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## US Soccer Small Sided Games - Embrace The Changes (In this article Small Sided Games = SSG's)

An article by Neil M. Smart: Director of Smart Soccer submitted December 13, 2015

A recent announcement from US Soccer mandated a new approach to age groupings (not addressed in this blog) and a new structure of SSG's. The result has been much healthy, not to mention heated, discussion as clubs, coaches, parents and players come to terms with a new reality. One aspect of the new SSG's approach is the stipulation that players who are u8 or younger will now play 4 v 4 games with no goalkeeper. Having worked with grass roots players for many years I am firmly in agreement with this move - it is a player oriented decision.

For many years many professional coaches, including myself, have advocated for such a SSG approach, particularly among the younger players. The benefits of SSG's are many, and differ depending on the age and level of the players. Benefits for the younger (4 v 4) ages include more touches on the ball, more involvement in the game and an emphasis on player development over positional responsibility. In addition to these player benefits volunteer parent coaches will have a less daunting task with simplified rules and an emphasis on playing and having fun over winning games.

### **Author's Note**

*I have nothing against winning and losing I was a very competitive player (youth and adult) and always wanted to win every game I played in. However, this should not be the mentality for the beginner and younger players there is plenty of time for that mentality once we have instilled in them a skills base and a love for the game.*

Of course there will be challenges, there always are. The most anticipated obstacle will be parents who feel their child is 'beyond' playing 4 v 4 and needs to 'move up and be challenged' Accepting this may apply to the occasional player of rare talent, for the large majority of u8 and younger players this new approach is where they should be. If players are allowed (by their parents) to sample and enjoy this new SSG environment they will have fun and thrive – I speak from considerable experience on this.

So all things considered I am convinced that the correct implementation of the new SSG's structure, over the long term, will produce better players with an enhanced understanding of the game.

To parents or coaches who might be skeptical about the new changes, in particular for u8 and younger, my plea to you would be 'give it a chance' – you may end up enjoying it as much as the kids!

Thank-you for taking the time to read and I welcome comments and feedback at the below e-mail.

Cheers

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