

What does “recreational soccer” mean?

Derived from US Youth Soccer Director of Coach and Player Development Manual

So you have heard the term before, but do you really know what “recreational soccer” is? There are no legal definitions, no US Youth Soccer rules, policies or regulations. One of the most often used terms is one of the least defined. Soccer has created a new meaning for the word recreation and the word recreational. US Youth Soccer does offer a partial definition in its “*Policy on Players and Playing Rules*” in the definitions section when it states:

“**recreational league**” means an intraclub league in which—

- (A) The use of tryouts, invitations, recruiting, or any similar process to roster players to any team on the basis of talent or ability is prohibited;
- (B) The club administering the league accepts as participants in the league any eligible youths (subject to reasonable terms on registration);
- (C) A system or rostering players is used to establish a fair or balanced distribution of playing talent among all teams participating; and
- (D) League rules require that each player must play at least one-half of each game except for reasons of injury, illness, or discipline.

“**recreational team**” means a team that participates in a recreational league.

For the purposes of this manual, let’s use the following basic definitions:

Recreational soccer: Is that soccer program that is primarily devoted to the enjoyment and development of soccer players without the emphasis on travel or high level competition. The purpose of recreational soccer is to provide an opportunity for the participants to have fun, learn the sport and develop life skills including a life long love of the game.

- Recreational Player – a player who is randomly assigned to a team without regard to his/her abilities and skills.
- Recreational Team – teams formed randomly to play soccer.
- Recreational League – leagues composed of teams formed in a random manner.

US Youth Soccer Player Participation Objectives

- **Fun!** It is critical that players involved in youth soccer enjoy the game in which they are playing. If the organization is able to instill a passion and enjoyment in the game then half the battle is already won. This also relates very closely to how players perceive their coach(es) and their interaction with them. One of the main reasons players under 12 decide not to continue is that they no longer are enjoying the game, it has become work.
- **Development:** A necessary element to support fun, without it training and games get stale because there is no improvement.
- **Life skills:** In our case through the sport of soccer (Mission)

Jim Cosgrove, US Youth Soccer Executive Director, USSF National “A” Licensed Coach, Feb. 2002

Developmental Models for Youth Sports: Recreational Soccer

(J. J. Coakley 2001 & Steven Aicinena 2002)

The Pleasure and Participation Model

- Active participation is emphasized
- Participation is the reason for involvement for sport
- The participant and opponent are important
- The opponent is seen as valued and needed
- An opponent is viewed as someone whom participants compete with in order for a test to take place
- The participant’s control of his or her body and objects in the environment
- provide satisfaction
- Skilled movement and performance yield satisfaction
- Demonstrating skill and cunning provides satisfaction
- Domination and victory are not requisites of satisfaction
- Decisions are shared
- Cooperation is desired and expected
- Power is shared

- There is give and take between coaches and athletes

Model “Fits” Recreational Soccer

Recreational soccer is designed to follow the “Pleasure and Participation” Model of Youth Sports.

- Access is open to all who desire to participate, (The Game for ALL Kids)
- Emphasis is on active participation (half game playing time)
- Success is developing each player to their potential
- Objective is for the players to enjoy the experience
- Players are to learn the game through learning to make decisions (The Game Within Each Child)
- Focus is on the CHILD, team is deemphasized with frequent shuffling (redraws annually or semi-annually)

Use of the “Pleasure and Participation” model is most appropriate for recreational players because the model directly addresses the reasons why players play or quit by maximizing the reasons they play and minimizing the reasons they quit. Success and Excellence in Recreational Soccer is measured in players attacked and players retained. Teams win games, players do not. Recreational Soccer is all about fun, recreation, love of the game – winning is **not** a measure of success.

Characteristics of Recreational Play

- Two year age groups are typical of recreational teams so there is a wide range between the most skilled player and the least skilled player.
- Wider age gaps create greater differences in physical, mental and social development
- Players new to the sport are constantly being introduced into the mix
- Enthusiasm and dedication also varies widely from the highly motivated to the socially involved.
- Soccer for some is an outlet for energy and enthusiasm, the child wants to play
- For others it is an imposed activity, something selected for the child for parental perceived needs – socialization, fitness, or just for something for the child to do.
- Physical and athletic skills span the range for each age group.
- Random selection process means, player skills are all across the spectrum
- Fit and unfit players play together
- Children with advanced motor skills mixed with others with physical challenges
- Social maturity levels vary from highly advanced to the somewhat socially challenged. Players may be as much as three grades apart in school creating educational differences as well.

U06 and U08 play small sided games. What are small sided games?

WHY SMALL-SIDED GAMES?

1. Because all parents want our young soccer players to touch and play the ball more often and become more skillful with it!
 - a. It stands to reason that the fewer number of players on the field, the more occasions a player will come in contact with the ball. In fact, players will find they have no choice; the ball will quickly find them!
(4v4 = 1 ball per 8 players) vs. (11v11 = 1 ball per 22 players)
2. Because we want our young soccer players to make more, but less complicated decisions during the game.
 - a. This allows more opportunities to plan or scheme...As they play they must constantly change and adapt to their surroundings. This challenge is the basis for tactics. Players ask themselves how do we solve the puzzle?
Less players on the field = less complicated decisions.
3. Because we want our young soccer players to be more physically efficient in the field space they are playing in! (Reduced field size)
 - a. Economical Fitness Training...
Short duration, high intensity play with ball versus running laps.
4. Because we want our young soccer players to have more individual teaching time with the coach!
 - a. Fewer players on the field and less players on the team will guarantee this!

Players need to feel worthy...they need to feel important!

5. Because there are more opportunities to coach.
 - a. The small-sided game allows coaches a perfect opportunity to observe and analyze the individual and collective responses of players in a simple environment.

It is easier to coach on a smaller field...easier to observe...parent coaches therefore will be more successful!

6. Because we want our young soccer players to have more involved playing time in the game!
More opportunity to solve problems that only the game can present.
7. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunity to play on both sides of the ball!
 - a. More Attacking Opportunities including: Dribbling to take on defenders, Dribbling into open space, Shooting and scoring, receiving, and Passing
 - b. **More Defending Opportunities including:** Intercepting the ball from the other team, stealing the ball from the opponent, and stopping shots.

More exposure to attacking and defending situations...

8. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunities to score goals! (Pure excitement)
 - a. Many players in an 11v11 game are not inclined to seek the goal, because they are so far away or because of defensive restraints.

The smaller field size and fewer players will foster more shooting.

9. Because the environment fosters development of mentally strong athletes.
Players cannot hide or get lost in the small-sided environment. It helps improve competitiveness & aggressiveness.

WHAT CAN BE TAUGHT IN A SMALL-SIDED GAME?

- 1) **Technique...**
Every player will get multiple opportunities to use dribbling, passing, receiving, and shooting.
- 2) **Tactics of Defending & Attacking**
Smaller numbers mean more opportunities for decision making by each player.
- 3) **Team Shape**
In larger numbers bad "shape" is hidden.
- 4) **Transition**
Encourages "fast play". No cushion of teammates to delay attack when possession is lost. The Principles of the game are much easier to see for both coaches and players.

The "Small Sided Game" is a developmentally appropriate environment for our young players. It's a FUN environment that focuses on the PLAYER!