object to set up field markings. The goals should be small and you can determine if you want no one to stand in goal or make the goal slightly wider so the defending team can't simply stand in front of the small goal space.

#### **Advantages of small-sided games:**

- 1) More touches on the ball.
- 2) Tactical decisions must be made.
- 3) Players can learn the principles of play within the game (learn by playing).
- 4) Most of the skills that players need for the game of soccer are used within the game.

#### **Added Advantages for Coaches:**

- 1) Players cannot hide such as a larger game so the coach can make evaluations in several areas such as: technique, tactics, physical, mental.
- 2) The game is "put under a microscope" where it is easier to coach.
- 3) Players can set these games up on their own time and have the freedom to play and learn without coach's stoppages. It gives players independence while developing skill, tactical understanding, and leadership qualities.

Players love to play in tournaments. Set up mini-tournaments at every practice. Instead of playing eight versus eight at practice play a tournament for the last 30-45 minutes of every practice, which simulates tournament competition, and the players can keep track of the standings. Rotate the players and teams on a weekly basis to build team unity and cohesion.

Players should concentrate on:

- 1) Skills - dribbling, passing, shooting, control, heading.
- 2) Defending skills - tackling, intercepting passes (anticipating), jockeying (delay), and channeling.
- 3) Attacking Tactics - support (helping your teammate by being in an open position to receive the ball, Combination play (wall passes, takeovers, overlaps), and improvisation.

**Coaches should concentrate on teaching:**

- 1) Principles of play - width (keep the field wide), depth (keep the field long), support (attack and defense), etc. Every practice there can be a different topic or emphasis.
- 2) Skills
- 3) Decision making in game situations. Encourage the players to think for themselves and let them.
- 4) Creativity (allow the players to experiment).

Remember, the most important idea is that players are playing the game outside of their normal practice time. It has been highly encouraged by soccer governing bodies to set up free play days. Invite all the players that live in the area and designate a day that the kids can come and simply play in a round robin Four versus Four tournament. The adult only needs to create a chart and keep track of scores and time. The players select the teams, no referees, and no coaches. Soon you will have more kids playing than you know what to do with on designated play dates.

If playing Four versus Four is not possible encourage players to play Two versus Two, Three versus Three, or Two versus One. Any small sided games are fun for the players and allow them to grow in skill and tactical areas.

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