



# Alberta Soccer Association

Governing Body of Soccer in the Province of Alberta

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In keeping with the Long-term Player Development model of Canada Soccer's Grassroots Soccer, The Long-term Athlete Development model from Sport Canada and in conjunction with the Canadian Sport for Life Philosophy this summary paper presents information for U12 soccer, which should be considered the next step in the development of Alberta Soccer's Player Development programs.

## U12 Soccer – Learning to Train *Player Development within an 8 a-side environment*

### Why make a change?

For a number of years, Alberta Soccer and the supporting districts have recognized that mini-soccer at the U10 age level are critical years in the development of children in sport and that we need to provide the appropriate environment for **ALL** of these children. In order to continue to provide the appropriate environment for all children and allow them to develop further, Alberta Soccer is moving to U12 8 a-side soccer. This is a positive change.

Soccer for players under the age of 12 years old is a topic that has been looked at very carefully. There are many varying opinions and desires among parents, players, coaches, and administrators. However, all research shows that playing 7 vs. 7 or 8 vs. 8 is far more beneficial to developing soccer skills than playing the 11 a-side game.

Progressing from 3 vs. 3, 4 vs. 4, 7 vs. 7 to 8 vs. 8, prior to the 11 vs. 11 game is based on sound education and learning principles worldwide.

Alberta Soccer, Canada Soccer, Sport Canada believes it is the right thing to do and, it is one more piece of the puzzle in the young players' development.

### What is 8 aside soccer?

Eight (8) aside soccer is playing the game with a team of 8 players on a field at one time (7 field players and 1 goalkeeper). It is the best way for players to combine nearly all elements of the game. The fewer the players the more game-conditioned touches on the soccer ball. As well as you get all these touches in a 'realistic' and 'live' environment with the addition of tactical applications. This is where the enjoyment happens and after 60 minutes of high activity combined with structured repetition the players learn and go home HAPPY!

The 11 a-side game routinely plays structured formations - defence, midfield and forward. Playing 8 vs. 8 games have the same structure but players are more able to move from position to position, transitioning from defence to offence, or vice versa, making the game exciting for them. The smaller field and smaller number of players on the field will help the players to develop their technique because they will have more touches of the ball. Because there are fewer players on the field there will be extra space, which will give the player more time to make decisions, this will help develop the tactical side of the game. In an 8 aside soccer game rules such as throw-ins, free kicks, corner kicks and goal kicks still apply.

Further from a coaching perspective organizing players during the match is far less stressful and practice time is not occupied with trying to demonstrate an 11 aside picture. Valuable training time can be spent on technique and small sided tactics. From a player perspective all players can have more opportunities to attack (develop and identify goal scorers) and all players will recognize that they will have to defend as well.

### **Keeping U12 Development Soccer Simple**

The U12, 8 vs. 8 soccer game provides the best environment for youth players to develop soccer skills and techniques. When coaching, officiating or parenting remember to keep the game simple. Over complicating things can lose the flow of the game in turn inhibiting a player's development. Encourage the players to discover the love of the game through the game. The game is a great teacher.

The transition from 11 aside to 8 vs. 8 will require time; teaching of the game and the organization of the practices will require time for everyone to familiarize themselves with the game. After a week or two, however, there should be no difficulties.

Be Patient! The principles of the 8 vs. 8 games are right. The game is right. The rewards will be in the children's enjoyment of playing and their positive development.

### **National/Provincial/District Assistance**

The Canadian Soccer Association has developed a Wellness to the World Cup booklet, which incorporates the Long Term Player Development model and is part of a National Strategic Plan.

Alberta Soccer has developed three handbooks to assist districts and local associations to implement the 8 vs. 8 game. The handbooks include: a rules handbook, an administrators handbook and a technical handbook. In addition ASA has employed a Grassroots Coordinator to assist districts and associations.

## Typical comments and questions for U12 8 a-side Soccer

### Why 8 a-side?

It makes the game a better experience for children. More touches on the ball, the more a player will develop his/her skills, having more opportunity to be actively involved in the game. Energetic workouts occur due to players playing both defensive and offensive roles.

### Why shouldn't they play 11 vs. 11 like 'real' soccer?

The 11 vs. 11 game is the **adult** version of the game. It makes little sense for Under 12 players to play on a full size field with full size goals, as they do not have the strength and size to play such a game. The players at this age have difficulty taking a goal kick that will reach out side of the goal area or a corner kick that reach the opponents goal mouth. In addition, the game will be played in a small area of the field for long periods of time as players do not have the strength to get the ball up the field. This would not help them develop their soccer skills.

### I did not grow up playing this way.

True. Whether you grew up playing here or elsewhere, soccer when organized was traditionally played 11 vs. 11 for all age groups. This is no longer true. Players under the age of twelve are now playing small-sided and/or mini games in soccer rich nations all over the world.

### How will they learn to play 11 vs. 11?

Young players were forced to play 11 vs. 11 before their bodies were physically developed to play the adult version of the game. Any notion that players will be less prepared to play 11 vs. 11 is not justified.

For further information please contact your local district or association or contact Eric Munoz at [emunoz@albertasoccer.com](mailto:emunoz@albertasoccer.com) or 780.378.8105