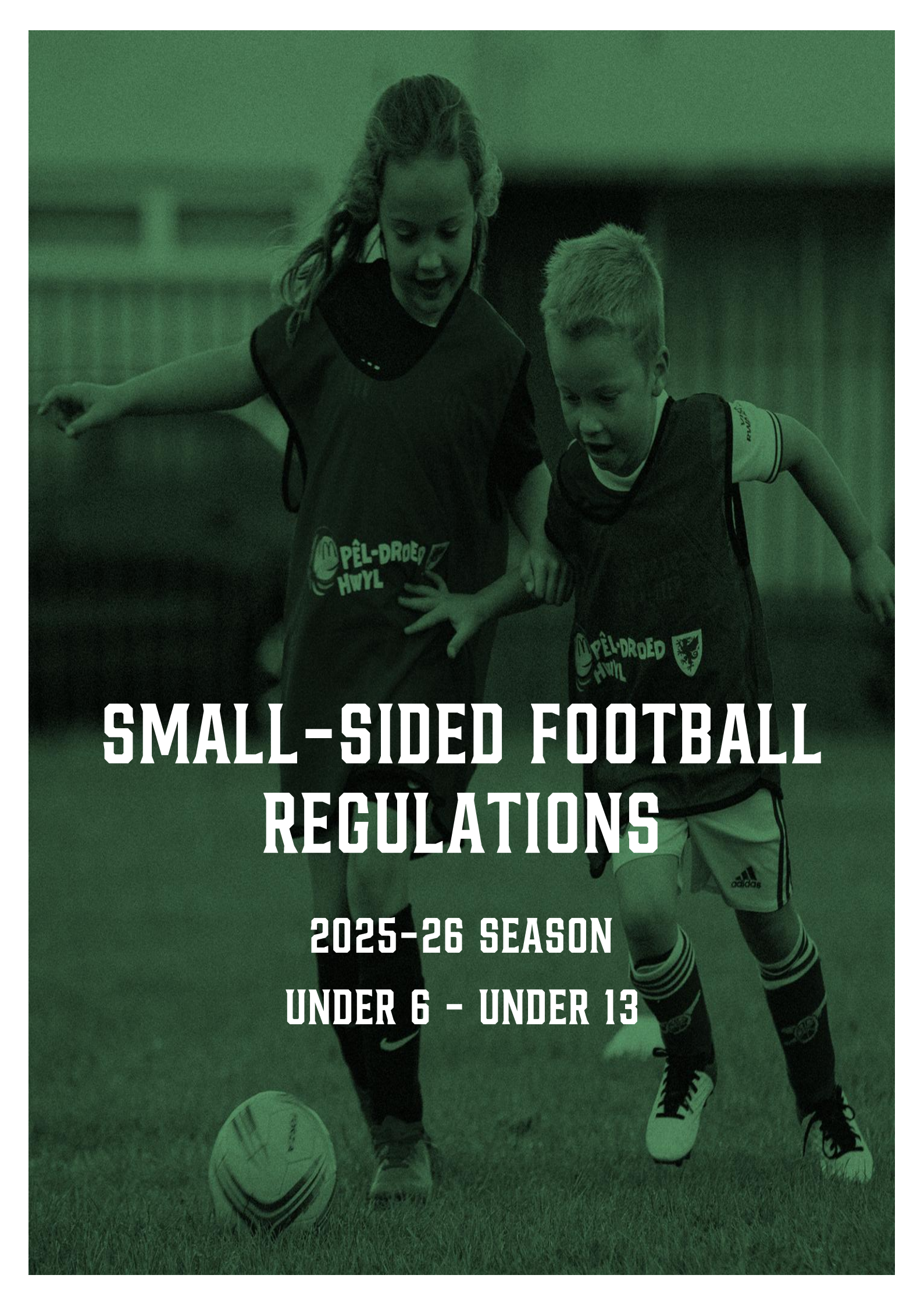




# **SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL REGULATIONS**

**2025-26 SEASON**

**UNDER 6 - UNDER 13**

# APPENDIX

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# SUPPORT RESOURCES

[Small-Sided & Junior Football webpage](#)

[Pitch Set-Up Examples](#)

[Heading guidance](#)

**Playing Format Video Guidance:**

- [Under 6 & 7](#)
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# FAW | SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

## INTRODUCTION

The Football Association of Wales (“FAW”) recognises that children do not perform the same as adults in an 11-a-side game. Therefore, a modified version is required to meet the developmental needs of young players while maintaining all the features and essence of the full game. Small Sided Football is recognised by the FAW as the only form of football in Wales for children under 13 years of age.

## WHAT IS SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

Small Sided Football is a modified version of the 11-a-side game. It gives children the chance to play real football, for a real team, whilst experiencing an enjoyable and fun introduction to football through small-sided games.

## MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

All available research shows that children have more fun and learn more playing a game within smaller teams. Small Sided Football is therefore ideal for boys and girls in terms of maximizing their enjoyment and technical/skill development.

## IF CHILDREN ARE TO ENJOY AND TAKE PART IN FOOTBALL THEY NEED TO:

- Take an active part in the game and have fun without any pressure from parents, coaches or managers.
- Learn to play within a team.
- Understand and observe the rules of football.
- Develop the skills and techniques to play football.
- Be able to take part whatever their ability.
- Have plenty of contact with the ball.

## KEY VALUES OF SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

Small Sided Football is for boys and girls aged 5 to 13 of all abilities who are interested in football. The FAW believes that children should learn how to compete to win fairly, skilfully and within the rules of the game. At this age striving to win is more important than the outcome, winning is not everything, making the effort is.

## SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL:

- Recognises that children do not perform and compete as adults and therefore its rules are adapted to meet the needs of children.
- Has all the features of real football for children.
- Recognises the value of competitiveness for children and provides an appropriate environment.



- Sets a standard and a framework of behaviour on and off the pitch.
- Is for boys and girls regardless of their ability.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- There is more contact with the ball in Small Sided Football leading to a better technique. In 11v11 the ratio of ball to outfield players is 1:20, because there are fewer players in Small Sided Football each player has more regular contact with the ball. More contact with the ball helps players practice technique and develop technique into a skill through 1v1 competition.
- Decision making is easier and occurs more often because of the small numbers involved. As a result, the players will gain a greater understanding of the game. The basic football situations are easier to see and simpler to solve.
- Because the ball is never far away from the player, the chance of developing concentration is greatly increased. Playing 11-a-side football, many children lose interest in the game because the ball goes out of their immediate vicinity, and they quickly become bored spectators.
- Fewer players, more space and simpler decisions will encourage more movement of players whatever the situation.
- More contact leads to more participation and usually, more enjoyment, success is easier to achieve.

## SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL IS THE BASIS OF ALL FOOTBALL

Small-sided games have been played for hundreds of years in the street, the playground, or on the beach and many professional teams use them as the basis for their coaching. They invariably lead to basic football situations, such as, 1v1, 2v2 and 3v3 so typical of the 11-a-side game. Small Sided Football, through its dynamic tempo, produces more vigorous exercise than 11-a-side football and so helps to improve children's core components of fitness – speed, agility, balance and coordination.

