Player Development Initiatives

A resource for parents, coaches and referees supporting the growth and improvement of grassroots soccer

February 2017

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Current Landscape

The coaching and playing environment needs to be improved for 6-12 year olds

Too much emphasis placed on the result of the game

The priority should be to develop skills and abilities

There is a need to educate and empower parents and coaches

- For example, the U.S. Soccer F License is specifically designed for volunteer coaches working with players 8 and younger

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Structural Change

We can’t keep doing the same thing and expect to get different results

Long-term development of players is the top priority

- Kids under the age of 12 don’t win World Cups so we should not treat them like adults or professional players

Players need to be put in the best possible environment to succeed

There are no shortcuts

- Success requires a long-term approach and commitment

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Starting Point

First set of changes designed to grow and improve the game

Birth Year Registration

- Registering players according to a January 1 to December 31 timeframe

Small-Sided Games

- Development philosophy and playing standards for players 12 and younger

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Birth Year Registration

Objectives

The focus moves away from the team and onto the individual player

- Development and winning do not have to happen independently from one another
- Our misguided desire to win at all costs at the youth levels often comes at the expense of individual player development
- This change will cause many parents and coaches to rethink how teams will be formed moving forward and this should take place with each individual player in mind based on his or her developmental needs

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Birth Year Registration

Objectives

The focus moves away from bigger, faster, stronger

- Changing to birth year registration doesn't eliminate relative age effect (RAE) because whenever there is a defined age range, someone will be the oldest and someone will be the youngest
- However, this change does help better understand and account for RAE
- Parents and coaches should have an increased awareness of a player's birth month relative to his or her peer group and level of performance
- This should help combat focusing on kids that appear to be better simply because they are up to 364 days older than a teammate or opponent

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Birth Year Registration

Objectives

Uniformity across the country and across membership

- The current landscape is highly variable
- Having uniformity doesn't mean that all soccer will look the same in all places at all times
- It does mean that the soccer community can be better aligned with U.S. Soccer's player development objectives and we can collectively harness the advantage our nation's diversity and populations has to offer
- A uniform framework also allows U.S. Soccer, and the programs of our members, to provide consistent messaging and education for parents, players, coaches and referees

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Birth Year Registration

Objectives

Aligns with international standards for youth development

- This means aligning with the international standards used by the world's leading soccer nations so that kids in the United States are developing in an environment similar to those playing in Germany, France, Spain, etc.

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Birth Year Registration Chart

	U6 6 years old and younger	U7 7 years old and younger	U8 8 years old and younger	U9 9 years old and younger	U10 10 years old and younger	U11 11 years old and younger	U12 12 years old and younger
2016-17 Season	Born in 2011	Born in 2010	Born in 2009	Born in 2008	Born in 2007	Born in 2006	Born in 2005
2017-18 Season	Born in 2012	Born in 2011	Born in 2010	Born in 2009	Born in 2008	Born in 2007	Born in 2006

	U13 13 years old and younger	U14 14 years old and younger	U15 15 years old and younger	U16 16 years old and younger	U17 17 years old and younger	U18 18 years old and younger	U19 19 years old and younger
2016-17 Season	Born in 2004	Born in 2003	Born in 2002	Born in 2001	Born in 2000	Born in 1999	Born in 1998
2017-18 Season	Born in 2005	Born in 2004	Born in 2003	Born in 2002	Born in 2001	Born in 2000	Born in 1999

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Small-Sided Games

Objectives

Develop improved skills with the ball

- Improve confidence and comfort

Develop intelligence with and without the ball

- Promote faster decisions and better awareness

Develop partnerships within the team

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Small-Sided Games

Objectives

Provide an age appropriate environment

- Standards align with physiological needs of players based on year of birth

Uniformity across the country and across membership

- Similar to the outcomes listed for birth year registration, having consistent standards allows U.S. Soccer, and the programs of our members, to provide more meaningful messaging and education for parents, players, coaches and referees

