

U6

Coach's Guide

(3v3)



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ASC's Small-Sided Soccer Program

In January 1996, the Board of Directors of the Alameda Soccer Club (ASC) unanimously voted in favor of phasing in a progressive program of small-sided games for younger players. The intent is to help kids learn skills faster and have more fun playing and practicing soccer. The program reduces the number of kids playing on the field (or "side"). Playing with fewer teammates and opponents has lots of benefits for kids, some of which are spelled out below. As they move from Under-6s to Under-7s and Under-8s kids will remain in the small-sided program and continue learning a style of soccer that's enjoyable to watch and satisfying to play.

The Small-Sided Soccer program has been implemented in three phases. It began with the 1996 season, when the Under-6 age group played games with three players on a side (3 vs. 3). In 1997 Under-7 kids played with five players on a side (including a goalkeeper). The program was fully implemented in 1998 with Under-8s also playing 5 vs. 5 games.

More Soccer Fun / More Soccer Learning

In creating this program, ASC acted on the advice of the overwhelming majority of experienced soccer coaches and educators, who have for years been saying that small-sided soccer is the best format for younger players. When playing with only two or three teammates, younger players have many more touches on the ball and participate in the game more fully. This increases their enjoyment and learning of soccer. Small-sided play also reduces a complex game to its basic features, such as the triangle, which are more readily understood by kids. Fewer players also reduces the tendency for soccer to degrade to "bunchball" in which a pack of players swarm around the ball, kicking wildly while the more timid players watch anxiously from a safe distance. The program will accelerate kids' mastery of soccer, a key to their enjoyment of the game. Kids have more fun with something when they're successful at it.

By gradually adding players and complexity to the game with a step-by-step progression to larger-sided teams, ASC's developmental program will respond better to kids' changing mental and physical abilities. It always challenges kids at an appropriate level, rather than overwhelming them. It enables kids to better handle game situations on their own, without needing constant intervention from adults. In small-sided soccer, the game itself is the most effective teacher.

The Alameda program is based upon successful programs in Fremont, Almaden, and other Bay Area youth soccer clubs. These, in turn, are largely based upon Tony Waiters' *Micro-Soccer* and *Three Steps to Eleven* programs for players under the age of 12. Waiters recommends that players spend two seasons at each step of a small-sided progression. This establishes "a solid base of skills development and game understanding...in a non-intimidating fun environment."

Your Chance to Get Involved

The ASC needs helpers for the small-sided program, and we especially encourage parents of U6, U7, and U8 players to be head coaches, assistant coaches, and game monitors. Even if you know nothing about soccer, you can get involved in this program. The club sponsors several clinics that show you how to run a practice and teach soccer skills. The emphasis on small-sided games is to let kids play with as little intervention as possible. As an involved and increasingly knowledgeable parent, you will be more and more valuable each year as you and your child progress through ASC's program.

Team Organization

- Each Under 6 3v3 team has a roster of 9 or 10 players.
- All teams are co-ed, in an effort to reduce competitive imbalance.
- Each team has one head coach and two assistants, each of whom acts as a "Game Monitor". Team parents may rotate as Game Monitors.
- U6 teams play on either Thursdays (4:30-5:30) or Sundays (1:30-2:30).
- Games begin the first week after Labor Day continue until the end of October (when Daylight Savings Time end).
- A post-season tournament is often held on the Sunday following the end of the regular season.
- Teams are free to practice prior to the start of the season. A practice or two is probably a good idea.

Equipment

Each coach is issued the following equipment for her/his team:

- A #3 soccer ball for use as a "Game Ball".
- Two goals (either street hockey or practice soccer goals).
- A number of small cones.
- A first aid kit.

All equipment except the Game Ball must be returned to the Alameda Soccer Club at the conclusion of the season.

Each player must use the following equipment:

- Soccer shoes or tennis shoes (no softball or baseball shoes with a toe cleat).
- Soccer shin-guards are mandatory.
- Socks which completely cover the shin-guards.
- Black shorts.
- An official Alameda Soccer Club jersey (reversible red/white). Your Age Group Coordinator will inform you of the store(s) carrying the ASC jersey.
- A #3 soccer ball.