## ORGANISATION OF SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

The general aim of Small Sided Football is to provide a safe, supervised environment for children to enjoy their introduction to the game.

### 1. PLAYING SURFACE

- 1.1 Small Sided Football pitches must be specifically laid out on any suitable open spaces or conventional grass or synthetic surface pitches which can be converted for Small Sided Football.
- 1.2 There must be no debris or dangerous hazards either on the field of play or in the immediate surrounding area.
- 1.3 Markings must be laid out with the use of conventional lines, marker discs or small cones.

### 2. PLAYING EQUIPMENT

- 2.1 Children must wear footwear suitable to the surface being played on.
- 2.2 All children must wear suitable shin guards. these must be made of a suitable



- material to provide reasonable protection and covered by the socks. The FAW does not advocate the use of 'mini shin pads' as these do not provide suitable protection.
- 2.3 All jewellery must be removed.
- 2.4 Opposing teams must wear colours that distinguish them from each other – either football shirts or bibs can be utilised. Each goalkeeper must wear colours that are distinguishable from the other players. For under 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 age groups, there is no requirement for shirts or bibs to carry numbers for matches.
- 2.5 Wearing glasses in football:  
Due to the physical nature of football, there is a moderate risk of eye injury. Spectacles or goggles may mitigate the risk of injury and can also be worn by individuals who need to wear prescription lenses. The FAW recommend that players who need prescription lenses wear Polycarbonate lenses with an elasticised band when playing football.

## POLYCARBONATE LENSES

Polycarbonate lenses are made of a type of plastic that is more impact-resistant than standard plastic lenses. Polycarbonate lenses are also much thinner and lighter in weight. This is the most important property of all protective spectacles or goggles. Good polycarbonate is virtually unbreakable and will sustain an impact such as a ball or hand/finger. Frames should provide full coverage of the eye orbit and should not have adjustable metal nose pad arms.

Example of polycarbonate lenses with sports band



## SPORTS BAND

An elasticised band should secure the frame instead of temple pieces. Players must have something that will be firmly secured to the head so that the spectacles or goggles won't fall off. A frame with temple pieces will not hold tightly enough and as such, any impact with the ball and or another player could lift the frame off and potentially cause injury to the eye.

Although sports eyewear is intended to offer the best protection available, there is always the possibility that the wearer may sustain an eye or facial injury due to severe impact or because of the nature of the activity.

### 2.5.1 Under 6 – Under 11

The FAW recognise that at these ages it may not be possible for all children to wear specific lenses and allows for some flexibility with younger players to ensure everyone has the opportunity to play and not be excluded. In the absence of Match Officials in these age groups, this should be at the discretion of coaches and parental guardians. The FAW always recommend where possible using Polycarbonate lenses and should individuals choose not to use them the risk is culpable to the parental guardians.

### 2.5.2 Under 12 - Under 16

All players must follow the above guidelines and use Polycarbonate lenses with an elasticised band. It is important to note as stated in the Laws of the Game "A player must not use equipment or wear anything that is dangerous". It is the Match Officials duty to ensure the safety of all participants. As such, if they feel the glasses/frame pose a risk to other players and/or the wearer, they may not allow the glasses to be worn. You should always check the suitability of spectacles with



a registered optician, optometrist or medical practitioner. It might be useful to obtain a letter to confirm the spectacles adhere to the above guidelines which can be shown to a match official should they enquire about their suitability and safety. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to follow these guidelines a request for exemption should be made in writing to the relevant League and or Area Association to be considered in conjunction with medical advice.

## **GUIDELINES FOR MATCH OFFICIALS**

Match Officials should ensure that if a request has been made to wear glasses or goggles, as per the Laws of the Game they should be checked and must not be a danger to the wearer or any other player and should follow the above guidelines and Laws of the Game. As with all aspects of the application of the Laws of the Game, the 'spirit' and 'intention' of the Laws are crucial considerations, where this enables greater participation and enjoyment than might otherwise be the case.

### **2.6 Wearing hearing aids in football**

Players are permitted to wear hearing technology during football matches provided they are comfortable and securely fitted. The decision on whether to wear a hearing aid during a match is up to the player, not the game leader or referee. However, the game leader or referee has a responsibility under Law 4 of the Laws of the Game that if a device of this nature becomes loose when playing they will have to request that the player leave the field of play in order for it to be made secure.

## **3. ORGANISATION OF MATCHES, FESTIVALS AND FUN DAYS**

- 3.1 The FAW believe that the game of Small Sided Football provides children with the necessary introduction to competition. The game itself is a sufficient skill development challenge for children.
- 3.2 As a consequence, no league or cup competition must be organised (or will be sanctioned) involving teams operating at under 6 - under 11 age groups. This also applies to clubs and others that organise summer festivals where no competition element will be sanctioned at Under 6 - Under 11 age groups. The age group maximum playing formats also apply. Area Associations are responsible for sanctioning such events / festivals.
- 3.3 Under 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 - matches are played on a festival/round robin format with a minimum of four teams playing at a central venue, and a minimum of 3 teams at a club-based venue. Leagues and Coaches should ensure suitable breaks are provided between games. Results of festival/round robin matches at these age groups should not be published due to the non-competitive nature of small-sided football.
- 3.4 Clubs that enter multiple teams at small-sided festivals are expected to a mix of player abilities across all teams. For example, there should not be an 'A' and 'B' team made up of perceived strong and weaker players. This is to help ensure a positive playing experience for all participants within small-sided football where the focus should be on fun and skill development.
- 3.5 Under 12 and 13 - matches are played on a 'Home and Away' basis as determined by the organising League.
- 3.6 League and cup competitions may be organised for the 9v9 Small Sided Football format where children from Academic Year seven (7) and eight (8) are involved. For the avoidance of doubt, if leagues operate a two-year age band and a 9v9 fixture



involves a Year 6 player (U11), the offer can remain competitive.

- 3.7 All league programmes must be approved annually by the relevant Area Association.

- 3.7.1 **Under 12** - To help with phased introduction of competitive football for this age group, Leagues can organise a maximum of 24 weeks of formal competition. For the remainder of the season, matches must be non-competitive.

At this age group, Leagues must commence their season with an initial non-competitive block of fixtures to ascertain team ability prior to structuring an appropriate competitive offer. This will help to support development of ability banding leagues / divisions.

It is also important to note that Leagues can organise a number of fixtures during the same week. For example, a League could operate a fixture programme of 28 competitive matches over a period of 24 weeks. All junior leagues must submit their fixture programme to the relevant area association for approval to avoid excessive competitive matches.

- 3.7.2 **Under 13** – Where single age bands apply, Leagues can adopt a full competitive offer at this age group. Leagues operating two-year age bands where there is no under 12 programme, must provide an initial block of non-competitive fixtures followed by a maximum 24 weeks of competition. This is to ensure a phased approach into competition football following the small-sided festival format.

