



U9, U10, and U11 Academy Programs

Spring 2010



**"Better Coaching, Less Traveling, More Playing"**

## **Message from the Technical Director**

When I was interviewing for the job as Technical Director for the Bozeman Blitzz, one of the first questions the board asked me was, “What would be your focus for this club?” I slyly smiled to myself because it was the exact question I was hoping for. I answered, “I feel that the biggest problem associated with youth soccer in this state, is we do not emphasize proper technique development for our youngest players.” I think they agreed with me, because I got the job. 😊

Technical development is a part of youth sports that is so often overlooked because, as a society, we are so focused on results. Too often we look at team chemistry, how players play as a group, or what the results of games are at the youngest ages when we should really be looking at how each individual player performs. We shouldn't be teaching a player how to fit into a spot on a team and play their role; we should be teaching them how to excel as an individual, and how that individualism can work for a greater good.

This ideal of sound individualism led the Bozeman Blitzz to develop the inaugural Fall Academy in 2008 which had over 130 participants. The program proved to be a huge success, which led the club to expand the program into the 2009 Spring season. This was a major change in Montana as it took the place of U11 traveling soccer in Bozeman. As a result, our players no longer had to travel 5+ hours a weekend to play only 2 hours worth of games. Since that first ‘test-run’ of the Academy, the program has almost doubled in enrollment, and we are just starting to see our first Academy players enter into true traveling soccer.

The following booklet is a question and answer guide for every parent wondering about the changes we have made and why we made them. Feel free to read the whole booklet straight through, or just individually look up the answers to each of your questions. I hope you are able to find what you are looking for and, if not, let me know so I can improve this booklet for next year. Together we can show every player how enjoyable and rewarding this game is, while helping them fulfill their potential as players, and people.

Faithfully yours in soccer,

Daniel Ferguson  
Technical Director for the Bozeman Blitzz

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## **Daniel Ferguson**

I feel it is important to give a little background about myself and my development as a soccer player. Hopefully, it will give some insight into why I believe what I do.

I was born in Garland, TX in a small sub-division just outside of Dallas. I played school yard soccer in Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, which consisted of about thirty kids chasing after a ball on a patch of grass that would be too small for half that number. One of the goals we used to score on was the backside of a foul ball fence for a baseball diamond. The other goal was two trees, about 5 yards apart. I always played goalie on the giant fence (and let in A LOT of goals).

My dad worked for an aeronautic company, and when I was eight years old my family moved to London, England for his job. This was my first introduction to organized soccer, as I joined a local U8 team that played 11-a-side on a full size field with full size goals. Their name: The 'Fighting Woodley Wonderers.' I was the worst player on the team, and I knew it. Instead of working with me in practice, my coach would always tell the assistant coach to take me away (because I was holding everyone else back) and he would work with me on throw-ins. Come game days, I wasn't allowed to take any throw-ins.

I played for that team for two years before switching to another local club. I was still the worst player on the team. The coach, Ron, was the parent of the best player on the team. I had a lot more fun playing with this group of kids (mostly because the coach didn't remove me from the other players), however I rarely got more than 20 minutes of playing time per game (these were 90 minute games!). The coach would play me for 5 minutes a time, and then take me off.

I played for this club for only half a season. I remember playing in a game against a local rival and was having the game of my life; the coach had put me in five minutes before and I had already assisted a goal with my first touch. On my second touch I got the ball on the half way line, beat two defenders, chipped the oncoming goalie, who collided into me, and watched from the ground as my shot took two bounces towards the empty net but was stopped on the line by the coach's son. He looked at me, smiled, and then passed the ball into the empty net.

The coach went wild! 'That's my boy!' he yelled as every other parent on the sideline was dead silent. Did that really just happen? I stood up, looked at my coach, gave him the finger, and walked off the field. I was 10 years old.

I refused to play organized soccer again that year, and instead just played with my friends wherever we could set up a game. We played in backyards, parks, fields, and streets. We played during recess, after school, and on weekends. No parents, no coaches, no one to tell me how bad I was. I loved it.

My last year living in England, I finally decided to play organized soccer again with a team called Early Eagles. The coach was fantastic. He didn't care about what happened on the field, as long as we were having a good time. I started to progress, and started scoring more goals. The coach even made me captain for the game we played against my former team! That coach, who's name I wish I could remember, helped me love the organized game again.

