

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 12 years of age (Under 13 from season 2022/2023).

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 12 (aged 5 to 13 from season 2022/2023) 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



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- 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.
- 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.

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



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- sanctioned) involving players in Academic school year six (6) and below.
- 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 venue. Leagues and Coaches should ensure suitable breaks are provided between games.
 - 3.4 Under 12 and 13 - matches are played on a 'Home and Away' basis as determined by the organising League.
 - 3.5 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, the offer must be non-competitive. All league programmes must be approved annually by the relevant Area Association.
 - 3.5.1 Under 12 - From the 2021/2022 season, Leagues can organise a maximum of 16 weeks of formal competition. For the remainder of the season, matches must be non-competition.
 - 3.5.2 Under 13 - From the 2022/2023 season, Leagues can organise a maximum of 16 weeks of formal competition. For the remainder of the season, matches must be non-competition.
 - 3.6 Guidance will be provided to Leagues to assist with fixture schedules, pitch layouts and competition formats.

4. SEASON STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Leagues can organise a calendar of matches that may commence in August and should conclude no later than June 30th.
- 4.2 Leagues can introduce a winter break or an alternative football offer such as Futsal.

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 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 All players in the squad should have a minimum of 50% playing time when participating in matches.
 - 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 by cones or 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 under.
- 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. Concussion symptoms may vary and can include dizziness, headache, or unsteadiness. Please refer to the FAW concussion guidelines for a comprehensive list of signs and symptoms of concussion (https://www.faw.cymru/files/4215/4331/2848/FAW_Concussion_G.pdf). A player who is not in an enhanced care setting must rest fully for 14 days and be symptom free before they are able to resume a graded return to football activities.

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



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- 1.1 Small Sided Football is for boys and girls in Academic Years one (1) to seven (7). (from season 2022/2023 Academic Years one (1) to eight (8)).
- 1.2 An Area Association can extend in its area the scope and application of the Small Sided Football Regulations to cover Academic Year eight (8) (refer to Section H of the FAW Rules). For the format and rules for Academic Year 8 refer to clause 15. (9v9 Small Sided Football) in these regulations.
- 1.3 Mixed football (boys and girls playing together) is permitted for Academic Years one (1) to eleven (11).

2. AGE GROUPS

- 2.1 Must be a minimum of a one academic year and a maximum of two academic years.
- 2.2 A Small Sided player is permitted to play in the age group directly one year above irrespective of any format changes. The age groups that a player is eligible to play in are set out in the table below:

Age as of August 31 st of the relevant playing season	Academic year	Eligible age groups	Maximum permitted format
5	1	Under 6	4v4
		Under 7	
6	2	Under 7	4v4
		Under 8	5v5
7	3	Under 8	5v5
		Under 9	
8	4	Under 9	5v5
		Under 10	7v7
9	5	Under 10	7v7
		Under 11	
10 **	6	Under 11	7v7
		Under 12	9v9 * must be non-competition
11	7	Under 12	9v9
		Under 13	
12	8	Under 13	9v9
		Under 14	11v11

**1 For the avoidance of doubt, if leagues operate two-year age bands and an under 12 9v9 fixture involves a Year 6 player, the offer must be non-competitive.*

*** If a league operates single age band divisions, and at under 12 want the offer to include competitive matches, no player from academic year 6 would be permitted to participate.*

- 2.3 For the purposes of age groupings, an Academic year begins on the 1st September and ends on the 31st August of the following year. Academic year one (1) is the year in which a player reaches his / her 6th 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 playing up an age group should be considered by the club:



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- Representative football – if a player attends an FAW Licensed Academy or FAW Trust Girls Development Centre
 - Physical attributes – if the player continually dominates the opposition physically
 - Ability – if the player's ability means that he or she finds the game challenge too easy and therefore, other players do not get the appropriate experience
- 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.

