

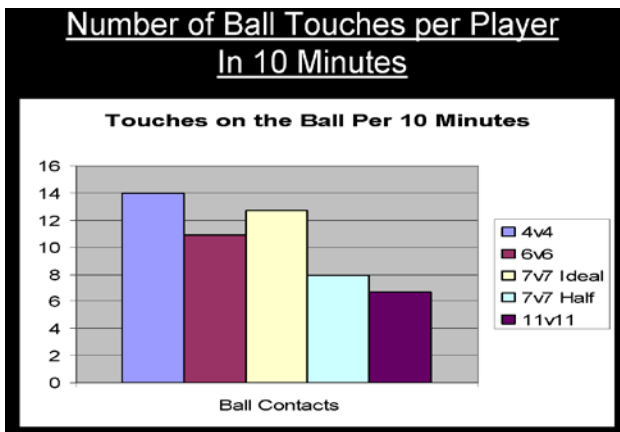
Alberta Soccer Association



U12 8-A-Side Soccer

League Administrative Handbook

(Booklet 1 of 3)



This handbook is to be used as a guide to assist with the U12 soccer.



Updated January 2009

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Introduction

U12 Soccer: Player Development within an 8 a-side environment

In keeping with the Long-term Player Development Model of Canada's Grassroots Soccer, this booklet deals with U12 soccer and should be considered the next step in the development of Alberta Soccer's U10 Mini-Soccer program.

When will the change occur?

The Technical Committee of Alberta Soccer is recommending the change be fully implemented for the 2008 outdoor season.

“Even when the kids graduate to 6v6 there should remain little or no emphasis on playing a position, on winning, or on restricting individual decision-making. The individuals who would rather dribble than pass may not be quite the pariah that (s)he’s assumed to be. The ability to dribble past several defenders in a limited space is a quality that only a handful of the game’s greatest players have acquired. Kids should not have their creativity stifled, especially at younger ages.” --Bobby Howe, former US Soccer Federation Director of Coaching

“I think the best way to improve your skills is to play football on a smaller pitch. I didn’t play 11-a-side football until I was 13 years old. In Brazil, most kids play futebol de salao, which is similar to five-a-side. The amount of space in 11-a-side is not good for young kids. You spend too much time running around without the ball.” -- Juninho, Brazilian World Cup Winner

One reason small-sided games are so good is because they force players to defend and attack. Very much of what my father did in practice replicated the street soccer he grew up with in the streets of Argentina. Street soccer usually meant small-sided games. In a small space, players have to make quick decisions on the ball and be able to handle it under pressure, because an opponent is usually close by. And you can’t hide in small-sided soccer. If you’re not marking opponents when they have the ball, they’ll capitalize quickly. When your teammate has the ball, you need to make yourself available or he’ll be cornered quickly. --Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain.

Overview

What is 8-a-side soccer?

Small sided games (SSG) are any games played with less than eleven players aside and 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, 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!

11v11 soccer is an adult game devised by and for adults to play. The 11 a-side game routinely plays structured formations - defense, midfield and forward. Playing 8 a-side games have the same structure but players are more able to move from position to position, from defense to offence 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 a 8 a-side 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 11a-side 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.

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 sports and that we need to provide the appropriate environment for **ALL** of these children.

Currently in Alberta U12 soccer is played in the form of 11 vs. 11 games. In order to develop our young players further, the technical committee is recommending this 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 small-sided games is far more beneficial to developing soccer skills than playing 11 a-side games.

Progressing from 3v3, 4v4, 7v7 to 8v8, prior to the 11v11 games is based on sound educational methods world wide. (See Additional Studies attached in appendix).

| 8v8 | 11v11 |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 67% utilized time (some games, up to 83%) ✓ Average 22 touches per player ✓ More goals per corners due to the field size ✓ Average of 26 shots on goals ✓ 1 in 3 goals scored from direct crosses ✓ More goals from headers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 53% utilized time ✓ Average 7 touches per player ✓ Less goals per corners ✓ Average of 8 shots on goals ✓ 1 in 12 goals scored from direct crosses ✓ Less goals from headers |

The technical committee believes it is the right thing to do and, it is one more piece of the puzzle in the young players' development.