The rest of the story is not as important. My family moved to Den Haag, The Netherlands when I was fourteen. I played club ball there for four years and played high school for two. I moved to Missoula, MT to ski and go to college (in that order) and ended up playing two years for the University of Montana's Club Team.

It was in Missoula that I took to the idea of coaching. I began with a U11 team, started learning how to teach techniques, and began educating myself, by trial and error, how to coach. In 8 years, I have coached over fifteen youth teams from U6 through U15, coached high school in Butte, worked as a volunteer assistant coach for the University of Montana Women's Soccer Team, and been an Olympic Development Program (ODP) coach for five years. I have also worked hard to gain licenses, and am now one of the youngest coaches in America with a United States Soccer Federation National 'B' license (it only goes up to 'A'), as well as the United States Youth Soccer Association 'Y' license. In addition, I have a degree from the University of Montana (Go Griz!) in Health Enhancement, and am the Physical Education and Health teacher at LaMotte School in Bear Canyon.

My path through soccer has not been an easy one; I have had some pretty bad coaches, and some pretty infuriating experiences with the sport. However, for every negative one I had as a youth, playing pick-up soccer with my friends kept me coming back. It is because of this background which is why I coach: to give kids the opportunities that have been afforded to me. This sport has taught me so much, and I have thusly dedicated my life to passing on these experiences to others. No child should have to go through what I went through to play this game, and I believe that every player has the potential to develop and fall in love with soccer. This is my promise, and I have a history to keep me faithful to it.

## Introduction

The largest overwhelming problem with youth soccer players coming from Montana, is they do not understand the basic techniques needed to play the game. As a result, soccer teams coming from this state rely on pure athleticism to win games and the soccer on display is as exciting in quality as watching a painted fence dry! The reason why Montana soccer is behind the rest of the country is simple; we are more focused on winning at the youngest age groups than learning how to play the game. While competition and winning are important, there is a difference between the two. Competition is the process of playing and challenging yourself, while winning is merely the outcome. Competition is vital to a player's development, albeit winning does not need to be a focus until a later stage of life.

As a result of failing basic soccer education in the world, a new idea has been introduced by leading clubs in Europe called the Academy Program. This idea has slowly swept across the Atlantic, and has been embraced by US Youth Soccer and the leading youth and professional clubs in the country. The premise is simple:

- Focus on individual development in techniques
- Work on how and when those techniques can be used in a game
- Develop a soccer culture of hard work and a common goal to become better
- Remove winning as the primary objective. We want players to take risks and be able to make mistakes
- Remove players from their comfort zone, and put them in environments to work with many different players of ranging abilities

The idea is that if we focus on the individual at the youngest age groups, teaching them the basics, then no matter who they play with when they get older, they will be able to compete and excel.

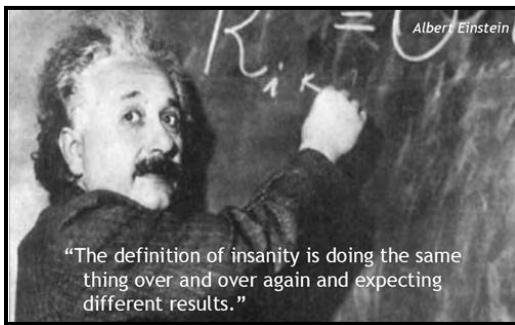
Bozeman Blitz has embraced this philosophy and have implemented an academy structure within our club. We believe that focusing on individuals, as opposed to teams, at these ages will better allow us to develop players, keep players interested in the game, and create a better pool to choose from for forming our older, more elite teams.

*“If we can give players the basics to compete, then success will take care of itself.”*

- John Wooden

## What should we expect this next season?

The U9, U10, and U11 Academies will be run under a very different format than from past years of traveling soccer in Montana. We will be removing a large chunk of the travel associated with this age of soccer, and will therefore be able to better guide the development of the players associated with these programs. We will no longer travel every weekend in the Montana Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) league at these ages, but will train in groups, play weekly games amongst ourselves (where we mix and match players), while still providing the excitement of competition, quality education, and tournament play.



At these young ages, we want to be on the road driving less frequently. This change comes at a good time due to the increasing fuel costs, however, the impetus for this change is purely developmental. Young players do not need to travel 5-7 hours every other weekend (some more frequently) in order to play a couple of hours of soccer. We need players playing more, not sitting in the backseat sleeping more.

