

U7&U8 Coach's Guide (5v5)



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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. This will 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 5v5 team has a roster of 7 or 8 players.
- Under 7 and Under 8 teams may be *All-Boys*, *All-Girls*, or *Mixed*. All-Girls teams play only among themselves and consist of teams with both Under 7 and Under 8 girls. All-Boys and Mixed teams are "age pure" (i.e. with separate Under 7 and Under 8 divisions) and generally play a common schedule.
- There is a ten day regular seasons, with games played each Saturday from the first Saturday after Labor Day until mid-November. There may be a post-season tournament.
- Teams typically have one 1-hour practice per week, starting in mid-August until the end of the season. Contact you Age Group Coordinator to reserve a practice time and field.

Equipment

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

- A #3 soccer ball for use as a "Game Ball".
- A number of small cones.
- A first aid kit.
- A goalkeeper's shirt.

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 5v5 games are played on Saturdays at several sites within the City of Alameda. Check your schedule for your game time and field.
- If you're the first game of the day on a particular field, then you must help set up the goals, nets, and corner flag. Try to have these set up at least 30 minutes before the scheduled start of the game. In past years, the first game's home team was responsible for picking up the nets at a nearby house. Check with your Age Group Coordinator to find out how nets will be handled.
- At game time, you will send your team out for the first of two 20 minute games. You'll need 4 field players and a goalkeeper.
- If you're the Home Team, you need to provide the Game Monitor for the first game. This can be a parent or soccer-experience sibling. It should not be the coach. Another parent on the sideline (or the coach) should act as timekeeper.
- Halfway into the first game (i.e. at the 10 minute mark), a one minute timeout is called and both teams **must** switch their goalkeepers. Each week you must play four different goalkeepers for no more than 10 minutes each.
- At the end of the first 20 minute game there is a 5 minute water/rest break.
- Then a second 20 minute game begins, with the teams switching ends. You use your third goalie of the day. The Visiting Team now provides the Game Monitor.
- Halfway through the second game, another timeout is called and you send in your fourth goalkeeper of the day.
- After the second game is concluded, move your team off to the side so that the next game can get going. It's time for snacks and congratulations!
- If this was the last game of the day on the field, both teams take the goals down and locks them up. The Home Team may also be responsible for dropping the nets and flags off at the appropriate nearby house.

Special 5v5 Rules and Objectives

Everyone a Goalie!

Under 7 and Under 8 is when kids are first exposed to the goalkeeper position. The goalkeeper is, in fact, the most important player on the field because most of the mistakes he or she makes result in a goal. Because of this, many coaches have elected to only play their “best” players in goal, even at the U7 and U8 levels. This, however, is the age when every kid should be given the opportunity to play in goal (and every other position too!) and discover whether they like it and are good at it.

We encourage coaches to give each of your players a substantial opportunity to play in goal this season. To further this objective, **you are required to play four different goalkeepers each week**. Each of these kids must play no more than 10 minutes in goal each week.

This rule should provide coaches with the tools to get all of their kids to try goalkeeping at the U7/U8 level before wins, losses, and the competitive pressures of the older age groups make it too scary for kids and risky for coaches. Hopefully you and the program will emerge with many more confident goalkeepers than in years past.

What's in a Game?

Rather than playing a single 40 minute soccer game, we have instead decided to play two 20 minute games. Why?

Starting a second game fresh allows a team which was hopelessly losing the first game to put that behind them and start off even in the second game. While we don't keep scores at this level, everyone (especially the kids) knows and may become discouraged when games become one-sided.

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 if at all possible. 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.

5v5 U7/U8 takes a similar approach. When a team has scored three more goals in a single game than their opponent, the coach 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 team goes ahead by four goals, the team will play with only four players. If the team then goes ahead by five, they will play with only three players, etc. See Rule 9, below.

While we hope that this rule proves unnecessary, we do think it critical that the small-sided soccer 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 7 or Under 8 kids.

Special Objectives of U7 and U8 Coaches

All coaches:

- Minimize competitive pressures at practices and games. Strongly encourage parents to do likewise. Remember that the emphasis of the 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.
- As players reach the ages of 7, 8, and 9, they learn how to share with others – not only their toys, but also the soccer ball! At this stage, passing and team play may be learned.
- 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 throw-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

- In 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.
- Karl Dewazien's staff at CYSA 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 Clubs'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.