Why small-sided games?

- We want our youth to have more touches on the ball and become more creative with it.
- We want our players to develop an understanding of tactical play and solving problems on the field.
- We want our youth to get quality instruction from the coach; less players on the squad and field, smaller field = easier for novice coach.
- Allows more opportunities to observe and analysis the individual and collective responses of players under quick decision-making conditions in a simple environment.
- More space + fewer numbers = less bunching. Enhance tactical awareness (positioning)
- Players under twelve are routinely structured into formal positions at ages when their spatial awareness do not lend themselves to a practical understanding of larger group tactics.
- More playing time, which encourages maximum individual participation → more individual involvement thereby improves fitness
- Want our youth to be more involved in the game including transition from defending to creating attacking opportunities
- More opportunities for youth to score goals! (Pure excitement!) → improves self-esteem and self-confidence
- U12: greater development for goalkeepers; more shots = more ACTION!
- The small sided environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our youth players; it's a fun environment that focuses on the player development.

How can this be accomplished?

- A. The Grassroots Coordinator of Alberta Soccer in conjunction with the District Head Coach should be available to work with all districts in organizing, guiding and evaluating the program. In addition licensed mentor coaches could be hired/organized by the districts to assist beginner coaches in the proper “on field” implementation of the program.
- B. With assistance from Alberta Soccer, a strong belief in the 8 a-side game, coupled by creating two streams at the grassroots level for the developing player:

1. Community Stream (Program)

It is recommended that players should be placed into teams and compete within their district or local association. Games will be played during the months of May and June. Alberta Soccer recommends that practices will be arranged at the discretion of the team coach, in consultation with parents of the players. *Play to train ratio could be 2:1*

2. Development Stream (Program)

This program is recommended to be a far more challenging program. The development stream is designed to create an environment for players who have decided soccer to be their sport of choice. Properly organized this program should demand a greater commitment from players and parents, i.e. training and travel. *Play to train ratio should be a minimum of 1:2*

Identification of Players:

Players wishing to be considered to play in this program should be identified through pre-season small-sided games. Where possible it is recommended that independent, qualified coaches should record their playing abilities. Teams could then be formed to compete in a league.

League Program:

The formed teams should then compete in a league which may include “club” teams from within. One or two games per week will

be played during the months of May and June. If districts wish the league could break for the month of July and resume play in August/September. Since U12 soccer is developmental, it is important that league standings are not kept!

Practices:

Two practices per week should be expected as a minimum. Practices should be structured, focus on movement and enjoyment, have a theme and include warm-ups – with the soccer ball, technique and skill training, and small-sided games. Practices must be no longer than one hour in length.

Games:

By implementing this program the difficulty with lack of proper fields is reduced (one full field can now be divided into two smaller fields) while the number of players on one full field is increased from twenty-two (22) to thirty two (32). In addition the program can act as a good development opportunity for the districts youth referees.

Field and Team Setup:

There is no need to restructure teams to accommodate the 8v8 format. Club team formations of 14-18 players per team already exist. Therefore, split the regular field into two fields running horizontal and have Team A1 vs. Team B1 and Team A2 vs. team B2 (samples attached). This maximizes players playing time. To maximize development, the top players of each team would play against one another on one field; while the up and coming developers would play against one another on the adjacent field. Coaching staff from each team overseeing one field; switching fields at half-time.

3. Provincial Tournament of Champions

Rather than offering Provincial Championships at the U12 age group Alberta Soccer will host a Provincial Tournament of Champions at the various tiers or playing levels

4. Festivals

In addition, districts can host festivals, as these provide a popular format for districts and clubs who come together at a central venue with teams playing a small number of games on a friendly basis. Results are not kept and the importance is placed on fun and enjoying the next game without the pressure of league tables.