Consequently, the players in our U9, U10, and U11 programs will stay closer to home. We will play in Bozeman the majority of the weekends, possibly Livingston or Belgrade as we are attempting to bring these clubs into this program. We will play at a certain time each Saturday from April through June, with the exception of three weekends where our teams may travel to play outside competition. This is a major change from past years of traveling soccer, as our youth players used to play outside competition every weekend, with an increase in traveling to reflect that.

We will play a variety of games throughout this period. Some weekends may be 4v4, others 6v6, and some may be 8v8. We will set the number depending on the theme of training during the previous week. Every weekend however, the trainers and coaches will be focused on giving instruction that touches on the work done in training the week prior.

These games sound like Micro soccer, but I cannot emphasize enough that this season will be in no way similar to Micro. The U9-U11 programs this year under Blitzz will have coaches as they typically do, however, these coaches will be the best we have to offer in our club. Working under these coaches, will be ‘trainers’ who are brand new coaches with the club, and are using this season to work under our best and learn. This combination of high level coaches with new trainers will, in essence, double the coach to player ratio.

Next, we will shorten the season. We will start accepting signups for the program starting in October, however, we will not come together until April of 2010. In the past, teams attempted to start training immediately after the New Year, but I have always found inconsistent attendance during the winter and the season to be too long for players and parents. Now the program will run April through the end of June, capped at the Montana Showcase (four months versus six).

Even though we will not be training indoor, I highly recommend all players to sign up for the Bozeman Blitzz Fall and Winter indoor futsal leagues. These programs offer indoor gym time where players will play short-sided games in a fast paced environment. Futsal is invaluable for player development, and I **HIGHLY** recommend all players to sign up. I encourage you to look at our website: [www.bozemanblitzzfc.org](http://www.bozemanblitzzfc.org) to find further information about these programs.

The U10 and U11 groups will be equally divided to play in the Montana Showcase, which is held during our last weekend of play (June 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>). Some of the most remembered experiences for young players are traveling with family/friends, staying in hotels or camping, and playing with their friends in out of town tournaments. We want this tournament to fit into the developmental plan, but also provide unique experiences and competition. Since the State Showcase does not have a U9 division, we will be finding an alternative tournament for them to play in.

This is really a return to street soccer, which is missed with many young players in modern day. The difference is that this is GUIDED Street Soccer. Coaches will guide the experience, but find the blend of instruction and free play to make the program both developmental and fun.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **“So which age groups are changing? Is this the only program available to my kids?”**

U9, U10, U11 will all be in an Academy format. We will also be keeping these age groups available at our Micro level, so players can sign up for the program that best suits them. Please keep in mind that the Academy is not for everyone: it is more expensive and requires more commitment than Micro. However, the rewards of better coaching, and more focused development plans are far more rewarding. Please look at both programs before making your decision ([www.bozemanblitzfc.org](http://www.bozemanblitzfc.org)), and find what works best for your family.

### **“Since there are tryouts, can players get cut?”**

We want to create three separate age groups: U9, U10, and U11 so we can better match the quality of the various age groups. In the past we have had 9 and 10 year olds playing with the U11's. This, at times, has stunted the development of the U11 player. Every player needs to be challenged to grow as a player. By separating these age groups, we are putting every player in a more challenging environment.

No players will be cut from the Academy program. However, since the Academy is not for everyone, we want our first year players to play Micro before they get involved in the Academy program. As we look at players from season to season, we may make the recommendation that a player look at Micro as their option for development for a year. Between The Academy and Micro, we want to provide a place to play and train for every young player, but still challenge those players at an appropriate level so they will continue to grow at their own rate.

### **“What is the focus of the U9-U11 Programs?”**

It has been said, “You can't play in the orchestra if you cannot play your own instrument.” This holds true for soccer as well. At this young age Blitz will focus on an individual's technical ability with the future in mind for our young soccer players. In fact, the majority of all practice time will be invested in the players' individual skill development with the knowledge that this will lead to a lifelong love of the game. It is common knowledge that people enjoy activities more that they're good at, so let's develop these players at this age, so they can be successful when they're older.

**“How does my child’s tournament team learn to play together and develop team chemistry in this new format?”**

This is where we have to adjust our thinking so that development can occur. In fact, our ‘team’ focus, versus an ‘individual’ focus has held back development. We have to understand that good players can go play in any team at any time, so we must focus on the individual and create good players, not necessarily good team chemistry.