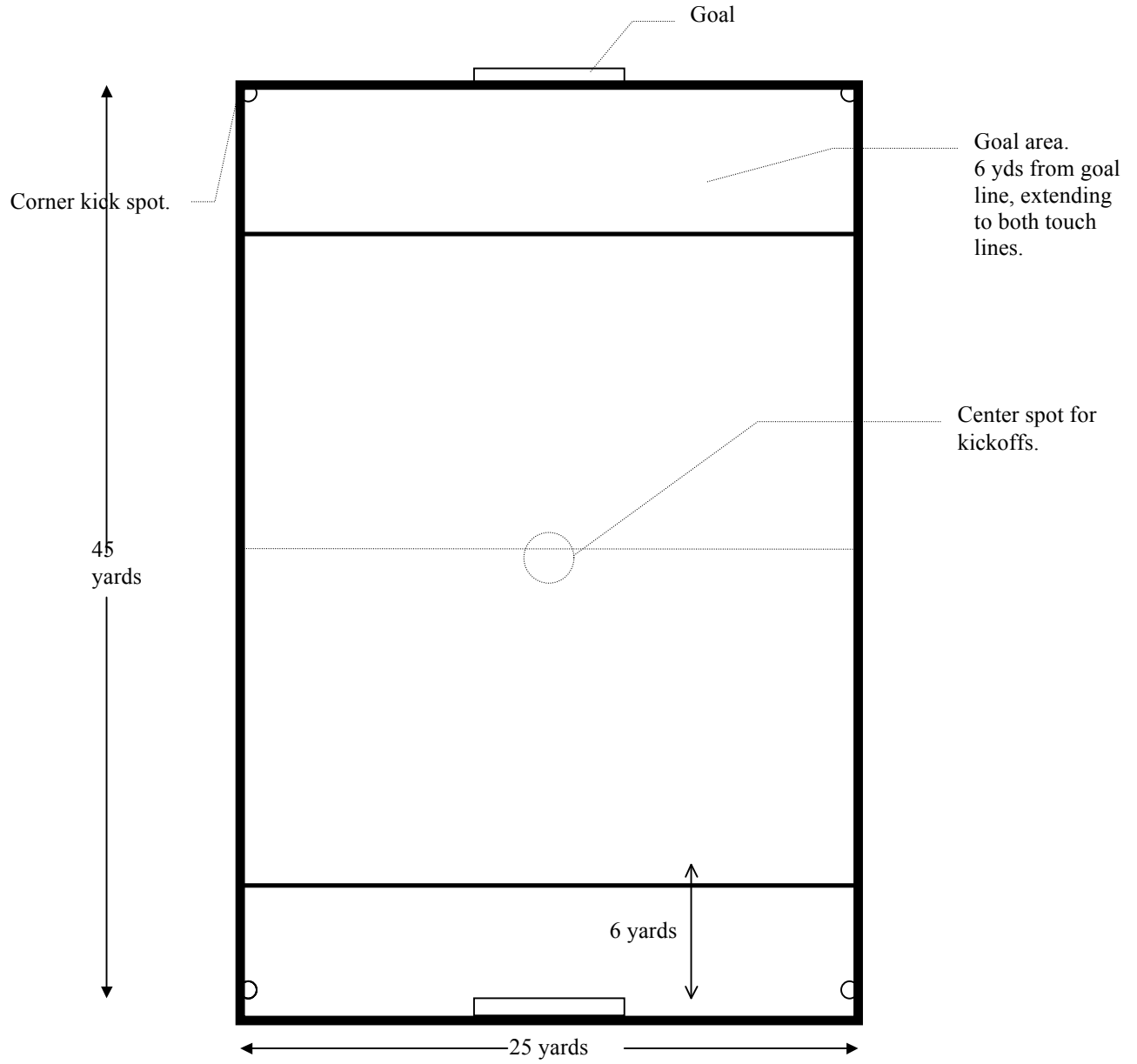
5v5 Field Layout

Fields will be lined prior to your game as per the diagram on the next page.

For the first game on the field (typically the 9am game) both teams are responsible for setting up the goals, nets, and flags. At the conclusion of the last game of the day, both teams are responsible for deconstructing the goals. The home team may also be responsible for picking up or dropping off the nets and flags at a nearby house.