**This regulation will be piloted during the 2021/2022 season and subsequently reviewed in advance of the 2022/2023 season.*

3. TEAM SIZE, PITCH SIZE, BALL SIZE, GOAL SIZE AND PLAYING DURATION

3.1 Must be implemented as below in the table:

Age Group	Number of Players (maximum number 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)	Maximum Playing Duration	Maximum Game Duration
U6	4 v 4	No GK	28 x 20 yards	No Goal Area	3	Height: Min 3ft Max 4 ft / Width: Min 4ft Max 6ft	40 mins	10 mins
U7	4 v 4	No GK	28 x 20 yards	No Goal Area	3	Height: Min 3ft Max 4 ft / Width: Min 4ft Max 6ft	40 mins	10 mins
U8	5 v 5	GK	35 v 25 yards	7 x 12 yards	3	4 x 8 ft	50 mins	15 mins
U9	5 v 5	GK	35 x 25 yards	7 x 12 yards	3	4 x 8 ft	50 mins	15 mins
U10	7 v 7	GK	44 x 40 yards	10 x 15 yards	4	6 x 12 ft	60 mins	20 mins
U11	7 v 7	GK	44 v 40 yards	10 x 15 yards	4	6 x 12 ft	60 mins	20 mins

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 To assist clubs with the transition to the new regulations, leagues should allow a degree of flexibility regarding goal sizes for the under 6 to under 9 age groups for the 2021/2022 season only.



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3.2 THE GOAL AREA

- 3.2.1 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.

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 have a minimum of 50% playing time when participating in matches.
- 4.4 Under 6, 7, 8 and 9 - No substitute should be waiting longer than 5 minutes before they are involved in the match.
- 4.5 Under 10 and 11 – No substitute should 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.

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.
- 8.2.1 The ball must be stationary from the point where it left the pitch before it is kicked to restart play.
- 8.2.2 The ball must not be kicked overhead height.
- 8.2.3 A goal may not be scored directly from a pass in.
- 8.2.4 The opposition must be 3 yards away from where the ball is placed.
- 8.2 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



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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.

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. 9V9 SMALL SIDED FOOTBALL

- For the under 12 age group, the 9v9 format is mandatory from the 2021/22 season.
- For the under 13 age group, the 9v9 format will be optional for the 2021/2022 season before becoming mandatory from the 2022/23 season.

15.1 Team Size, Pitch Size, Ball Size, Goal Size and Match Duration

15.1.1 Must be implemented as below in the table: -

Age Group	Number 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	GK	18-yard box to 18-yard box x 44 yards / or 64 x 44 yards	12 x 28 yards Penalty spot 9 yards	4	7 x 16 ft	70 mins (35 min halves)



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U13	9 v 9	GK	18-yard box to 18-yard box x 44 yards / or 64 x 44 yards	12 x 28 yards Penalty spot 9 yards	4	7 x 16 ft	70 mins (35 min halves)
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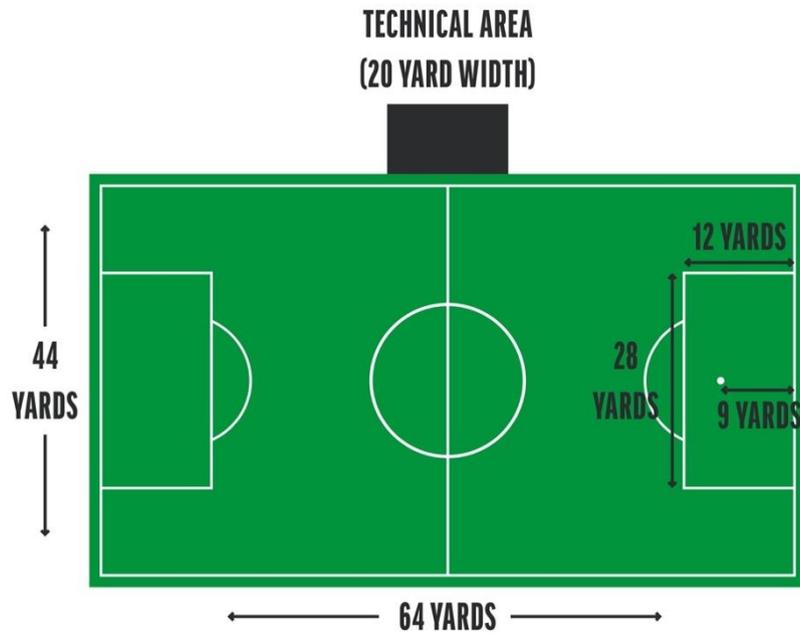
15.2 SQUAD SIZE