When we watch children play on their own with friends (and I think we can all agree that this does not happen as much as it used to), they play in games and do not care about team chemistry, nor do they say, “I play better with so-and-so,” or “we have a connection,” or “we play hard for one another.” These are adult phrases that come from the adult game (and adult sports or sporting movies). Children just play and whoever is on their team, is on their team. Left alone, the young players ‘free game’ (free of coaching and spectators) is a true pick-up game and this is where the greatest development occurs.

On top of developing individual techniques, we will start to teach basic small-sided tactics as the season progresses. It is important that players know what to do on a field, and we will spend time learning this aspect of the game. However, I cannot stress enough: we do not care about winning tournaments or games at this age. Winning or losing is not our measure of success for this program; how much your child learns is.

**“My child loves to win games. If you don’t care about winning, these kids are going to lose and my child will quit soccer.”**

Every child loves to win and all players keep score, regardless if the coaches do or not. However, winning is not the primary focus for children to play sports at this age. If you ask your son or daughter why they play soccer, they will say “to have fun” or “to be with my friends.” While children are initially upset about losing a game, 10 minutes after the final whistle they have forgotten about it. It is the parents, who have been raised in a society of winning and losing, who make a big deal out of results. This is where we need to alter our thinking; if your child’s team loses a game, instead of talking to them about the score, talk to them about how they played. Children get their cues from adults, so if we change our mentality, theirs will align as well.

This program is for the individuals. We do not immediately put our players into teams and learn how to get the ball to the fastest kid to score. We focus on each player and how they can develop the confidence and abilities to contribute in a game. We will come across teams that do not have the same focus that we do, and they may beat us initially. However, as the season progresses and your children develop, you will see how strong

players form a strong team. The State Showcase is our chance to show you, the parents, how beneficial this program is and what it has done for your children. By entrusting your players into our development plan, we are preparing them for a lifetime of better playing and better results down the road.

**“Why can’t my child, who is 10, play with the U11’s? I know they have done this in the past?”**

As the interest in the Club continues to grow, there are now increased numbers at the youngest ages. At one point the Club needed the 9-10 year olds to form teams at U11. This is no longer the case, and there is a better way for these under aged players to develop – to play within a structure that does not put additional stress on our players and parents at an early age.

Having said this, if there is a player who is so strong technically, physically and competitively for their age group, the technical staff of Bozeman Blitzz (comprised of the Technical Director and age group coaches) may make a recommendation that this player be moved up an age group.

**“What will the practice schedule be like?”**

Training sessions will be run twice a week by an age group coach. The coaches will be higher level coaches whom I know are capable and talented enough to work with these kids.

In addition to an age group coach (who might be a head coach of an older age group), I will assign additional trainers at each age group (the number of coaches depends on the number of kids). These trainers will be new, fresh faces who are interested in learning how to coach and they will help the coaches work with each player.

On Saturdays, when the coaches are with their older teams, the trainers will be in charge of games. The Technical Director will come out and help divide teams, and the trainers will warm up their group and get them ready for the big game!

**“What about the travel requirements?”**

We have attempted to minimize the travel at the U9-U11 age groups with the Academy format. We want our young players playing more and traveling less.

As the clubs within Montana Youth Soccer Association adopt the Academy structure in 2010 at U9-U11, there will also be some weekends where our group will travel to other Montana cities to play 6v6 at U9 and 8v8 at U10-U11. Some of these traveling weekends, teams will come to play us in Bozeman, however others we will be traveling.

**“How much will each child play?”**

Because of the Academy format at U9-U11, the players will be playing games of different sizes, we will adjust the games to ensure that players play nearly every minute of every game (there will be substitutions in order to give players a quick break or if the numbers do not work out to be even at game time (i.e. playing 6v6 needs 12 players, but uneven number of 13 need to play).

**“What will happen to Winter Team Training?”**

In January, February and early March, there is always consistently poor turnout for team training at U9 through U11. I want to have these players instead playing in unpressured futsal games, and will highly recommend that everyone sign up with Winter futsal. ([www.bozemanblitzfc.org](http://www.bozemanblitzfc.org))

**“If at U9-U11 the teams are not chosen by ability and we are not playing in a league, why would I pay more for Blitz when my child could continue in Micro?”**

Although a league is not in place, the training and game format leads to greater development and enjoyment. These club coaches will be guided by a Long Term Development Plan and will receive feedback from the Technical Director with regard to curriculum and the progress that the players are making.