- 3.7.3 Where there is a single age band at under 13, Leagues can offer non-competitive 11v11 fixtures from 1<sup>st</sup> March in order to support the transition into Junior Football (under 14 – under 17).

- 3.8 Template resources are available to [download here](#) to assist with fixture schedules, pitch layouts and competition formats.

#### 4. **SEASON STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 For competitive age groups (Under 12 & Under 13) Junior Leagues can organise a calendar of matches that may commence in August and should conclude no later than 31st May.
- 4.2 Leagues can introduce a winter break or an alternative football offer such as Futsal.
- 4.3 Small-Sided Football Festivals (Under 6 – Under 11) can take place all year-round given there is no competition element to this format.

#### 5. **POSITIVE MATCH DAY CULTURE**

- 5.1 The FAW want to improve the match day culture and off-pitch behaviour of parents, coaches and guardians. As part of the campaign, the following practices must be introduced:

- 5.1.1 Smoking and Vaping is banned from the side-line.
- 5.1.2 Supportive side-lines where spectators are encouraged to applaud and praise both teams' efforts but not shout, call out in a negative way or coach.
- 5.1.3 Coaches may support players through questions that prompt them to think



for themselves but must not continually shout instructions during matches.

- 5.1.4 When playing matches, all players in the match day squad should participate in a minimum of 50% of the total playing time available. For example, at an under 10 festival where the total playing duration is 60 minutes, all players within the squad should play a minimum of 30 minutes each. This is to ensure that all participants have adequate playing opportunities to experience small-sided football, develop their skills and ultimately have an enjoyable experience.
- 5.1.5 To help provide adequate playing opportunities and to grow the game, clubs are encouraged to field more than one team if practically possible. Teams should not be made up of more than double the playing numbers for their respective age groups (for example, the under 8 age group that play the 5v5 format should have a maximum of 10 players per team).
- 5.1.6 All squad members to benefit from the experience of playing in all positions, including goalkeeper for the under 8 to under 11 age groups.
- 5.1.7 If teams are low on players and cannot field the correct number, then the other team should provide the additional player(s) or withdraw players to make the numbers even for the under 6 to under 11 age groups.
- 5.1.8 'Behind the Line, Behind the Team'. Leagues/clubs must:
  - Create a 'Buffer zone' that runs parallel to the pitch, ideally 2 metres from both touchlines, a smaller buffer zone can be used where space doesn't allow 2 metres.
  - Buffer zone should be marked portable crowd barriers, cones or an additional marked line.
  - Only players, designated coaches and 1st Aider allowed within zone.
  - All other spectators must watch from behind the buffer zone lines.
  - NO spectators are allowed to stand on the goal line or behind the goal.

## **6. OTHER FOOTBALL OFFERS**

- 6.1 All formats of the game that include players of small-sided game age must follow the principles set out in this document (e.g. Futsal, walking football).

## **7. HEADING / CONCUSSION**

- 7.1 Heading is rarely observed in games involving players aged 11 and under. Coaches should continue to emphasise dribbling, passing, retaining the ball and building from the back. To reduce further the instances of heading within games coaches should encourage short corners and short free kicks that remain below head height. New rules changes have been introduced in this document to further decrease the amount of time the ball is in the air (such as a throw in replaced with a pass in for the under 9 age group and below, and goal keepers in the under 11 age group and below are no longer able to kick the ball out of their hands).
- 7.2 At under 12 and 13 heading may become more likely within the game. However, coaches should continue to encourage a style of play which limits the number of longer passes in the air.
- 7.3 Heading practice must not form part of training for boys and girls aged under 11 and below.
- 7.4 Heading practices are a low priority for boys and girls in the under 12 and 13 age groups. When introducing the specific technique of heading for these age groups, The FAW advise: - a maximum of 10 minutes of any duration training session and a maximum of 4 headers in one bout, using self-serve over short distances.
- 7.5 Age-appropriate size, weight and the correct pressure of the ball must be used.



- 7.6 If a player sustains a head injury, or suspected head injury, through a collision or heading drill, they must not be permitted to return to the pitch and the coach must advise the parent/guardian to seek medical advice.
- 7.7 Concussion symptoms may vary and can include dizziness, headache, or unsteadiness. Please refer to the UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport that will help you identify, manage and prevent concussion affecting players in grassroots football:  
[UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite \(Grassroots\) Sport](#)  
[FAW Heading Guidelines](#)

A player can only return to football activities (not before day 21) as long as they are symptom free at rest for 14 days.



# THE RULES OF SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL

The rules are simple and as near to real football as possible. A game leader, who is urged to be as flexible as possible with the players, must supervise the game from the touchline for the under 11 age group and below - this could be a coach, team helper or a qualified referee. For the avoidance of doubt, no person should be officiating the game on the pitch. Rules are explained as the game proceeds (e.g. hand ball). It may also be necessary to demonstrate in certain instances how to restart the game (e.g. a throw in, corner kicks). A referee is introduced at the under 12 age group (the 9v9 format).

## 1. PLAYERS ELIGIBLE

- 1.1 Small-Sided Football is for boys and girls in Academic Years one (1) to eight (8).
- 1.2 Mixed football (boys and girls playing together) is permitted for Academic Years one (1) to twelve (12).

## 2. AGE GROUPS

- 2.1 Must be a minimum of a one academic year and a maximum of two academic years.
- 2.2 The table below sets out the relevant playing format and offer for each age banding. However, a small-sided player is permitted to play in the age group directly one year above irrespective of any format changes.

| Age Banding | School Academic year | Age as of 31st August 31 <sup>st</sup> of the relevant playing season | Playing Format | Max players per team on match day | Structure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Under 6     | 1                    | 5                                                                     | 4v4            | 8                                 | Festival / Round Robin Format                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Under 7     | 2                    | 6                                                                     | 4v4            | 8                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Under 8     | 3                    | 7                                                                     | 5v5            | 10                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Under 9     | 4                    | 8                                                                     | 5v5            | 10                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Under 10    | 5                    | 9                                                                     | 7v7            | 14                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Under 11    | 6                    | 10                                                                    | 7v7            | 14                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Under 12    | 7                    | 11                                                                    | 9v9            | 18                                | Max <b>24 weeks</b> competitive offer<br>Goal difference is not permitted as a measure of league standings                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Under 13    | 8                    | 12                                                                    | 9v9            | 18                                | Fully competitive offer for Leagues operating single age bands (U12 & U13).<br><br>Maximum of <b>24 weeks</b> competitive offer for leagues running two-year age bands (U13 only with no U12 League)<br><br>Goal difference is not permitted as a measure of league standings |