5. Tournaments

Teams are participating in a vast number of tournaments each season. The participation in these tournaments by youth teams often creates a “win-at-all-cost” attitude and has a negative influence on player development.

This high level of participation in tournaments affects the development of the player in the following ways:

- a) Time is reduced for development (i.e. training)
- b) Excessive play at competitive tournaments is detrimental to individual growth and development
- c) Winning becomes the main issue for the coach rather than the long term development of the player

6. Organization

All youth districts shall administer leagues and programs under the Alberta Soccer regulations. Included will be U12 development soccer.

In all U12 development soccer, emphasis shall be placed on enjoyment, sportsmanship (fair play), education, skill development, respect for teammates, opponents and referees.

What is the easiest way to implement the new rules?

The largest hurdles are education and logistics. Parents, coaches, referees need to be informed of the reasons for the change as well as the rules of play. The Provincial Association can provide coaching courses and clinics, as well as, assist with referee training. Converting

existing fields is as simple as re-marking fields to the small sided games dimensions and acquiring small goals.

Common FAQ's regarding 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 format 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. 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 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 games in soccer rich nations all over the world.

How will they learn to play 11 vs. 11?

Progressing from 3v3, 4v4, 6v6, to 8v8 BEFORE 11v11 is sound educational methodology. The problem is that young players were forced into 11v11 before their bodies were physically developed to play the adult version of the game. Any notion that players will be less prepared to play 11v11 is not justified.

Other sports don't alter their game- why does soccer?

It's not a good comparison with football or baseball- neither has the element of transition that soccer does. Look at basketball- how many

kids play basketball 5 on 5? Most basketball is played 1v1, 2v1 or 2v2 in a driveway! Kids don't wait until they have nine friends to have a game! Playing on a small field is a more efficient use of space, it takes less time to advance for a shot on goal, and children are more actively involved for a longer period of time.

Will I need more fields?

Rather than build new fields "convert" your existing ones. For U12 8v8 they can play across the width of an existing full size field.

Will I need more goals?

YES! But they should not be permanent or expensive. A number of manufacturers offer lightweight portable goals or you can make your own. Remember player safety is a priority- don't let children hang or play on the goals.

We'll have to break up our current team rosters!

No, simply adopt the "dual field" method explained below!

What is the "dual field" method?

We recommend the "dual field" method for 8v8 club teams: two fields, side by side, with the coaches and substitutes in between. Players rotate from Field "A" to Field "B" to substitute. Using this method maximizes player participation. (How to coach two fields at once? That's the beauty of two fields- you can't! Let the kids play! Practices are for the coaches, games are for the players.

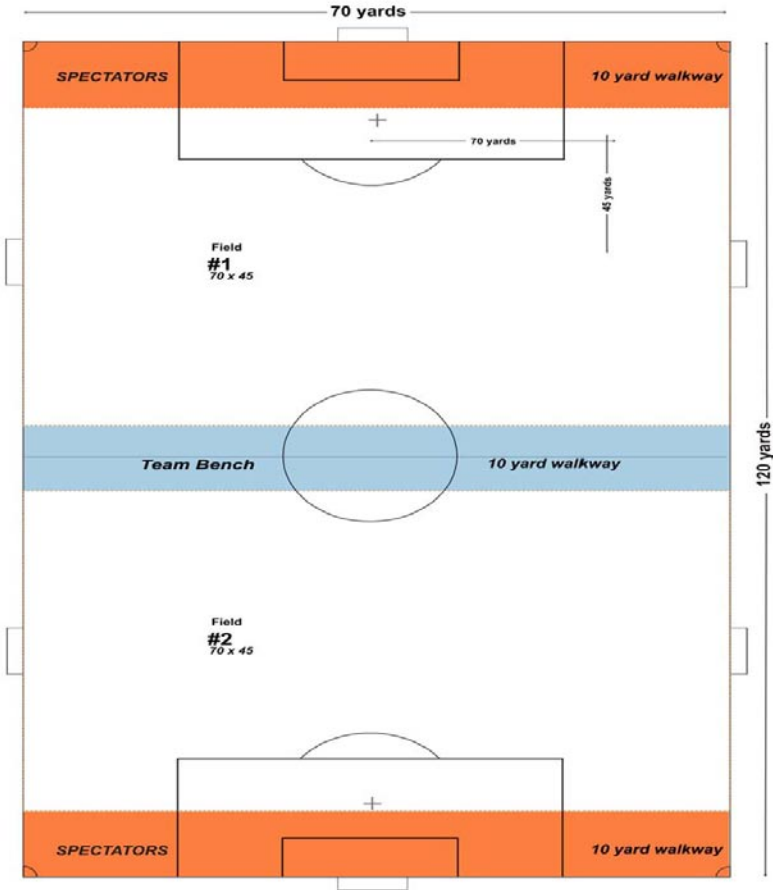
Examples of Field Setup:

Sample 1

U12 FIELDS

Suggested Set-up for 8v8 Fields

Dividing a 120 x 70 field into 2 - 60 x 45 fields (minimum field size)

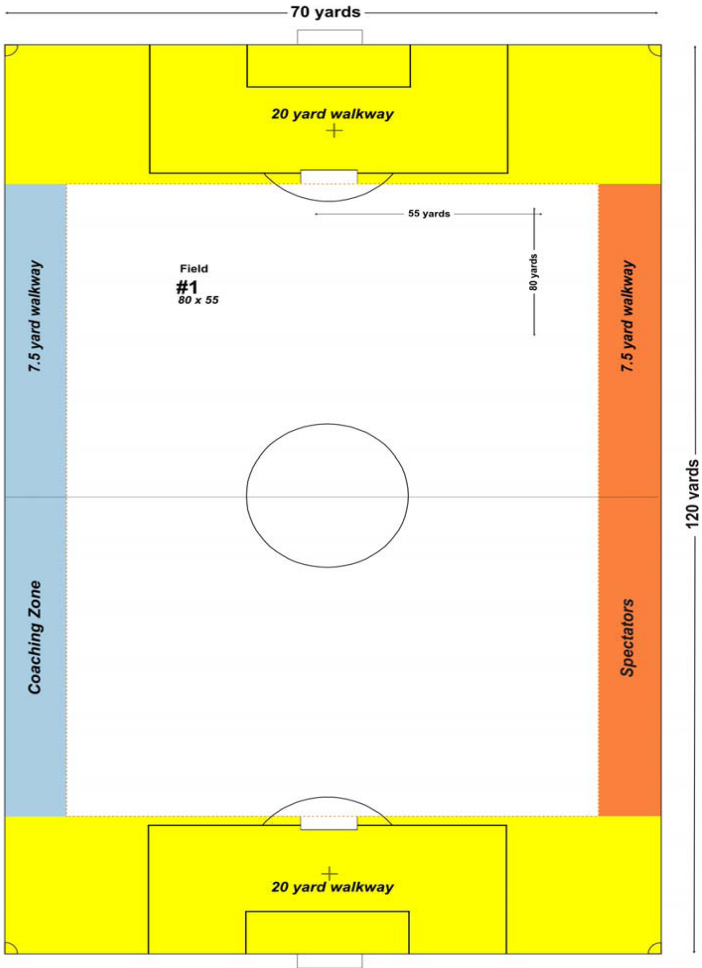


Sample 2

U12 FIELDS

Suggested Set-up for 8v8 Fields

Dividing a 120 x 70 field into 1 - 80 x 55 field (maximum field size)



The Future of U12 Soccer...

All over the World soccer leagues have begun to realize...