Game Day

What Happens on Game Day

- All U6 3v3 games are played at fields within the City of Alameda. Check your schedule for your game time and field.
- Coaches should arrive early enough to set up a playing field (with provided cones and goals). See below for dimensions and layout. Your opposing coach will set up a playing field adjacent to yours.
- For the first half-hour, each team will practice on the field set up by their coach.
- Each coach will then split their team into two *squads*. See below (*Splitting Your Team Into Squads*) for guidelines on how to do this.
- Each team will provide two *Game Monitors* (one for each field), who will be on the fields, running the games. If sufficient parent volunteers are available, then the Head Coach need not also act as a Game Monitor, but can remain free to observe both games.
- For each squad, the coach or Game Monitor selects three (3) players to start the first game. These are all “field players” – there are no goalies in U6 soccer. Coaches must not permit players to simply guard the goal, but must encourage them to participate on both offense and defense.
- Each squad will then play a 10 minute 3 vs. 3 game against a squad from the other team. There is no half-time, break, or change of ends. Extra players are substituted “on the fly” so that all kids are given equal playing time. A Game Monitor from each team supervises each game on the field, and another parent on the sidelines manages player substitutions and the game clock. No scores are kept.
- Teams then take a 5 minute break for rest and water.
- Coaches again split teams into two more (different) squads, and another pair of 10 minute games are played.
- Snack time. Great games! See you next week!

Splitting Your Team Into Squads

The developmental range of skills and personality of Under 6 kids is perhaps the widest of all soccer age groups. Some kids already have skills learned from siblings, parents, or U6 last year. Many have never touched a soccer ball. Some kids possess a competitive nature which helps them wade into a pack of other players and emerge with the ball. Others are easily intimidated by aggressive play and tend to watch from a safe distance.

One of the goals of the Alameda Small-Sided Soccer program is to provide a format in which ***all kids*** can have fun and be successful. One of the ways this is achieved is through creatively dividing your team into squads in the following manner:

- For the **first** 10 minute game, coaches will divide their team into two squads: the first squad (Squad A) will be composed of the team's *more advanced* players, the second (Squad B) of the team's *less advanced* players. The two Squads A (more advanced) will play a 10 minute game and the two Squads B (less advanced) will also.

This works well for both squads. Those players who are playing with skill and confidence will benefit from playing alongside and against similar players. The fast pace of these games provides more touches on the ball and a greater chance to use their skills. Similarly, those players who have yet to develop soccer confidence will find games must less intimidating with the stronger players removed. These relatively weaker players will have the opportunity to do well and develop the confidence necessary to become strong players themselves.

Note to coaches – avoid referring to these squads by the terms “strong” and “weak” as kids may get hurt feelings. You should also shuffle the composition of the squads from week to week as the level of play of your kids improves.

- For the **second** 10 minute game, coaches will divide their team into two more squads, Squads C and D. These two squads will be of *equal skill levels*, with both more advanced and less advanced players assigned to each squad. The two Squads C will play a 10 minute game and the two Squads D will also.

This mechanism for creating squads **must** be followed by all coaches each week. This ensures that the developmental needs of all U6 players are met.

Keeping Games Fun – The Ideal Game

At the Under 6 level, our goals are: (1) having kids learn basic ball skills such as dribbling and kicking and, even more important, (2) making soccer so much fun that every kid will want to come back and play next year.

For four and five year olds, nothing is more fun than kicking the ball into the net for a goal. Development of offensive skills is also the first and most critical individual skill. Accordingly, our Small-Sided Soccer program is geared toward scoring goals. The rules we will use are aimed at providing scoring opportunities for every child.

From our perspective, the ideal U6 3 vs. 3 game will end with 10 goals scored by each side. While we don't keep score, the point is that we want to encourage wide-open games with lots of scoring. If that's not happening, then something is wrong which needs to be corrected.