- 2.3 For the purposes of age groupings, an Academic year begins on the 1<sup>st</sup> September and ends on the 31<sup>st</sup> August of the following year. Academic year one (1) is the year in which a player reaches his / her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 2.4 Clubs are encouraged, if practically possible, to run single age group teams as this will help us grow the game and band players together who, in the main, are of similar age, size and football ability. It is recognised, however, that this may not be possible due to limited player numbers.
- 2.5 If leagues run single age band divisions, we would encourage players to play within their relevant age group, however, we do want players participating within a suitable environment and therefore, there are circumstances when an individual playing up an age group should be considered by the club.
- 2.5.1 Where junior leagues operate single age bands in junior competition football, i.e. U12, U13, U14, U15, U16 & U17, the age parameters on the COMET platform must reflect the age groups being delivered as per the League programme and must not be automatically set at a two year age band. Players wishing to play up or down can do so in accordance with regulation 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.
- 2.5.2 A player may only participate in one team per match day. For example, a player representing an U9 team within the club cannot also play for the U10's on the same day. This is to protect player welfare by not overloading the participant and ensuring players do not exceed the maximum game duration in a 24 hour period. This applies to all Small-Sided age groups.
- 2.6 If a Junior League feels that based on a player's ability or physicality, he or she should be playing down one-year group, permission to play down must be gained annually in accordance with FAW Rule 88 with approval from the relevant area association.
- 2.7 Where clubs operate single age bands, entire teams are not ordinarily permitted to move up an age group en masse. This approach could benefit some players but may also disadvantage others within a team. If a club wishes to play a whole team up one academic year en masse, this must be communicated in writing to the relevant league secretary and area association secretary evidencing a clear rationale within the request. Teams can only request to move up an age group en masse prior to the commencement of a league season. This will enable leagues to deliver a sustainable games programme for all participating clubs.
- 2.8 Players are allowed to play both within grassroots teams and FAW Licensed Academies from Under 8 to Under 11 age groups only. Where this applies, the grassroots club shall hold the player registration on the Comet platform. For the avoidance of doubt, where an Under 11 grassroots player is playing one year up at Under 12, they may also continue to play academy football at Under 11 age group only as per the one player one club FIFA ruling.
- 2.9 In order to provide relevant training and playing opportunities for girls across Wales, there is additional flexibility with regards to the age bandings that a junior female player or team can request to participate within:



- 2.9.1 Any junior girls' team aged under 12 – under 17, can request to play up to a maximum of two years down within a mixed / boys junior league. Any girls team with permission to do so, must conform to the playing format of the respective league age group. For example, an under 14 girls team playing in an under 12 mixed/boys league must play the 9V9 format.
- 2.9.2 Girls can request permission to play down up to a maximum of two years within a boys/mixed team or league, or for a Cymru Premier Academy at ages under 12 – under 17. For example, an U12 girl can request permission to play within an U10 boys team / mixed league.
- 2.9.3 Permission for girls or girl's teams to play down two years are managed on a case-by-case basis as follows:
  - 2.9.3.1 For a junior girls' team wanting to play down two years in a boys/mixed league, a written letter outlining rationale must be sent to the relevant league secretary and signed by the club secretary and be subject to approval by the relevant area association.
  - 2.9.3.2 For a junior girl to play down two years in a boys/mixed team, a written letter outlining the rationale must be sent to the relevant league secretary and signed by the club secretary and player's parent.
  - 2.9.3.3 For a junior girl to play down two years in a Cymru Premier Academy, a written letter outlining the rationale must be sent to the FAW Competitions Executive and signed by the Academy Head of Coaching and players' parent.
- 2.10 Team Sheets - all participating teams must submit a team sheet via COMET on match days. This is to identify what players have participated on any given match day. Teams **DO NOT** need to submit a team sheet for each individual festival/round robin match. One team sheet per squad is required, evidencing those players that have participated at a festival / round robin match day. For clarity, a club with 3 teams in the same age group would submit 3 teams sheets for the match day, not for each individual festival match.

### 3. SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL PLAYING FORMATS

- 3.1 Must be implemented as below in the table:



| Age Group | Max Playing format | Max No of players per team | GK or no GK | Pitch Size (length x width)                                                       | Goal Area (length x width)            | Ball Size | Goal Size (height x width)                                 | Max Playing Duration | Maximum Game Duration |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| U6        | 4 v 4              | 8                          | No GK       | 28 x 20 yards                                                                     | No Goal Area                          | 3         | Height: Min 3ft<br>Max 4 ft /<br>Width: Min 4ft<br>Max 6ft | 40 mins              | 10 mins               |
| U7        | 4 v 4              | 8                          | No GK       | 28 x 20 yards                                                                     | No Goal Area                          | 3         | Height: Min 3ft<br>Max 4 ft /<br>Width: Min 4ft<br>Max 6ft | 40 mins              | 10 mins               |
| U8        | 5 v 5              | 10                         | GK          | 35 v 25 yards                                                                     | 7x12 yards                            | 3         | 4 x 8 ft                                                   | 50 mins              | 15 mins               |
| U9        | 5 v 5              | 10                         | GK          | 35 x 25 yards                                                                     | 7x12 yards                            | 3         | 4 x 8 ft                                                   | 50 mins              | 15 mins               |
| U10       | 7 v 7              | 14                         | GK          | 44 x 40 yards                                                                     | 10x15 yards                           | 4         | 6 x 12 ft                                                  | 60 mins              | 20 mins               |
| U11       | 7 v 7              | 14                         | GK          | 44 x 40 yards                                                                     | 10x15 yards                           | 4         | 6 x 12 ft                                                  | 60 mins              | 20 mins               |
| U12       | 9 V 9              | 18                         | GK          | 64 x 44 yards                                                                     | 12 x 28 yards<br>Penalty spot 9 yards | 4         | 7 x 16 ft                                                  | 70 mins              | 70 mins               |
| U13       | 9 V 9              | 18                         | GK          | <b>Length:</b><br>76 yards<br><br><b>Width:</b><br>Min: 44 yards<br>Max: 54 yards | 12 x 28 yards<br>Penalty spot 9 yards | 4         | 7 x 16 ft                                                  | 70 mins              | 70 mins               |

Where appropriate, Leagues can deliver multiple participation offers up to the maximum playing format permitted per age group. This is to encourage flexibility and a variety of playing opportunities.

| Age Group           | 4v4 | 5v5 | 7v7 | 9v9 |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Under 6 & Under 7   | ✓   | ✗   | ✗   | ✗   |
| Under 8 & Under 9   | ✓   | ✓   | ✗   | ✗   |
| Under 10 & Under 11 | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✗   |
| Under 12 & Under 13 | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |

3.1.2 Under 6 and 7 - The FAW suggest using rectangle shaped goals, but Pop-Up Goals (4ft or 6ft) may be used.

3.1.3 Pitches should be marked out to the size detailed in the above table. This may not be possible at every venue. For this reason, a degree of flexibility will be allowed. Pitches should not differ more than 5 yards in length and/or width.

3.1.4 Clubs that have a number of teams at a specific age group are expected to have a mix of player abilities across all teams, for example there should not be 'A' and 'B' teams made up of perceived strong and weaker players.