15.2.1 Teams at the under 12 and 13 age groups can have a match day squad cap of up to 18 payers, all of whom are eligible to play (teams can use all 9 substitutions – please refer to 15.7). Teams are capped at signing 20 players.

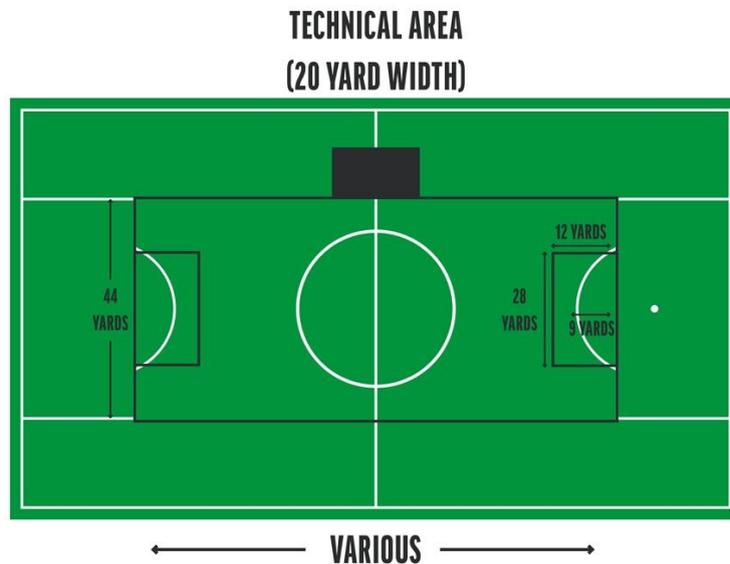
15.3 An 11v11 pitch can be adapted for the 9v9 format, utilizing the width of the penalty area (44 yards) for the 9v9 pitch width and the distance from penalty box to penalty box for the 9v9 pitch length. See diagrams below for guidance:



SPECIFIC 9V9 PITCH



9V9 PITCH ON 11V11 PITCH



15.4 GOAL SIZE

15.4.1. The goal size is 16-foot (width) x 7 feet (height).

15.5 PENALTY AND GOAL AREAS

15.5.1 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.

15.5.2 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.

15.4.3 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.

15.6 MATCH DURATION

15.6.1 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.

15.6.2 If leagues operate a two-year age band and a 9v9 fixture involves a Year 6 player then the Match duration should not exceed 60 minutes.

15.7 SUBSTITUTES

15.7.1 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).

15.6.2 All players in the match day squad should have a minimum of 50% playing time when participating in matches.

15.8 KICK OFF

15.8.1 Is taken in the centre of the playing area to start the game and after a goal has been scored.

15.8.2 The opposition must be a minimum of 7 yards away from where the ball is placed.

15.9 BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY AND THE METHOD OF SCORING

15.9.1 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.

15.10 OFF-SIDE

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

15.11 THROW IN

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

15.12 CORNER KICKS

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

15.13 FREE KICKS

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

15.14 GOALKEEPERS

15.14.1 Can handle the ball in their penalty area and there are no restrictions on



the number of steps they may take holding the ball.

15.14.2 The Goalkeeper can leave the penalty area but cannot handle the ball outside the penalty area.

15.14.3 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.

15.14.4 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.

15.15 GOAL KICKS

15.15.1 The ball must be stationary and from the ground (refer to 15.5.2 for location).

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

15.15.3 Opponents must be outside the penalty area until the ball is in play.

15.16 PLAYERS IN THE GOAL AREA

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

15.17 THE REFEREE

15.17.1 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 the 'IFAB Laws of the Game document'.