The Long Term Development focus will guide the players through appropriate stages of technical, tactical, and movement education. The training, based on this, will challenge the player to grow. Micro, in contrast, is run by parent coaches who may have no previous knowledge about the sport. Micro soccer is more geared towards social fun, while Academy play is more focused on fun through development.

Players in this program will not look the same at the end of the season. Their technical growth will be accelerated and players outside of the program will be falling behind

**“What would a typical Saturday look like for U10 and U11?”**

As a general schedule, when the U10-U11’s are playing at home in our Academy format, the morning may look like this:

9:20 – 9:30 a.m.: Arrive at Fields

9:30 a.m.: Players are separated into teams, assigned fields and start to warm up

9:45-11 a.m.: Games

11-11:05: Academy players help clean up and wrap up of morning by Trainers

**“Why would I have my player join the Blitz Academy when I could find an elite team for them to play on?”**

Bozeman Blitz is committed to player development and helping players achieve their potential. We are dedicated to becoming THE leading club in the Region in terms of developing new programs and problem solving ways to challenge and develop our youth players. Forming elite traveling teams at the youngest age groups has always been a tried method for developing players, and has been recently dismissed by the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and professional academies across the world (look at the Arsenal F.C. academy and Manchester United’s). Putting players on elite traveling teams at U9, U10, U11 and U12 produces good teams, but not strong players. Players learn to play a position, always fill that position, and play their roll so the team can produce results.

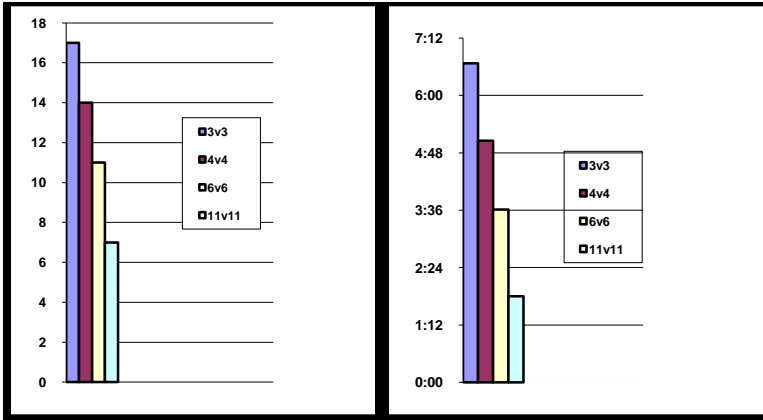
Closer to home in Montana, local clubs that have attempted to do this have experienced great success at U11 and U12 with their ‘stacked’ teams, but those teams constantly struggle when moving to U13 and above where a larger roster is required and all the players that were overlooked are required to step in. You will constantly hear players that are U11 and U12 who played on those teams say “I’m a defender” or “I’m a forward” when we should be teaching them how to be “soccer players.”

80% of youth soccer players that end up playing on a college soccer team play a different position then they did in club, or in high school

Bozeman Blitz is the only local competitive club that has a Micro program - so we can develop players from the start - the only local youth club that has USSF ‘C’ license, ‘B’ license, and ‘Youth’ licensed coaches, and the only local club who has committed themselves to the development of EVERY youth player. Not the select few.

Every player develops at their own level, and the best player at U10 will not necessarily make them the best player at U16, just like the weakest player at U10, with proper instruction, will not stay that way throughout their career. With this cornerstone belief, Bozeman Blitz will never form select teams, favoring the advanced over the weaker, at these ages but rather provide the best product in Montana for every player and will nurture them throughout their entire time playing soccer.

## What is Small Sided Soccer?



**Ball Contacts During  
a 10 min Period of a Game**

**Time (mins) Individual Has Ball in  
40 min Game**

Small sided games (SSG) are any games played with less than eleven players aside and are the best way for players to combine nearly all elements of the game. The fewer the players on the field, the more game-conditioned touches on the soccer ball per player. These touches also all come in a 'realistic' and 'live' environment with the addition of tactical applications. This is where the enjoyment happens and after 60 minutes of high activity, combined with structured repetition, the players learn and go home HAPPY!