No Goalies!

One fairly common problem occurs when a player decides to camp him or herself in front of the goal and act as a goalie. Sometimes the player won't leave the goal mouth even when the ball is in the other end of the field. The end result is that it becomes very difficult for attacking players to kick the ball into the guarded (and rather small) goal. They become frustrated and begin to feel that the defensive team is not playing fair. They are correct.

Positioning players in a solely defensive position (i.e. stationed in front of the goal) is not permitted in U6 small-sided games.

Coaches must teach their players to move into the offensive zone when their team is on the attack, and to fall back only when they lose possession of the ball. *Players should be taught to defend the ball and opposing players, not to block the goal mouth.*

If coaches or parents feel that the spirit of the "no goalie" rule is being violated, they should contact the Under 6 Coordinator or the Small-Sided Soccer Coordinator. If this becomes a persistent problem, then a rules change (for example, a penalty shot against an undefended goal) could be instituted.

If Games Become Too One-Sided

Occasionally, in spite of the best efforts of coaches, one squad will dominate the other and the score will become lop-sided. This is not a desirable situation and should be avoided. Note that, while we don't keep score, kids and parents have a very good idea how many goals each team has scored.

The Jack London Youth Soccer League, of which the Alameda Soccer Club is a part, has a rule for older age divisions (Under 10 and up) which addresses the problem by reducing the number of players on the field as games become more one-sided.

Under 6 takes a similar approach. When a squad has scored three more goals than their opponent, the coach or Game Monitor should act to reduce his/her team's scoring (by resting the more effective players or instructing certain players to pass instead of shoot, etc.). When the squad goes ahead by four goals, the squad will play with only two players. If the squad then goes ahead by five or more goals, they will play with only one player. See Rule 8, below.

While we hope that this rule proves unnecessary, we do think it critical that the U6 experience be a positive one. The feeling of crushing your opponent (or being crushed) is not one that we believe is a positive lesson for Under 6 kids.

Special Objectives of U6 Coaches

All coaches:

- Minimize competitive pressures at practices and games. Strongly encourage parents to do likewise. Remember that the emphasis of the Under 6 small-sided program is on promoting the player's enjoyment of the game and the development of his/her individual skills.
- Act as a facilitator, helping players to learn from the game itself. Create situations in which kids can learn by playing and enjoying themselves.
- Create realistic challenges that enable players to succeed. Adapt the challenges to the capabilities of the individual player. Help every child succeed.
- Give every child an equal opportunity to participate.
- Develop and reinforce players' basic individual skills: dribbling, kicking, trapping, and tackling. All 4, 5, and 6 year olds will want the ball and will naturally swarm around it. With only three players on a team, they will all have many opportunities on the ball.
- Develop the players' understanding of the triangle – the basic tactical configuration of soccer. Encourage attacking players without the ball to space away from teammates into supporting positions. Encourage players to communicate with each other.
- On goal kicks and kick-ins, encourage the use of a triangle, with one player going forward and the other going wide.
- Promote maximum contact with the ball for each player. Require each player to bring her/his own ball to every practice/game. Play games that require a ball for each player.
- Encourage kids to play creatively.
- Always remember that the game is the best teacher. Intervene very selectively to demonstrate correct techniques and to encourage players.
- Always promote players' enjoyment of the game.