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Small-Sided Games Chart

	U6 6 years old and younger	U7 7 years old and younger	U8 8 years old and younger	U9 9 years old and younger	U10 10 years old and younger	U11 11 years old and younger	U12 12 years old and younger
Field Size Ranges (yards)	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Length 25-35 Width 15-25	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Length 55-65 Width 35-45	Length 70-80 Width 45-55	Length 70-80 Width 45-55
Maximum Goal Size (feet)	Height 4 Width 6	Height 4 Width 6	Height 4 Width 6	Height 6.5 Width 18.5	Height 6.5 Width 18.5	Height 7 Width 21	Height 7 Width 21
Ball Size	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Players	4v4 No GK	4v4 No GK	4v4 No GK	7v7 GK	7v7 GK	9v9 GK	9v9 GK
Game Time (minutes)	4x10	4x10	4x10	2x25	2x25	2x30	2x30
Offside	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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4v4 Standards

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4v4 Player Development Philosophy

Coaches should have the age appropriate license issued by U.S. Soccer

Formal games are not needed so playing with and against teammates at the end of each training session (1-2 per week) should be sufficient

Formal rosters and teams are not needed so having a flexible and fluid approach to training and playing is recommended

- While playing, everyone should participate a minimum of 50% of the time
- With 4 players on the field, having 6 players on each “team” when the “game” is played helps maximize participation and engagement

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4v4 Player Development Philosophy

Here are some examples of having a flexible and fluid approach to training and playing

- Utilize “in-house” programs that have everyone train and play as a pool of players rather than as distinct teams
- This approach allows players to train and play with a variety of other kids based on numbers, ability, age, height, weight, etc.
- If using teams with a set roster of players, players can be mixed up during the game at the end of the training session to provide variety

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4v4 Player Development Philosophy

Results and standings should not be recorded

Travel should be limited as much as possible

Players should not be participating in events (tournaments, showcases, festivals, etc.)

Remember that safety and fun are the top priorities so make adjustments as needed to ensure both are being promoted

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4v4

Concussion Initiative

Per U.S. Soccer's Concussion Initiative, if a player is suspected to have a head injury the referee* is instructed to stop play to allow for treatment/evaluation as needed

If the player leaves the field of play for additional evaluation, a substitution can be made in that moment

The player with the suspected head injury may not return to the game unless a Health Care Professional (HCP) or Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) has cleared the player

Any coach or parent insisting on returning the player to the game without approved clearance will result in the referee* ending the game

*Since there is no referee in 4v4, this responsibility falls to the coaches and parents involved

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4v4

Concussion Initiative

Deliberate heading is not allowed in 4v4 games

If a player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense

In a controlled and individual environment (where heading is an isolated skill being taught away from any form of opposition or other aspects of the game), the use of lightweight balls (foam, balloon, etc.) would be acceptable for teaching heading technique

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4v4 Standards of Play

Field

- 25-35 yards (length)
- 15-25 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 4 feet (height) x 6 feet (width)
- Corner flags are not needed