11v11 soccer is an adult game devised by and for adults to play. The 11 a-side game routinely plays structured formations - defense, midfield and forward. Playing 8 a-side games have the same structure but players are more able to move from position to position, from defense to offence making the game exciting for them. **The smaller field and smaller number of players on the field will help the players to develop their technique because they will have more touches of the ball.** Because there are fewer players on the field there will be extra space, which will give the player more time to make decisions, this will help develop the tactical side of the game. In a small sided soccer game rules such as throw-ins, free kicks, and goal kicks can still apply.

From a player perspective all players can have more opportunities to attack (develop and identify goal scorers earlier) and all players will recognize that they will have to defend as well. From a coaching perspective organizing players during the match is far less

stressful and practice time is not occupied with trying to demonstrate an 11 a-side picture. Valuable training time can be spent on technique and small sided tactics.

### Why small-sided games?

- We want our youth to have more touches on the ball and become more creative with it.
- We want our players to develop an understanding of tactical play and solving problems on the field.
- We want our youth to get quality instruction from the coach; less players on the squad = easier for novice coach.
- Allows more opportunities to observe and analyze the individual and collective responses of players under quick decision-making conditions in a simple environment.
- More space + fewer numbers = less bunching. Enhance positioning awareness
- Players under twelve are routinely structured into formal positions at ages when their spatial awareness do not lend themselves to a practical understanding of larger group tactics.
- More playing time, which encourages maximum individual participation → more individual involvement thereby improves fitness
- Want our youth to be more involved in the game including transition from defending to creating attacking opportunities
- More opportunities for youth to score goals! (Pure excitement!) → improves self-esteem and self-confidence
- The small sided environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our youth players; it's a fun environment that focuses on player development.

*"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."*

- Michael 'Air' Jordan



## **What are the training priorities of small sided soccer?**

### Developmental Soccer Training Priorities

The number one objective of a Small Sided Development environment is to develop players. Players grow and develop at different rates. Just because a player isn't the strongest, fastest or most technical player today, does not mean they cannot grow and develop into the great player of the future.

### ***Technical Skills***

Establishing the foundation. Develop individual skills under pressure of time, space and an opponent. Increase technical speed.

- ✓ Passing (long, short, inside of foot, crosses)
  - Proper technique for instep, inside and outside. Work on short and long.
- ✓ Receiving/Controlling (balls on ground, balls in air)
  - Body behind ball, cushion ball (ground, bouncing, and air). All surfaces from partner on the move.
- ✓ Dribbling (beating challenges from front, behind, side)
  - Risk taking. Moves to beat your opponent. Keeping possession shielding and spin turns: changing speed and direction.
- ✓ Finishing (instep, inside of foot, volleys, half volleys, headers)
  - Proper striking of the ball plant foot, toe down, ankle locked, strike ball with instep and follow through. Hitting moving balls.
- ✓ Heading (basic introduction to proper technique)
- ✓ Individual Defending.

### ***Tactical***

- ✓ Basic principles of play.
- ✓ Promote attacking soccer, i.e. 1v1 duals.
- ✓ 1v1 - 3v3 games to develop technical skills.
- ✓ First defender (pressure) and Second Defender (cover)
- ✓ Combination play (wall pass, takeover, overlap)
- ✓ Where to Support
- ✓ Possession (small games 2v1, 3v1, 4v2).
- ✓ All training should involve transition

### ***Mental***

- ✓ Create fun in practice environments.

- ✓ Introduction of competition to training environments.
- ✓ Encourage decision-making.
- ✓ Increase demands.
- ✓ Discipline.
- ✓ Begin to create students of the game. Encourage players to watch games on television; take your team to college games or to watch older teams in the league.
- ✓ Training Focus of learning and enjoyment.

### ***Physical***

- ✓ All fitness is done with the ball or is agility based.
- ✓ Focus on developing player coordination and balance with ball.
- ✓ Sessions devoted to 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 games to develop technique with the main focus on attacking.
- ✓ Encourage players to go to goal as often as possible.



*“One reason small-sided games are so good is because they force players to defend and attack. Very much of what my father did in practice replicated the street soccer he grew up with in the streets of Argentina. Street soccer usually meant small-sided games. In a small space, players have to make quick decisions on the ball and be able to handle it under pressure, because an opponent is usually close by. And you can’t hide in small-sided soccer. If you’re not marking opponents when they have the ball, they’ll capitalize quickly. When your teammate has the ball, you need to make yourself available or he’ll be cornered quickly.”*

- Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain

## Synopsis (Studies) on the Topic of Small Sided Soccer:

### Study #1 – Manchester United FC

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.

