



Small Sided Games Pilot Study

By John Weinerth

Anyone involved in youth soccer over the last four years either from a coaching or administrative perspective has somehow been directly or indirectly been drawn into the Small-sided games debate. What are the optimal age appropriate #'s a side & why? We have all seen the research, the position statements endorsed nationally by the State Director's of Coaching and the subsequent recommendations put forth by US Soccer and US Youth Soccer. When looking at all of these things objectively, it is extremely hard to argue with the findings along with the reasoning behind them.

Many States since have taken the initiative and mandated the adoption of the recommendations to the leagues in their state. However, as anyone that has presented to a volunteer Recreation League Board of Directors can attest to – without such mandating a league can essentially find any number of reasons not to make the change. Albeit that many are administrative (realigning fields, buying new goals etc...), there are just as many that become adult proclamations of what the kids want & enjoy about the game as it relates to playing goalie, throw-ins and the importance of being tied to a position on the field. To this end, back in the summer of 2001 having heard these proclamations & rationale from league administrators on numerous occasions it seemed to me that a different approach would help bolster the justification for change. An approach that combined technology with the common sense of speaking with the kids themselves and finding out what they thought. With that, we started putting the pieces in place for our pilot study. With the imperative assistance of Zvi Friedman and his SoftSport game analysis software in conjunction with a simple kid friendly survey, our pilot study collected the following data. It is our hope and that of the NSCAA that the following data will help everyone's efforts

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study was to measure the girls performances in several different categories such as: number of total passes, completed passes, lost passes, completion rate, goals, shot on goals; and then compare their performance on a large field with 8 a side (w/ goalies) verses a small field with 4 a side (no goalies). This was done in hopes of illustrating the benefits of small-sided play (4v4) at this age group in terms of skill development, but more importantly the positive impacts that spill over to the players themselves – mainly, the pure enjoyment of the game of soccer itself. At the conclusion of the games component, we asked each player three simple questions listed below in conclusion. While we would have liked to track the # of individual touches on the ball by each player – our tracking capabilities for the purposes of this initial pilot study does illustrate the # of times throughout a match the player did come in contact with the ball.



Background Information on the Pilot Study

- The Study took place at Pierce College on August 26, 2001.
- Teams involved: Girls under 8, from the West Valley Soccer Club
- Time: 9:00am to 11:30am
- Temperature: 80-90
- Field Size:
 - 8x8 = 80 x 50 yards
 - 4x4 = 35 x 25 yards
- Number of players = 16 players
- The Girls were divided into two teams:
 - Red Team (8 players)
 - Blue Team (8 players)
- Each team was divided into equal strength
- The following personnel supported the project:
- The study was initiated by John Weinerth, CYSA –South (Cal South) Director of Marketing & Recreation
- West Valley Soccer Club personnel included:
 - Howard Fink Team Coach/ President, Esse - Referee,
 - Juan Flores, Director of Coaching.
- SoftSport™ Personnel included: Shiela Friedman, Shadia, Brian Murray and Zvi Friedman



8 x 8 Study

- The 16 players were divided into two balanced teams of 8 red players and 8 blue players
- The Red Team played the Blue Team 10min x 2 (total-20 minutes)
- The field size was 80 x 50 yards
- Goal size was 7 feet high and 21 feet wide
- No coaching from the sidelines was allowed
- After each goal, restart was taken in the center circle.
- Players were assigned positions by the coach (goalkeeper, defenders, mid-fielders and forwards)

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4x4 Study

- The 8 Red Team players were divided into 4 Red "A" players and 4 Red "B" players.
- The 8 Blue Team players were divided into 4 Blue "A" players and 4 Blue "B" team players.
- Red "A" team played the Blue team "A" (10 minutes x 2) for a total of 20 minutes
- Red "B" team played Blue team "B" (10 minutes x 2) for a total of 20 minutes
- The Field Size was 40x25 yards
- Goal size was 6 feet wide by 4 feet high
- No coaching from the side-lines were allowed
- 3 Balls were available immediately at the touchlines in order to continue the game
- Players were encouraged to restart immediately.
- Restarts were allowed by kick-ins.
- Referee role was to supervise the health of the players and encourage the players to keep playing.
- After each goal the defending team restarted the game at their own goal (in order to have more playing time)



Survey

At the end of the game, each girl was asked 3 questions

1. What is your favorite part about playing soccer (i.e. kicking the ball, scoring a goal, running)?
2. Which game allowed you to touch the ball more 4 x 4 or 8 x 8?
3. Which game did you have more fun playing (on the small field or the bigger field)?



Computer Analysis

- SoftSport™ SecondLook™ software was used to collect data and information in several categories of players performance such as:



Summary and Observations

1. In the 4x4 game on a smaller field, 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%
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, 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.
6. 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.