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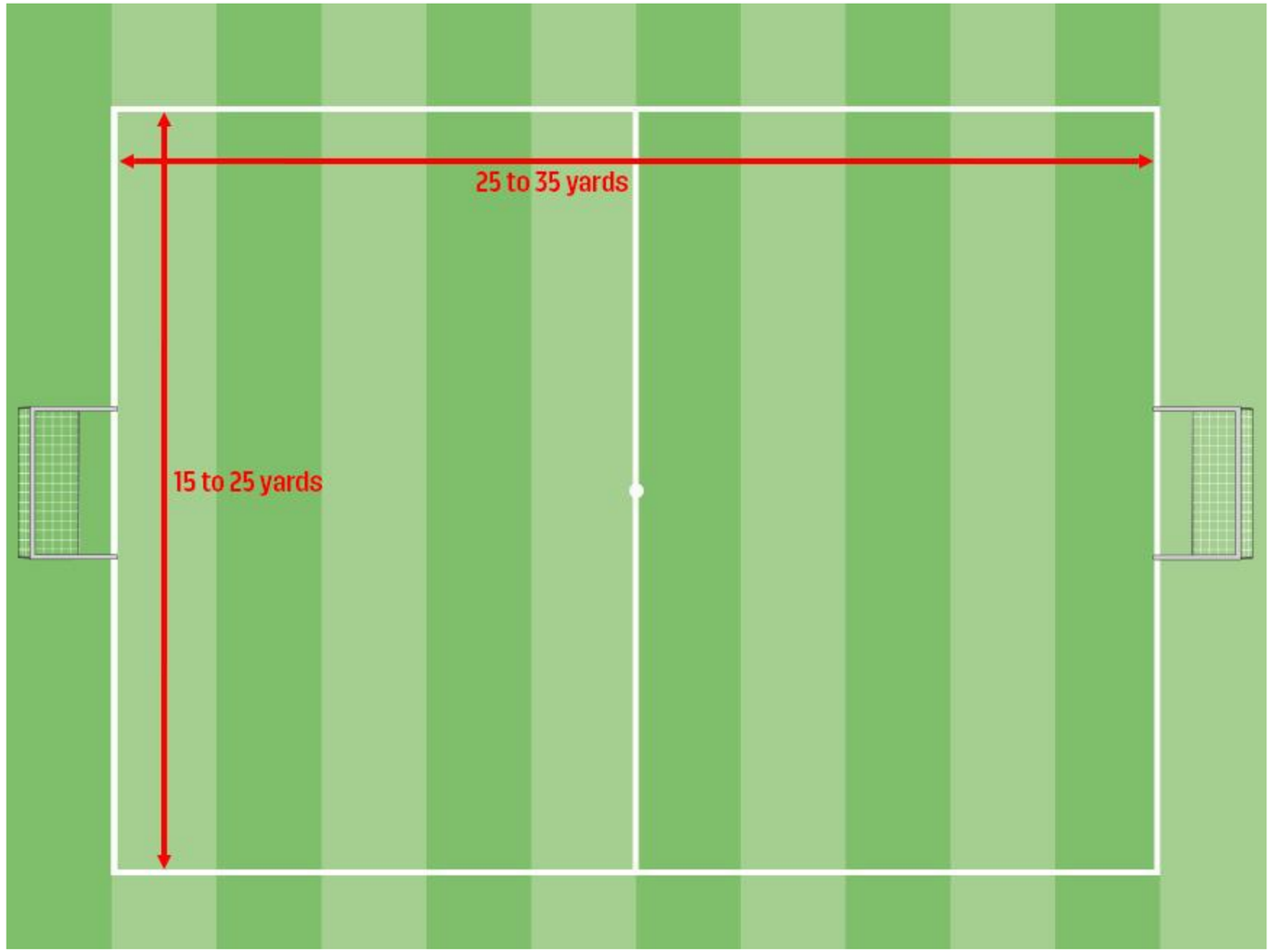
4v4 Standards of Play



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4v4 Standards of Play

Games

- Size 3 ball
- 4v4 (no goalkeepers)
- Shin guards are required
- Substitutions are unlimited and can occur at any time
- 4 quarters
- No more than 10 minute quarters
- 5 minute breaks between quarters
- Playing times can be less than 10 minutes when managed by the coaches and parents

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4v4 Standards of Play

Games

- Kick offs, free kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks and corner kicks are used to start or restart play
- Kick-ins and/or dribble-ins are also acceptable
- Goal kicks and corner kicks should be taken in the general vicinity of the respective goal or corner
- If used, all free kicks are indirect
- Opponents should be 10 feet away from the ball on all restarts
- No penalty kicks
- No offside

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4v4 Standards of Play

Games

- Registered and certified referees are not needed at this level
- Since there is no referee, coaches are expected to manage the game environment from the touchline using these standards of play and their best judgement
- Together, coaches and parents are expected to create and promote a fun and safe environment for the players

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7v7 Standards

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7v7 Player Development Philosophy

Coaches should have the age appropriate license issued by U.S. Soccer

The training-to-game ratio should be 2-3 training sessions per game played

Rosters should include no more than 12 players

Players should participate in no more than 20 games per calendar year and in no more than one game per day

Every player should play a minimum of 50% of the time in each game

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7v7 Player Development Philosophy

Results and standings should not be recorded

Players should have a minimum of 2 rest days per week during the season along with planned breaks from organized soccer during the calendar year

Any travel should be limited to no more than an hour away

Events (tournaments, showcases, festivals, etc.) should provide a predetermined number of games with no advancement, placement games or champions

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7v7

Concussion Initiative

Per U.S. Soccer’s Concussion Initiative, if a player is suspected to have a head injury the referee is instructed to stop play to allow for treatment/evaluation as needed

If the player leaves the field of play for additional evaluation, a substitution can be made in that moment

The player with the suspected head injury may not return to the game unless a Health Care Professional (HCP) or Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) has cleared the player

Any coach or parent insisting on returning the player to the game without approved clearance will result in the referee ending the game

