

Fitting Practices to Ages

Game formats can easily be adjusted for each level

The U.S. Soccer Federation has made these recommendations for formats for the best practices for youth development:

- To promote the implementation of small-sided games as the vehicle for match play for players under the age of 12 throughout the United States.
- To promote and encourage an appropriate developmental environment for players that is based on both age and ability characteristics.

Recommendations by age group

U-6

- Game form – 4 v. 4 (3 v. 3 is an option)
- Game duration – 4 x 8 minutes
- Substitution – free
- Goalkeeper status – none required
- Field size – 4 v. 4 (40 x 25 yards) or for 3 v. 3 (30 x 20 yards)
- Ball size – 3

U-8

- Game form – 5 v. 5 (4 v. 4 is an option)
- Game duration – 2 x 20 minutes
- Substitution – free
- Goalkeeper status – use last defender as goalkeeper in 5 v. 5 (no goalkeeper used in 4 v. 4)
- Field size – 5 v. 5 (45 x 30 yards) 4 v. 4 (40 x 25 yards)
- Ball size – 3

U-10

- Game form – 7 v. 7 (6 v. 6 is an option)
- Game duration – 2 x 25 minutes
- Substitution – free
- Goalkeeper status – players rotate as goalkeeper in game
- Field size – 60 x 40 yards
- Ball size – 4

U-12

- Game form – 9 v. 9 (8 v. 8 is an option)
- Game duration – 2 x 30
- Substitution – free
- Goalkeeper status – goalkeepers share time in order of priority
- Field size – 100 x 50 yards
- Ball size – 4

U-14

- Game form – 11 v. 11
- Game duration – 2 x 35
- Substitution – no re-entry in half
- Goalkeeper status – goalkeepers chosen based on ability
- Field size – 110 x 60 yards (minimum)
- Ball size – 5

U-16/U-18

- Game form – 11 v. 11
- Game duration – 2 x 40 or 2 x 45
- Substitution – no re-entry
- Goalkeeper status – goalkeepers chosen based on ability
- Field size – 110 x 70 yards/20 x 70 yards (minimum)
- Ball size – 5

Development of goalkeepers

- The implementation of goalkeepers in youth soccer is an issue that creates considerable discussion among coaches. Requiring a player to be only a goalkeeper at too early an age may have a negative effect and eliminate him/her from future soccer participation.
- Children grow at different rates and times. It is impossible to predict who will be the best goalkeeper at age 20 when they are age 10. Early selection as a goalkeeper may not be in the player's best long-term interest.
- Development of a goalkeeper must be carefully monitored and conducted. The progressive teaching of technical skills is important given concerns for safety at this position.

Recommendations:

- U-6 – No goalkeeper required for 3 v. 3 or 4 v. 4 games.
- U-8 – No goalkeeper for 4 v. 4. Use the last defender for 5 v. 5 game.
- U-10 – Rotate players on the team as goalkeeper.
- U-12 – Goalkeeper is identified within the team; goalkeepers share time in a priority order determined by the coach.
- U-14+ – Goalkeeper chosen on ability and contribution to the team.

Maximum competition

- Multiple games being played on one day or one weekend and their effect on the quality of the experience and development of the individual player.
- Playing schedules that include so many tournaments and games that there is never an "off season" for players.

Recommendations:

For tournament managers and schedulers:

- Players allowed to play a maximum of one full-length game plus overtime period per day per weekend (maximum two games per weekend).

- Where multiple games are a necessity:
 - Schedule full-length games with a day of rest between games;
 - Play shortened halves for games played on back-to-back days;
 - For players U-14 a maximum of 100 minutes of competition per day;
 - For players U-15 and older a maximum of 120 minutes per day
- Kick-off times for games should allow players reasonable opportunity to prepare properly for competition. This encompasses rest and recovery, nutrition and adequate time to warm up.

Coaches prioritizing events:

- Objectives are identified and a seasonal plan is developed that balances practice, competition, rest and recovery.
- The best interests of the player must be considered when scheduling competition. The quality and the choice of the events must be carefully considered when developing a seasonal plan.