- Soccer is viewed differently by younger players than older players
- Young players cannot fully grasp the complexity of 11v11 soccer and learn best through a progression of building blocks
- Without building blocks, many players are forced into more tactical situations bypassing technical and personal growth
- We set the youngsters up for failure if we continue at larger numbers for younger ages.

Keeping U12 Development Soccer Simple

The U12 8-a-side 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.

In addition a small sided game is a great teacher.

The 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 game are right. The game is right. The rewards will be in the children's enjoyment of playing and their positive development.

"We should respect the soccer of the past, analyze the soccer of the present, and anticipate the soccer of the future."

Synopsis (Studies) on the topic:

Study #1 – Manchester United FC

The following data were collected in a 2002-2003 study conducted for Manchester United Football Club by Dr. Rick Fenoglio, a lecturer in Exercise Science at Manchester Metropolitan University. Fifteen 4v4 and 8v8 games were videotaped and analyzed for the study.



Passes: +135% or 585 more passes in 4v4 games
Shots Taken: +260% or 481 more shots in 4v4 games
Goals Scored: +500% or 301 more goals in 4v4 games
1v1's: +225% or 525 more 1v1's in 4v4 games
Tricks, Turns, Moves: +280% or 436 more tricks, turns, and moves

Study #2 – California Youth Soccer

The following conclusions were reported in 2001 by John Weinerth as part of a 4v4 vs 8v8 pilot study for the California Youth Soccer Association - South (CYSA-S).

1. In the 4x4 game on a smaller field (35x25 yards), most of the players (88%) touched the ball 3-4 times more in several different categories such as: goals, shots on goal, completed and lost passes and total passes while still maintaining similar completion ratio of 31 vs 35%
2. When no positions were given to the players (the player's were free to move around the field), the results were that they were much more involved & subsequently touched the ball 3-4 times more.
3. In the 8x8 game (80x50yard field), two or three players dominated the game in passes and dribbles.
4. The observation of the game by several people was that the 4x4 game flowed with little breaks compared to the 8x8 game which had many breaks due to restarts from goals, shots on goals, throw-ins and dribbles by 2-3 dominating players.

5. Based on the oral survey, 88% of the players answered the oral survey questions #2 and #3 (Which game did you have more fun playing (on the small field or the bigger field)? & Which game allowed you to touch the ball more 8v8 or 4v4?) in favor of the 4v4 small-sided game. The individual Player Performance Analysis clearly illustrates a much more active involved player in the 4v4 game in comparison with that same player that seemed hidden and uninvolved in the 8v8 game.

Study #3 – German Football Association

This study was conducted by the German Football Association, in conjunction with The Sports University of Cologne.

Observations on the question, “What Game Format and Development Model is Best?” were as follows.



1. Children like to compete with each other
2. Skills need to be developed in playful environment
3. Players can't learn when game demands skills or tactics they haven't yet learned
4. If they encounter the same situation many times over, they learn to deal with it
5. Complicated rules, such as offside detract from the ability to learn fundamentals
6. Commonly accepted now that ages 8 to 12 are ideal for developing technique and coordination
7. In spite of this many coaches continue to implement adult rules and strategies, which hinder this development
8. It's not enough to merely substitute smaller games for 11v11
9. Basic concepts such as passing, control, dribbling and ball possession must be taught
10. Players should not be forced into rigid positional responsibilities until they have mastered the basics
11. Development is a long term process, and the player's enjoyment should take precedence over that of the parents - games that teach soccer fundamentals may not be the most exciting to watch
12. By changing conditions and variations of the training games, the coach can alter the playing style of the children