This help ensure a positive playing experience for all participants within small-sided football where the focus should be on fun and skill development.

### **3.2 THE GOAL AREA**

Must be marked by conventional lines or cones on the touchline and a small number of marker discs on the playing area (refer to 3.1 for area sizes).

### **3.3 PLAYING DURATION**

- 3.3.1 Under 6 and 7 – Game duration should not exceed 10 minutes. There is no half time. For example, Leagues could organise 4 x 10-minute games in accordance with the maximum playing duration of 40 minutes.
- 3.3.2 Under 8 and 9 – Game duration should not exceed 15 minutes. There is no half time. For example, Leagues could organise 5 x 10-minute games or 3 x 15-minute games in accordance with the maximum playing duration of 50 minutes.
- 3.3.4 Under 10 and 11 – Game duration should not exceed 20 minutes. A half time interval should be taken if exceeding 15 minutes of play. The duration of half time should not exceed 5 minutes. For example, Leagues could organise 3 x 20-minute games or 4 x 15-minute games in accordance with the maximum playing duration of 60 minutes.
- 3.3.5 It is recommended that a Small Sided player should not exceed the playing duration detailed in the above table in a 24-hour period.
- 3.3.6 When training, coaches should ensure player welfare is the paramount consideration and take a common-sense approach to ensure practice is appropriate for the children for whom they are responsible.

### **3.4 Coaches & Team Helpers**

- 3.4.1 Clubs are to ensure that each age group squad has at least ONE qualified coach, minimum FAW Football Leaders Award. (CAP 2.3.3).
- 3.4.2 As per Club Accreditation criteria 2.3.5, all clubs must ensure that there is an adult(s) in attendance who possesses an FAW DBS, FAW Football Leaders Award and FAW First Aid Award for all age group squad's matches and training sessions.
- 3.4.3 A club may appoint volunteers to the role of 'team helper' with any team. Subject to completion of a FAW DBS check, these individuals can supervise young people to ensure the correct player to adult ratio is maintained. (CAP 2.3.2). For clarity, where a club has multiple small-sided team at the same age group attending a venue, 1 qualified coach with an FAW Leaders Award must be present along with a first aider. Team helpers with a valid DBS check can assist with the organising of teams at a venue where a qualified coach is present.
- 3.4.4 For the avoidance of doubt, all coaches must have a valid FAW approved Enhanced DBS Check for Regulated Activity
- 3.4.5 As per club accreditation criteria 2.3.1, clubs must adhere to the following coach to player ratios as outlined below:



| Age group | Qualified coach (has a minimum of an FAW Leaders Award):<br>Players ratio | DBS certified adult: Players ratio | Qualified first aiders (has a minimum of an FAW Emergency Aid Award): Players ratio |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U6 – U8   | 1:16                                                                      | 1:6                                | Minimum 1 per training or playing venue                                             |
| U9 – U12  | 1:16                                                                      | 1:8                                | Minimum 1 per training or playing venue                                             |
| U13 – U17 | 1:18                                                                      | 1:10                               | Minimum 1 per training or playing venue                                             |

***Please remember that a minimum of 2 supervisors is always recommended, even if the number of children is low.***

#### **4. SUBSTITUTES**

- 4.1 Any number of substitutes may be used at any time (Rolling substitutes).
- 4.2 Players may re-enter the game.
- 4.3 All players in the squad should participate in a minimum of 50% of the total playing time during a match day. *For example, at under 8 where there is a total maximum playing duration of 50 minutes, all players should participate in at least 25 minutes (50%) of the total game time available.*
- 4.4 Under 6, 7, 8 and 9 - No substitute must not be waiting longer than 5 minutes before they are involved in the match.
- 4.5 Under 10 and 11 – No substitute must not be waiting longer than 10 minutes before they are involved in the match.

#### **5. KICK OFF**

- 5.1 Is taken in the centre of the playing area to start the game and after a goal has been scored.
- 5.2 The opposition must be 3 yards away from where the ball is placed.
- 5.3 A goal may not be scored directly from the kick-off

#### **6. BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY METHOD OF SCORING**

- 6.1 Laws 9 (Ball in and out of play) and 10 (The method of scoring) apply to Small Sided Football.

#### **7. OFF-SIDE**

- 7.1 There is no offside (Law 11) in Small Sided Football at Under 6 to Under 11 age groups.

#### **8. PASS IN / THROW IN**

- 8.1 Under 6, 7, 8 and 9 – The method of restating play when the whole of the ball passes over the touchline is by a pass in.
- 8.2 The ball must be stationary from the point where it left the pitch before it is kicked to restart play.
- 8.3 The ball must not be kicked overhead height.
- 8.4 A goal may not be scored directly from a pass in.
- 8.5 The opposition must be 3 yards away from where the ball is placed.
- 8.6 Under 10 and 11 – Throws ins are introduced. Although Law 15 (The Throw In)



applies and the throw in should be taken in the normal way, game leaders can show flexibility.

**9. CORNER KICKS**

9.1 Law 17 (The Corner Kick) applies to corner kicks except the opposition must be at least 3 yards away.

**10. FREE KICKS**

10.1 Law 12 (Fouls and Misconduct) applies to free kicks although they are all indirect and the opposition must be at least 3 yards away.

**11. GOALKEEPERS**

11.1 Can handle the ball in their goal area and there are no restrictions on the number of steps they may take holding the ball.

11.2 The Goalkeeper can leave the goal area but cannot handle the ball outside the goal area.

11.3 When handling the ball in the goal area, goalkeepers can throw the ball out of their hands or kick the ball on the ground but can then be challenged by opponents. Drop kicks are not permitted.

11.4 In all age groups a retreat line is introduced, and the opposition players must be a minimum of 10 yards away from the point where the goalkeeper has the ball to encourage build up play.

**12. GOAL-KICKS**

12.1 The ball must be stationary and from the ground.

12.2 The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.

12.3 Under 6 and 7 - Are taken anywhere on the goal line.

12.4 Under 8, 9, 10 and 11 – Are taken from any point within the goal area

12.5 Under 8, 9, 10 and 11 – Opponents must be outside the penalty area until the ball is in play.

12.6 In all age groups a retreat line is introduced, and the opposition players must be a minimum of 10 yards away from the point where the goal-kick is taken.

**13. PLAYERS IN THE GOAL AREA**

13.1 There are no restrictions regarding the number of players allowed in the goal area during open play.

**14. PASS BACK TO GOALKEEPER**

14.1 Under 8 and 9 – A goalkeeper can pick the ball up (in the goal area) if it passed to him/her from a teammate.

14.2 Under 10 and 11 - A goalkeeper cannot pick up the ball (in the goal area) if it has been passed to him/her by a teammate.

**15. POWER-PLAY FOR UNBALANCED MATCHES**

Development football is designed to create the best learning and fun experiences for young players. To ensure an imbalance in ability does not affect the overall playing experience, the FAW has approved the 'optional use' for coaches to use the 'Power-Play' regulation for Small-Sided Football age groups (Under 6 – Under 11).