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7v7

Concussion Initiative

Deliberate heading is not allowed in 7v7 games

If a player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense

If the deliberate header occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infringement occurred

In a controlled and individual environment (where heading is an isolated skill being taught away from any form of opposition or other aspects of the game), the use of lightweight balls (foam, balloon, etc.) would be acceptable for teaching heading technique

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7v7 Standards of Play

Build Out Line

The build out line promotes playing the ball out of the back in a less pressured setting

When the goalkeeper has the ball in his or her hands during play from the opponent, the opposing team must move behind the build out line until the ball is put into play

Once the opposing team is behind the build out line, the goalkeeper can pass, throw or roll the ball into play (punts and drop kicks are not allowed)

After the ball is put into play by the goalkeeper, the opposing team can cross the build out line and play resumes as normal

The opposing team must also move behind the build out line during a goal kick until the ball is put into play

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7v7 Standards of Play

Build Out Line

If a goalkeeper punts or drop kicks the ball, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense

If the punt or drop kick occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infringement occurred

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7v7 Standards of Play

Build Out Line

The build out line will also be used to denote where offside offenses can be called

Players cannot be penalized for an offside offense between the halfway line and the build out line

Players can be penalized for an offside offense between the build out line and goal line

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7v7

Build Out Line Practical Applications

Ideally, the goalkeeper will wait to put the ball into play once all opponents are past the build out line

However, the goalkeeper can put the ball into play sooner but he or she does so accepting the positioning of the opponents and the consequences of how play resumes

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7v7

Build Out Line Practical Applications

To support the intent of the development rule, coaches and referees should be mindful of any intentional delays being caused by opponents not retreating in a timely manner or encroaching over the build out line prior to the ball being put into play

Coaches are responsible for addressing these types of issues with their players

Referees can manage the situation with misconduct if deemed appropriate

Referees should be flexible when enforcing the 6 second rule and counting the time of possession should only begin when all opponents have moved behind the build out line

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7v7 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 1 – Field of Play

- 55-65 yards (length)
- 35-45 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 6.5 feet (height) x 18.5 feet (width)
- A 6.5 feet (height) x 12 feet (width) goal is recommended based on the age and ability of the players
- Diagram contains recommended field markings and dimensions
- Build out lines should be equidistant between the penalty area line and halfway line

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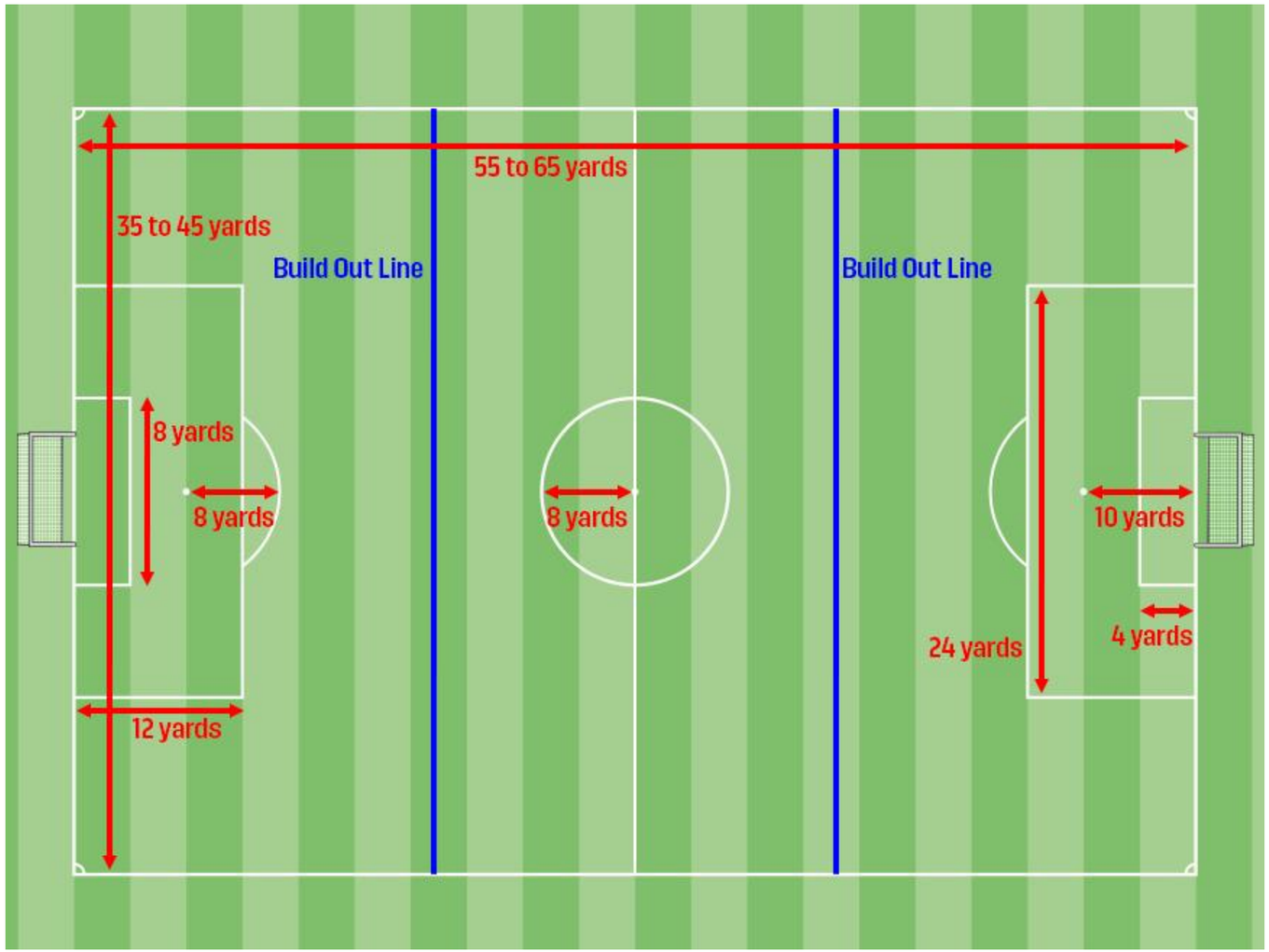
7v7