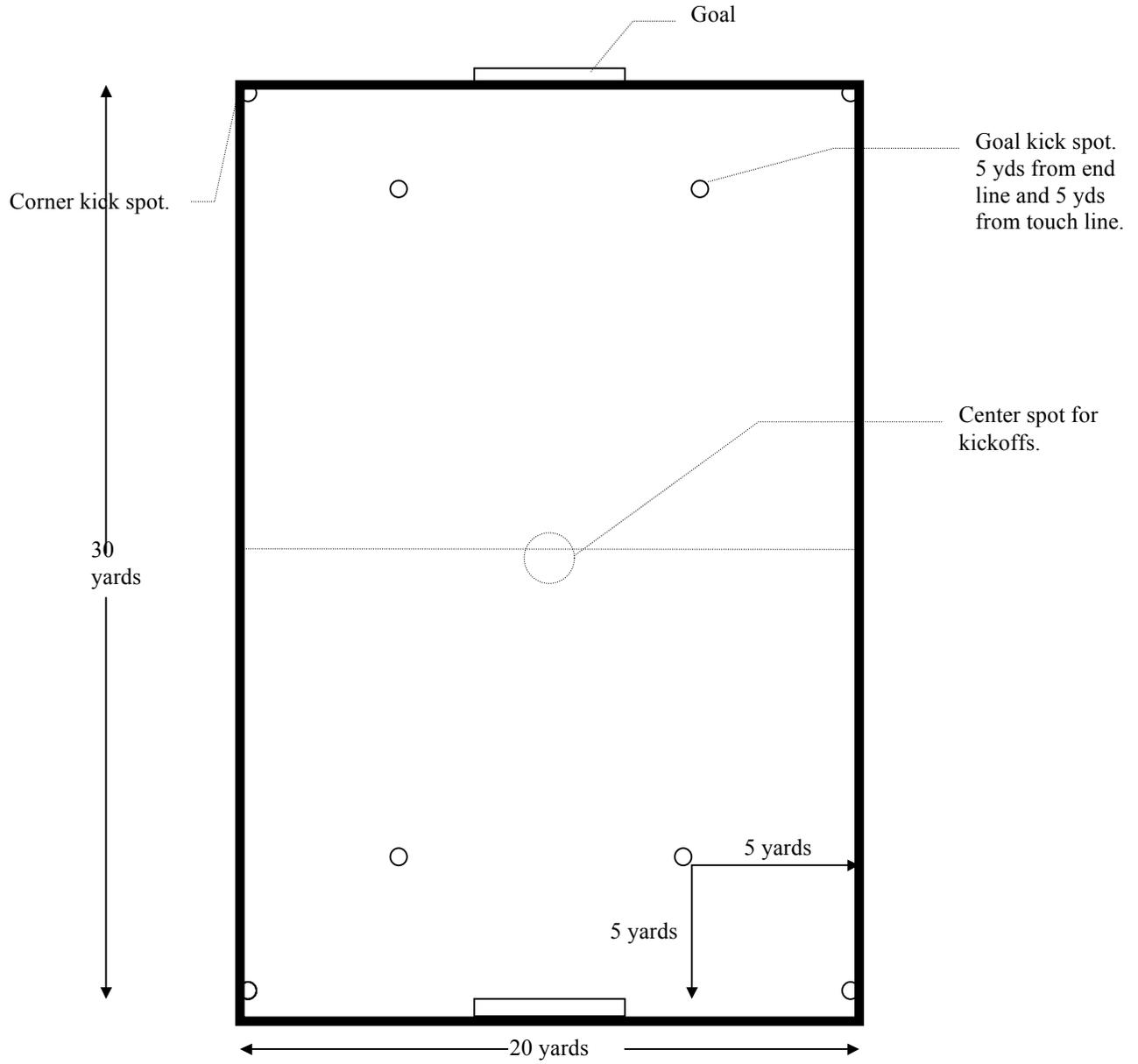
Support and Training of Coaches

- As part of the Under 6 Coach's Meeting (held in late August), the Alameda Soccer Club conducts a Small-Sided Soccer Coaching Clinic run by an outstanding soccer teacher. David Gold, an associate of Micro-Soccer guru Tony Waiters, taught our first clinic in 1996. In 1997 and 1998 our clinic was taught by Don O'Connell, a California Youth Soccer Association (CYSA) Staff Coach and a master of teaching soccer to kids in a fun way. The clinic explains the benefits of small-sided soccer for kids, outlines coaching objectives appropriate to the U6, U7 and U8 age groups, and offers specific practice techniques and small-sided games.
- The California Youth Soccer Association (CYSA), of which the Alameda Soccer Club is a member, provides a number of excellent coaching clinics. The entry-level "F" clinic is especially useful for U6 - U8 coaches. These clinics are primarily offered during the summer. See the ASC Newsletter for coaching clinic announcements or contact the Alameda Soccer Club's Coaching Development Coordinator.
- Micro-Soccer™ is introduced in the excellent book, *Coaching 6, 7 and 8 Year Olds* by Tony Waiters with Bobby Howe. Every new Under 6, Under 7, and Under 8 coach in the Alameda Soccer Club receives a copy of this book. The Waiters and Howe series includes several other books and a video.