**The main objective of the 'Power-Play' rule is to:**

- Ensure that all players are being appropriately challenged.
- Improve the overall playing experience.



- To be available through all Small-Sided Festival Format age groups (U6-U11).

#### How the Power-Play rule works:

- If a team is losing by a four-goal margin, the coach of the losing team has the option to implement the **Power-Play** by adding an additional player, for example a 5v5 becomes a 5v6.
- If the score reduces the less than four goals, the team with an extra player is required to remove one player and return to equal numbers. ***This does not have to be the same player!***
- If the goal difference reaches six, the losing team may field another additional player (taking the total up to two additional players). When the goal difference reduces to five, one of the additional players is removed.

| SCORE          | WHAT HAPPENS                                   | 4V4 | 5V5 | 7V7 |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Reds 3-0 Blues | No change                                      | 4v4 | 5v5 | 7v7 |
| Reds 4-0 Blues | Blue team brings on one extra player           | 4v5 | 5v6 | 7v8 |
| Reds 4-1 Blues | Blue team removes one player*                  | 4v4 | 5v5 | 7v7 |
| Reds 5-1 Blues | Blue team brings on one extra player           | 4v5 | 5v6 | 7v8 |
| Reds 6-1 Blues | No change                                      | 4v5 | 5v6 | 7v8 |
| Reds 7-1 Blues | Blue team brings on a second additional player | 4v6 | 5v7 | 7v9 |
| Reds 7-2 Blues | Blue team removes one player*                  | 4v5 | 5v6 | 7v8 |
| Reds 7-3 Blues | No change                                      | 4v5 | 5v6 | 7v8 |
| Reds 7-4 Blues | Blue team removes one player*                  | 4v4 | 5v5 | 7v7 |

**\* The players being removed, do not need to be the same people added as extra players.**



## 9V9 SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL (U12 & U13)

### 16. PLAYING FORMAT

16.1.1 The Playing Format for 9v9 football must be implemented as below:

| Age Group | Playing Format | Max no of players | GK or no GK | Pitch Size (length x width)                                                       | Goal Area (length x width)                | Ball Size | Goal Size (height x width) | Match Duration          |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| U12       | 9 v 9          | 18                | GK          | <b>Length:</b><br>64 yards<br><b>Width:</b> 44 yards                              | 12 x 28 yards<br><br>Penalty spot 9 yards | 4         | 7 x 16 ft                  | 70 mins (35 min halves) |
| U13       | 9 v 9          | 18                | GK          | <b>Length:</b><br>76 yards<br><br><b>Width:</b><br>Min: 44 yards<br>Max: 54 yards | 12 x 28 yards<br><br>Penalty spot 9 yards | 4         | 7 x 16 ft                  | 70 mins (35 min halves) |

#### 16.1.2 Competition Structure

| Age as of August 31 <sup>st</sup> of the relevant playing season | Academic Year | Competitive Offer                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Under 12<br>Single age band                                      | 7             | Initial block of non-competitive matches followed by a maximum of <b>24</b> weeks competition.                                                                                 |
| Under 12<br>Two-year age band                                    | 6 & 7         | Initial block on non-competitive matches followed by a maximum of <b>24</b> weeks competition.                                                                                 |
| Under 13<br>Single age band                                      | 8             | Fully competitive 9v9 offer.                                                                                                                                                   |
| Under 13<br>Two-year age band                                    | 7 & 8         | Initial block on non-competitive matches followed by a maximum of <b>24</b> weeks competition. This is to ensure a phased approach into competitive football for participants. |

### 16.2 SQUAD SIZE

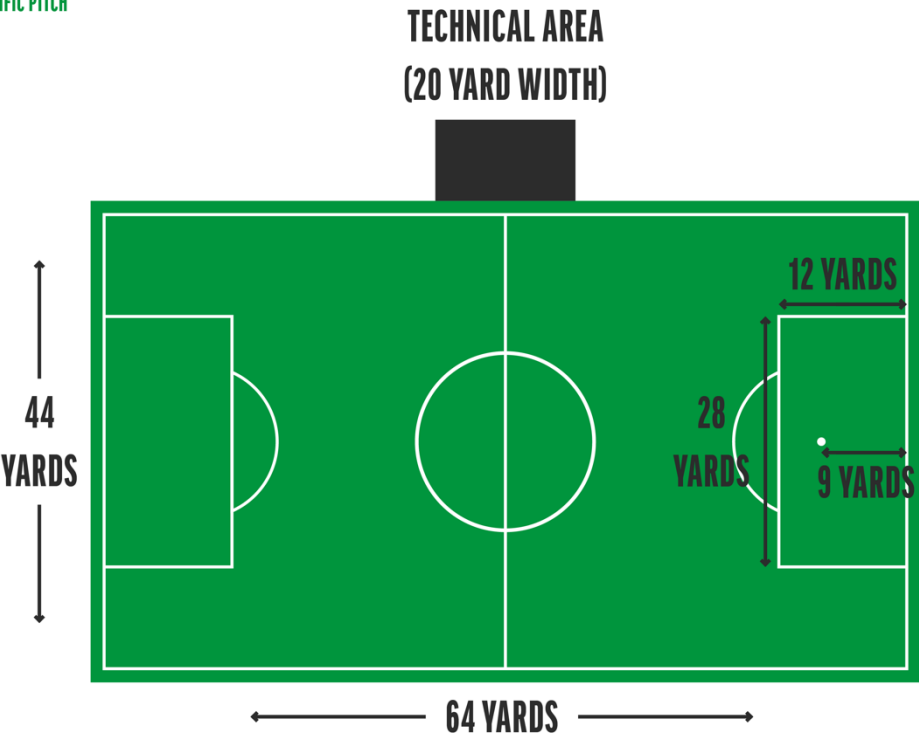
- 16.2.1 Teams at the under 12 and 13 age groups can have a match day squad cap of up to a maximum of 18 players, all of whom are eligible to play (teams can use all 9 substitutions, please refer to 16.7). Teams are capped at signing 20 players.
- 16.2.2 A match may not start or continue if either team has fewer than six (6) players.
- 16.2.3 The use of team rosters for all League and Cup competitions are compulsory at Under 12 age group and above for all junior leagues. This will help to maintain competition integrity.