5v5 fields will be marked as follows:

- Dimensions of 45 yards long by 25 yards wide.
- 5' x 15' metal goals.
- A goal area 6 yards from the goal line and extending to both touch (side) lines.
- A center circle 5 yards in radius.



5v5 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 five players on the field at one time (5 vs. 5).
 - b. One of the five players is the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper must wear a jersey which is distinctive from both teams. If no player on a team wears a distinctive goalkeeper jersey, then no player may use his or her hands.
 - c. Substitutions are allowed at **any** stoppage of play, with the permission of the Game Monitor.
 - 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. Each team supplies the Game Monitor for one 20 minute game per week. The Home Team supplies the Game Monitor for the first game, with the Visiting Team's Game Monitor working the second game.
 - c. Games Monitors briefly explain rules infractions to offending player.
 - d. Game Monitors intervene as little as possible, allowing the game to flow.
 - e. If licensed referees are assigned by the Club, then they act as Game Monitors for both games.
4. Duration of the Game
 - a. At the scheduled Saturday game time, the teams play two (2) consecutive 20 minute games, for a total of 40 minutes of soccer. The clock shall not be stopped for any reason, except those listed below.
 - b. At the end of 10 minutes of play, a one minute "goalkeeper change timeout" is called. See 7d, below.
 - c. 5 minute break between games.
 - d. Teams switch ends 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 5 yards from the ball when it is kicked. On a kick-off the ball must travel forwards.
- c. Play is considered stopped 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 throw-in (not a kick-in, as in Under 6).
- 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 5 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 anywhere within the 6 yard goal area or on the goal area line itself. Opponents must be at least 5 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. Goalkeepers

- a. The goalkeeper may handle the ball only when it is within the marked 6 yard line (the "goal area").
- b. The goalkeeper may throw, punt, kick or dribble a ball after it has been picked up.
- c. A player may play as goalkeeper for no more than 10 minutes total in the two games. Each team **must** employ at least 4 different goalkeepers each week.
- d. A brief (1 minute) "goalkeeper change timeout" will be called in the middle of each 20 minute game for the sole purpose of changing goalkeepers. Play should be stopped at the 10 minute mark of each game for this purpose. A sideline timekeeper should be used to call the timeout.

8. 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; includes goalkeeper handling the ball outside of the goal area)
 - iv. POOR SPORTSMANSHIP (including disruptive behavior, failure to retreat 5 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 5 yards from the ball when a free kick is taken. If the foul occurred within 5 yards of the offending player's goal, the indirect free kick is taken 5 yards from the goal. On an indirect free kick, defending and attacking players may form a "wall" so long as the wall is at least 5 yards from the ball.

9. One-Sided Games

- a. If one team draws ahead in a game 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 team draws ahead by four goals, they will play with only four (4) players on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to three or less, the team may again use five (5) field players.
- c. If one team draws ahead by five or more goals, they will play with only three (3) players on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to four, the squad may again use four (4) field players.
- d. If one team draws ahead by six or more goals, they will play with only two (2) players on the field. When the goal differential is reduced to three, the team may again use three (3) 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 or end line. Our experience is that this will quickly get out of control, with play continuing far afield or 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.
- **Throw-Ins**
Try to encourage the player throwing in the ball to do so quickly. While it's tempting to ignore violations of the throw-in rule, kids will only learn the proper technique if we require it of them. In particular, whistle throws in which the back foot is off the ground at the instant of ball release and also insist that the throw come all the way over the head with both hands on the ball. When you do whistle a bad throw, quickly explain the error and allow the same player as many re-throws as it takes.
- **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**
One team pulls ahead by three or more goals, then notify the coach of the team which is ahead that she or he must take action according to Rule 9, above.
- **Timekeeping**
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 you should consider taking the Referee Class and becoming a licensed referee!

5v5 Small-Sided Soccer Procedures

Many of the procedures, guidelines, and rules described in this manual were discussed and approved by 5v5 coaches at the Alameda Soccer Club Coaches Meeting held on August 5, 1997. Others were derived from the highly successful 3v3 program used in the Under 6 age group in 1996.

The Small-Sided Soccer Coordinator, with input from experienced Under 7 and Under 8 coaches, is responsible for rules interpretations and decisions about the play of 5v5 soccer. If you have any questions about how 5v5 Small-Sided Soccer is played or suggestions about how it might be improved, please contact the ASC's Small-Sided Soccer Coordinator.