Field Layout

Each coach is responsible for laying out an entire field on the assigned location. Two goals and sixteen small cones are provided to each coach for this purpose. Use all the cones to clearly mark the field boundaries. The field is marked as follows:

- Dimensions of approximately 30 yards long by 20 yards wide.
- Goals at each end.
- Cones in each corner to mark the location for corner kicks.
- Flat cones to mark the four spots for goal kicks, each 5 yards out from the goal line and 5 yards from the touch (side) line.



Small-Sided Soccer Rules

These rules are intended to simplify the game in a way that is readily intelligible to young children. In general, supervising adults should allow children to play freely with minimal interference. There is no need for uniformed referees or whistles. Use common sense to handle problematic situations not explicitly covered by the rules.

1. The ball: a standard #3 size soccer ball.
2. Number of Players
 - a. Maximum of three players on the field at one time (3 vs. 3).
 - b. There are no goalkeepers. All players are "field players." Positioning players in a solely defensive position (e.g. stationed in front of the goal) is not permitted.
 - c. Substitutions allowed at any time during the games (i.e. "on the fly" without a stoppage of play).
 - d. All children who are present should have equal playing time.
3. Officiating
 - a. Knowledgeable parents, older siblings, coaches, or assistants may serve as Game Monitors.
 - b. Games Monitors briefly explain rule infractions to offending player.
 - c. Game Monitors intervene as little as possible, allowing the game to flow.
 - d. No uniformed referees. No whistles.
4. Duration of the Game
 - a. Games between two squads are 10 minutes each. The clock shall not be stopped for any reason.
 - b. 5 minute break between games.
5. Start and Restart of Play
 - a. At the beginning of the game, the referee tosses a coin to determine which team kicks off. The other team chooses its half of the field.
 - b. The ball is kicked off from the exact center of the field. All players must be in their own half of the field. Defending players must be at least 3 yards from the ball when it is kicked. On a kick-off the ball must travel forwards.
 - c. Play is considered to stop when the ball crosses **completely** over the goal line or touch (side) line. If any part of the ball is on the field, then the ball is still in play.

- d. If the ball is out of play over the touch line, the team that last touched the ball loses possession. The other team puts the ball back into play with a kick-in (not a throw-in), which is classified as an indirect kick (i.e. a goal cannot be scored directly off a kick-in – it must first touch another player). The ball is placed on the touch line where it went out. The opposing team must be at least 3 yards from the ball when it is kicked in.
 - e. If the ball is out of play over the goal line, the team that last touched the ball loses possession.
 - i. If the attacking team gains possession, it puts the ball into play with a corner kick. Opponents must be 3 yards away when the ball is kicked.
 - ii. If the defending team gains possession, it puts the ball into play with a goal kick. This kick may be taken from either goal-kick spot. Opponents must be at least 3 yards away when the ball is kicked.
 - f. When the ball is out of play because a goal was scored, the team that defended re-starts the game with a kick-off from the center of the field (see 5b).
6. Method of Scoring
- a. When the attacking team kicks the ball completely across the goal line and between the goal posts, it scores a goal.
 - b. No official score is kept.
7. Fouls and Misconduct
- a. Fouls are as follows:
 - i. TRIPPING
 - ii. VIOLENT PLAY (striking, kicking, pushing, abusive language)
 - iii. HAND BALL (player uses hands or arms in a deliberate attempt to control the ball)
 - iv. POOR SPORTSMANSHIP (including disruptive behavior, failure to retreat 3 yards from a free kick, excessive gloating after a goal, etc.)
 - v. SLIDE TACKLING (ASC does not permit slide tackling at this age level).
 - b. If a foul is committed, the Game Monitor or Coach will briefly explain the infraction to the responsible player.
 - c. A foul results in an indirect free kick for the team against which it was committed. A goal may not be scored on an indirect free kick until the ball has been touched by another player of either team. Opponents must be at least 3 yards from the ball when a free kick is taken. If the foul occurred within 3 yards of the offending player's goal, the indirect free kick is taken 3 yards from the goal.