- 16.3** An 11v11 pitch can be adapted for the 9v9 format, utilising the width of the penalty area (44 yards) and the distance from penalty box to penalty box for the 9v9 pitch length or (64 yards). At under 13's, the length of the pitch should be extended to 76 yards and between 44-54 yards wide. See diagrams for guidance:

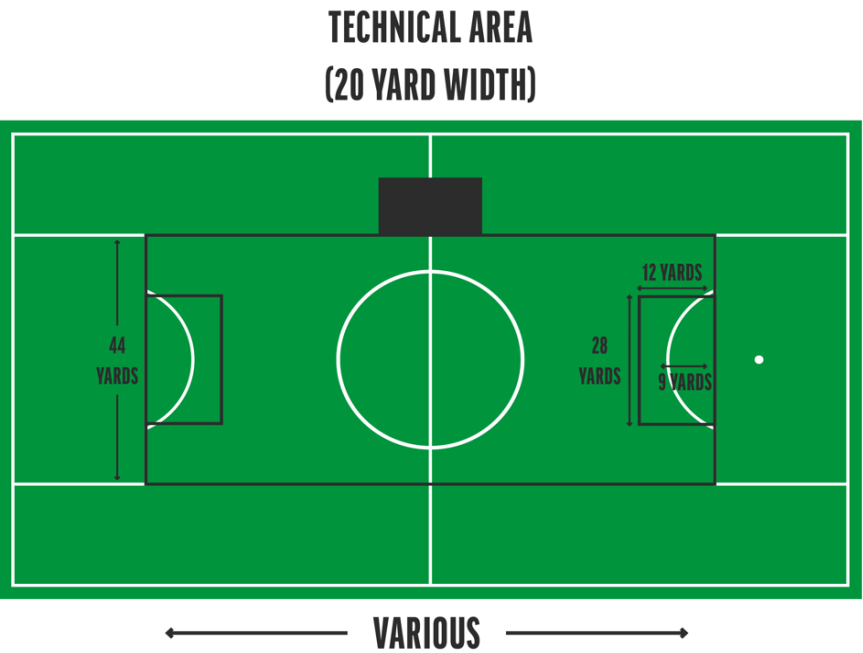


# U12 - 9V9 PITCH DIMENSIONS

U12 9V9 SPECIFIC PITCH

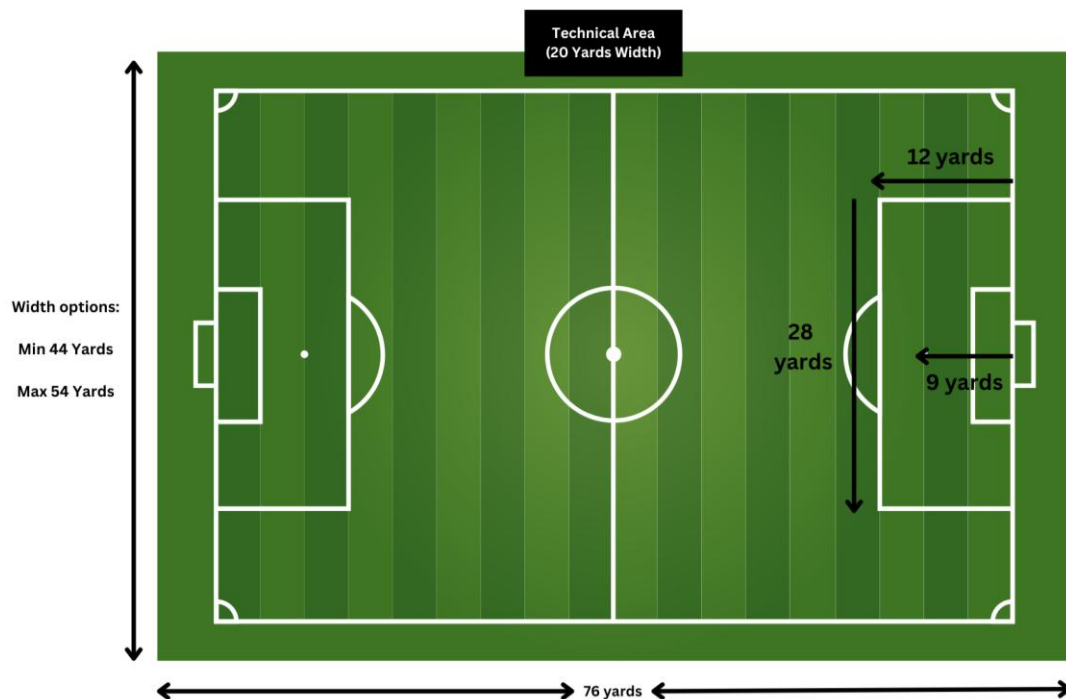


U12 9V9 PITCH ON 11V11 PITCH

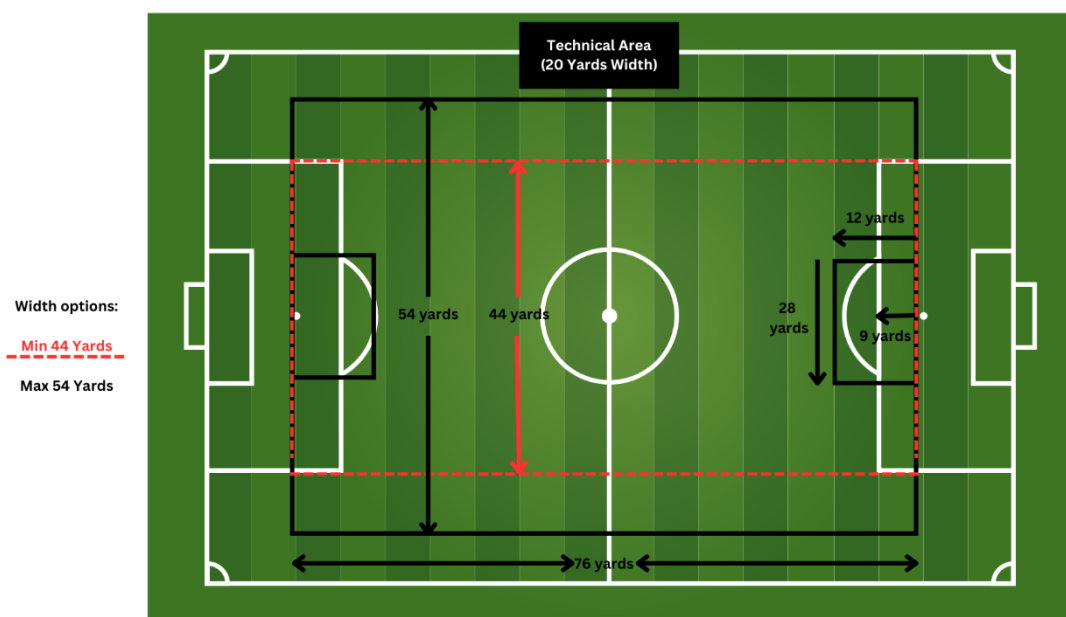


# U13 - 9V9 PITCH DIMENSIONS

U13 Pitch Size



U13 Pitch markings on a 11v11 pitch



## 16.4 GOAL SIZE

- 16.4.1 The goal size is 16-foot (width) x 7 feet (height).
- 16.4.2 In order to comply with the IFAB Laws of the Game (International Football Association Board) football clubs participating in 9v9 competition football will be required to ensure that the goal frames being used meet the requirements of the 'FIFA Quality Programme for Football Goals'. 'A rope or any **flexible** or dangerous material **may not** replace the crossbar' as this reduces the stability of a goal frame.