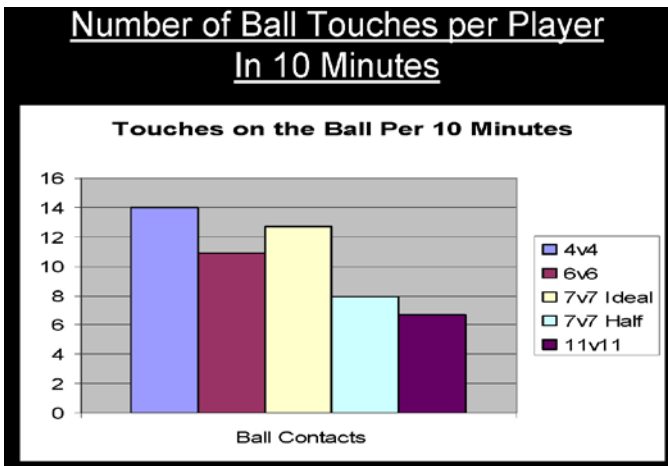
Study #4 – US Olympic Development Program (ODP)

Why is training more important for young players than game playing?

During a major international tournament (11-a-side) with FIFA-3 substitution rules (three changes with no re-entry), the individual time of possession for 90-minute games ranged between 20 seconds and three minutes, with an average of one and a half to two minutes possession time per player. (Bangsbo and Pietersen,2004)

In a study of 1500 ODP level female players, the average number of games reported played over the previous twelve months was 116. With an average game duration of 80-minutes and a maximum roster of 18, and with the ball out of play for an average of 33%, the typical player would experience 1.5 minutes of active play per game for a total of 174 minutes per year. Less than 3 hours of ball contacts! (Turner, 2003)

Under FIFA-3 substitution rules, a young soccer player competing in 100 games per year will only come into contact with the ball for a maximum of 300 minutes, or 5 hours. The recommended ratio of training sessions to games for 9-12 year-old players is 70% training and 30% games.



Study #5 – SSG STUDY OF PLAYERS IN SCOTLAND

The University of Abertay Dundee conducted the following research by means of an observational analysis of small-sided games in Scotland. The purpose of the study using video analysis software (prozone) as our observational analytical tool was to collect data to compare the 4 vs. 4 game to the 7 vs. 7 and 11 vs. 11 game for U12 players.

More than fifteen years ago the move towards small-sided football was discussed at national level. In particular, the then, current Technical Director of the SFA, Andy Roxburgh (now Technical Director for UEFA) pioneered the small-sided game as the best means of developing the game for children. The small-sided games principle was based on sound educational and developmental evidence. Children learn in a progressive and sequential way using a building block approach. According to existing research the belief is very much that the 11-a-side game is a game designed by adults for adults and should be seen as the last part of the learning journey. Therefore, the 7-a-side game is the intermediate step and the 4 v 4 game is the first step in the ladder.

According to current research (Winter, 2005; Insight, 2004; Manchester United, 2003), the ability of children to make decisions in a difficult, ever changing environment will be dictated by their developmental age, their preparation and the complexity of the situation. Professional educators and football coaches from around the world are agreed that the small-sided game is the best developmental tool for under 12's considering all the information. Also, the use of the 4 and 7 a side games are the best means of teaching the technical and tactical [decision making] parts of the game in preparation for the adult game.

Many believe that the large size of an eleven-a-side pitch, even at its smallest dimensions is too big for children due to the fact that they spend large amounts of time running around or standing still without even touching the ball with very limited passing interaction as well as skill and technical development. The limited time a child touches the ball will not allow appropriate time to develop the basic skills of which many of our international counterparts carry out so successfully. Ultimately, this will result in relatively low skill levels amongst young players in Scotland, which in turns leads to a number of children becoming disenchanted and leaving the sport.

Appendix – Additional Studies

The following complete studies, as well as, additional studies and documents regarding this topic are available from the Alberta Soccer Association in pdf format upon request.

Some other studies and document of interest include:

- ✓ US Youth Soccer – SSG from other FIFA National Associations
- ✓ Effective playing time relative to game format and roster size chart compiled by the United States Youth Soccer Association.
- ✓ Straight Talk about Children and Sport – National Coaching Institute of Canada

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NOTES

NOTES

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