8. One-Sided Games

- a. If one squad draws ahead by three goals or more, the team's coach or Game Monitor should use methods to reduce his/her team's scoring. This may include resting his/her most effective players and/or instructing certain players to remain in the defensive half.
- b. If one squad draws ahead by four goals, they will play with only two (2) players on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to three or less, the squad may again use three (3) field players.
- c. If one squad draws ahead by five or more goals, they will play with only one (1) player on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to four, the squad may again use two (2) field players.

The Role of the Game Monitor

The Game Monitors play an important role in making small-sided soccer work. The most important job of the Game Monitor is to keep the game moving quickly. The vast majority of your actions will be re-starting the game after the ball has gone out of play or after a goal. Here are a few guidelines to follow:

- **Enforce the Sidelines**
It's tempting to let play continue even though the ball has gone over the touch line (side line) or end line. Our experience is that this will quickly get out of control, with play continuing far afield or even on the next field. Instead, you should strictly enforce the field's boundaries. Kids will quickly learn to stop play when the ball goes over the touch line or end line.
- **Quick kick-ins.**
Try to get the ball back in play quickly. Encourage the player kicking in the ball to do so quickly. One reason why kick-ins can take a long time is that all three players will want to take the kick-in. As your team's representative on the field, you get to pick who takes it. Talk with your coach about how to pick the kicker (e.g. strict rotation, whoever's closest, etc.).
- **Positive Encouragement**
Try to encourage the players on the field (both on your team and the other) with lots of positive comments. It'll be hard to resist a little on-field coaching, and that's okay. But be sure to keep the comments positive.
- **One-Sided Games**
If a game begins to become one-sided, then you should take action or, if the other team is dominating, ask the other Game Monitor to take action. Rule 8, above, is used to remedy one-sided games.
- **Substitutions**
Get a parent on the sideline to keep track of the time and handle substitutions.
- **Have Fun!**
If the kids are having fun, then you're doing a great job. Maybe it's time to consider coaching!

Substitution Patterns

The following substitution patterns ensure equal playing time for a 3 vs. 3 game in which the squad has 4 players.

Rotation Schedule		Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4
Start	(0:00)	IN	IN	IN	out
1 st Change	(2:30)	out	IN	IN	IN
2 nd Change	(5:00)	IN	out	IN	IN
3 rd Change	(7:30)	IN	IN	out	IN

The following substitution patterns ensure equal playing time for a 3 vs. 3 game in which the squad has 5 players.

Rotation Schedule		Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4	Player 5
Start	(0:00)	out	out	IN	IN	IN
1 st Change	(2:00)	IN	IN	IN	out	out
2 nd Change	(4:00)	IN	out	out	IN	IN
3 rd Change	(6:00)	out	IN	IN	IN	out
4 th Change	(8:00)	IN	IN	out	out	IN

Small-Sided Soccer Procedures

The procedures, guidelines, and rules described in this manual are essentially unchanged from those used for the Under 6 division in 1996 and 1997. Last year's coaches felt that the Under 6 season was extremely successful and required little change.

The Small-Sided Soccer Coordinator, in concert with several experienced Under 6 coaches, is responsible for rules interpretations and decisions about the play of Under 6 soccer.

If you have any questions about how U6 Small-Sided Soccer is played or suggestions about how it might be improved, please contact the ASC's Small-Sided Soccer Coordinator.