## 16.5 PENALTY AND GOAL AREAS

- 16.5.1 The Penalty area must be 28 yards wide and 12 yards from the goal line. A penalty spot should be marked 9 yards from the goal line.
- 16.5.2 A Goal Area is not necessary, but goal kicks are to be taken approximately 4 yards from the goal line. A painted marker 4 yards from each post is sufficient for guidance.
- 16.5.3 For dedicated 9v9 pitches a goal area can be marked out. This is to be 4 yards from the goal line and 4 yards from each goal post towards the corner.

## 16.6 MATCH DURATION

- 16.6.1 A match must be a maximum of 70 minutes, split into two halves of 35 minutes. The duration of half time should not exceed 15 minutes.

## 16.7 SUBSTITUTES

- 16.7.1 Any number of substitutes may be used at appropriate breaks in play with the permission of the referee, a player who has been replaced may re-enter the game (rolling substitutes).
- 16.7.2 All players in the match day squad should have a minimum of 50% playing time when participating in matches.



## **16.8 KICK OFF**

- 16.8.1 Is taken in the centre of the playing area to start the game and after a goal has been scored.
- 16.8.2 The opposition must be a minimum of 7 yards away from where the ball is placed.

## **16.9 BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY AND THE METHOD OF SCORING**

As per the 'FIFA Laws of the Game' - Law 9 (Ball in and out of play) and 10 (The method of scoring) apply to 9v9 Small Sided Football.

## **16.10 OFF-SIDE**

As per the 'FIFA Laws of the Game' - Law 11 'Off-Side' applies to 9v9 Small Sided Football.

## **16.11 THROW IN**

As per the 'FIFA Laws of the Game' - Law 15 'The Throw in' applies to 9v9 Small Sided Football.

## **16.12 CORNER KICKS**

As per the 'FIFA Laws of the Game' - Law 17 'The Corner Kick' applies to 9v9 Small Sided Football.

## **16.13 FREE KICKS**

As per the 'FIFA Laws of the Game' - Law 12 'Fouls and Misconduct' applies to 9v9 Small Sided Football.

## **16.14 GOALKEEPERS**

- 16.14.1 Can handle the ball in their penalty area and there are no restrictions on the number of steps they may take holding the ball.
- 16.14.2 The Goalkeeper can leave the penalty area but cannot handle the ball outside the penalty area.
- 16.14.3 The Goalkeeper can throw or kick the ball out of their hands; the Goalkeeper can also kick the ball on the ground but can then be challenged by opponents.
- 16.14.4 Pass Back to Goalkeeper - A goalkeeper cannot pick up the ball (in the goal area) if it has been passed to him/her by a teammate.

## **16.15 GOAL-KICKS**

- 16.15.1 The ball must be stationary and from the ground (refer to 15.5.2 for location).
- 16.15.2 The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- 16.15.3 Opponents must be outside the penalty area until the ball is in play.

## **16.16 PLAYERS IN THE GOAL AREA**

There are no restrictions regarding the number of players allowed in the goal area during open play.

## **16.17 THE REFEREE**

Each match is controlled by a referee who has full authority to enforce the rules of 9v9 Small Sided Football and the 'IFAB Laws of the Game'. For further info on the laws of the game please refer to [IFAB Laws of the Game](#).



### **16.18 MANAGING UNBALANCED MATCHES IN JUNIOR COMPETITION FOOTBALL**

Matches that finish 18-0, 15-1 or even 35-0 are demoralising for the losing team and do nothing for the development of the players on the winning team. In addition, such scorelines can have a major impact on player enjoyment, well-being and participation in the sport.

In an attempt to prevent such high scorelines being recorded where matches are clearly unbalanced, the FAW have introduced the following mandatory rules for Junior competition football (Under 12 to Under 17):

16.18.1 Introduction of the 'Mercy' rule. When one team is ahead by eight (8) goals, the match is declared over, the home team must end the match timer on the Comet App and the score is recorded. Any remaining game time is to be played out as a friendly with no match events to be recorded other than discipline offences by the match official. As an example, a scoreline may finish 8-0, 9-1, 10-2. Comet will automatically prevent the winning team from entering further goals that would exceed the 8 goal margin.

Coaches are encouraged to use interventions to challenge players appropriately during unbalanced fixtures to aid player development. Guidance and resources on how to manage unbalanced matches will be made available.

In addition, any disciplinary action in the subsequent part of the game must be recorded in the usual way.

16.18.2 The recording of goal difference is not permitted to be used by junior leagues as a determining factor for league standings.

In addition to the 'Mercy rule' the FAW will be working with junior leagues across the country to support the development of ability banding leagues which will help reduce the number of unbalanced matches and provide a more enjoyable football experience for all.

### **16.19 FIXTURE FLEXIBILITY**

In the spirit of promoting participation and enjoyment in competition junior football (U12 and above), teams are permitted to bring a scheduled fixture forward, provided the following conditions are met:

- **Mutual Agreement:** Both teams must agree to the new date and time. This agreement must be confirmed in writing by email, by both club secretaries or their nominated deputy.
- **League Notification:** The league secretary must be notified of the rescheduled fixture at least 72 hours in advance, with confirmation from both teams' club secretaries or their nominated deputy.
- **Referee Availability:** It is the responsibility of the teams to ensure a qualified referee is available for the new date in accordance with League rules. The league will assist where possible but cannot guarantee referee availability.
- **Fairness and Integrity:** No fixture may be moved to give an unfair advantage or to avoid playing with a weakened team.

### **16.20 TEAM ROSTERS IN COMPETITION FOOTBALL (U12-U17)**



16.20.1 All teams (U12 to U17), competing in grassroots competitions provided by Area Associations, must complete a team roster on Comet, for each competition they have entered, which includes cup competitions.

16.20.2 Junior Leagues will have the authority to implement the locking of team rosters in order to maintain competition integrity. Where the locking of team rosters is implemented, Junior Leagues will set a date for all participating member clubs to complete a roster prior to the start of a season.

16.20.3 The maximum number of players that can appear on a team roster is set out within each Area Association rule book. Where team rosters are locked, clubs will need to request permission to add/remove players from a team roster to the relevant Junior League Secretary.

16.20.4 Where a club has more than one team in a junior league or cup competition, the Junior League has the authority to enforce a rule where a player can only be assigned to one team roster for a designated competition. This is to ensure competition integrity. Failure to do so may result in Disciplinary Action being taken by the relevant League or Area Association.

16.20.5 Each Area Association is empowered to set internal transfer limits on team rosters for clubs wishing to move players. This is to maintain competition integrity.

16.20.6 Where the locking of team rosters is implemented by a Junior League, they will have the authority to enforce a regulation where a junior player can only be registered to one team roster at any given time. For example, where an U14 junior player is playing up a year at U15, the player can only represent the U15 team unless an internal transfer is made. This is to support the maintaining of competition integrity. Club wishing to make internal transfers should refer to their League and Area Association rules.

16.20.7 Any registered player that participates in a match and does not appear on a team roster would be deemed as ineligible.