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 – California Youth Soccer

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).

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%
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 – German Football Association**

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

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

#### **Study #4 – US Olympic Development Program (ODP)**

##### **Why is training more important for young players than game playing?**

During a major international tournament (11-a-side) with FIFA-3 substitution rules (three changes with no re-entry), the individual time of possession for 90-minute games ranged between 20 seconds and three minutes, with an average of one and a half to two minutes possession time per player. (Bangsbo and Pietersen,2004)

In a study of 1500 ODP level female players, the average number of games reported played over the previous twelve months was 116. With an average game duration of 80-minutes and a maximum roster of 18, and with the ball out of play for an average of 33%, the typical player would experience 1.5 minutes of active play per game for a total of 174 minutes per year. Less than 3 hours of ball contacts! (Turner, 2003)

Under FIFA-3 substitution rules, a young soccer player competing in 100 games per year will only come into contact with the ball for a maximum of 300 minutes, or 5 hours. The recommended ratio of training sessions to games for 9-12 year-old players is 70% training and 30% games.

#### **Study #5 – SSG Study of Players in Scotland**

The University of Abertay Dundee conducted the following research by means of an observational analysis of small-sided games in Scotland. The purpose of the study using video analysis software (prozone) as our observational analytical tool was to collect data to compare the 4 vs. 4 game to the 7 vs. 7 and 11 vs. 11 game for U12 players.

More than fifteen years ago the move towards small-sided football was discussed at national level. In particular, the then, current Technical Director of the SFA, Andy Roxburgh (now Technical Director for UEFA) pioneered the small-sided game as the best means of developing the game for children. The small-sided games principle was based on sound educational and developmental evidence. Children learn in a progressive and sequential way using a building block approach. According to existing research the belief is very much that the 11-a-side game is a game designed by adults for adults and should be seen as the last part of the learning journey. Therefore, the 7-a-side game is the intermediate step and the 4 v 4 game is the first step in the ladder. According to current research (Winter, 2005; Insight, 2004; Manchester United, 2003),

the ability of children to make decisions in a difficult, ever changing environment will be dictated by their developmental age, their preparation and the complexity of the situation. Professional educators and football coaches from around the world are agreed that the small-sided game is the best developmental tool for under 12's considering all the information. Also, the use of the 4 and 7 a side games are the best means of teaching the technical and tactical [decision making] parts of the game in preparation for the adult game.

Many believe that the large size of an eleven-a-side pitch, even at its smallest dimensions is too big for children due to the fact that they spend large amounts of time running around or standing still without even touching the ball with very limited passing interaction as well as skill and technical development. The limited time a child touches the ball will not allow appropriate time to develop the basic skills of which many of our international counterparts carry out so successfully. Ultimately, this will result in relatively low skill levels amongst young players in Scotland, which in turns leads to a number of children becoming disenchanted and leaving the sport.



*"No-one gets an iron-clad guarantee of success. Certainly, factors like opportunity, luck and timing are important. But the backbone of success is usually found in old-fashion, basic concepts like hard work, determination, good planning and perseverance."*

- Mia Hamm

## **The Future of Small Sided Soccer**

All over the World soccer leagues have begun to realize...

- Soccer is viewed differently by younger players than older players
- Young players cannot fully grasp the complexity of 11v11 soccer and learn best through a progression of building blocks
- Without building blocks, many players are forced into more tactical situations bypassing technical and personal growth
- We set the youngsters up for failure if we continue at larger numbers for younger ages.

## **Keeping Development Soccer Simple**

The Small Sided Game provides the best environment for youth players to develop soccer skills and techniques. When coaching, officiating or parenting remember to keep the game simple. Over complicating can lose the flow of the game, in turn inhibiting development. Encourage the players to discover the love of the game through the game.

In addition a small sided game is a great teacher.

The teaching of the game and the organization of the practices will require time for everyone to familiarize themselves with the game. After a week or two, however, there should be no difficulties.

Be Patient! The principles of the game are right. The game is right. The rewards will be in the children's enjoyment of playing and their positive development.

*“Championships are the result of development, but development is not a result of championships”*



**“Heading” in the Right Direction**