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7v7 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 2 – Ball

- Size 4

Law 3 – Players

- 7v7 (6 field players and 1 goalkeeper)
- Game may not start or continue if there are less than 5 players on a team
- Substitutions are unlimited and can occur at any stoppage

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7v7 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 5 – Referee

- Minimum certification as a U.S. Soccer Grade 9 Referee

Law 6 – Other Match Officials

- Used at the discretion of the competition

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7v7 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 7 – Duration of the Match

- 2 halves
- 25 minutes halves
- 10 minute halftime
- No added time

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7v7 Standards of Play

Standard Laws of the Game

Law 4 – Players' Equipment
Law 8 – Start and Restart of Play
Law 9 – Ball In and Out of Play
Law 10 – Method of Scoring
Law 11 – Offside
Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct*
Law 13 – Free Kicks
Law 14 – Penalty Kick
Law 15 – Throw-in
Law 16 – Goal Kick
Law 17 – Corner kick

*With the exception of deliberate heading and punting

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9v9 Standards

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9v9 Player Development Philosophy

Coaches should have the age appropriate license issued by U.S. Soccer

The training-to-game ratio should be 2-3 training sessions per game played

Rosters should include no more than 16 players

Players should participate in no more than 30 games per calendar year and in no more than one game per day

Every player should play a minimum of 50% of the time in each game

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9v9 Player Development Philosophy

Results and standings should not be recorded

Players should have a minimum of 2 rest days per week during the season along with planned breaks from organized soccer during the calendar year

Any travel should be limited to day trips with limited allowances for overnight stays

Events (ex: tournaments, showcases, festivals, etc.) should provide a predetermined number of games with no advancement, placement games or champions

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9v9

Concussion Initiative

Per U.S. Soccer's Concussion Initiative, if a player is suspected to have a head injury the referee is instructed to stop play to allow for treatment/evaluation as needed

If the player leaves the field of play for additional evaluation, a substitution can be made in that moment

The player with the suspected head injury may not return to the game unless a Health Care Professional (HCP) or Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) has cleared the player

Any coach or parent insisting on returning the player to the game without approved clearance will result in the referee ending the game

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9v9

Concussion Initiative

Deliberate heading is not allowed in U11 games. Heading is currently allowed in U12 games without limitations but membership is empowered to limit or ban heading at this level of play

If a player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense

If the deliberate header occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infringement occurred

In a controlled and individual environment (where heading is an isolated skill being taught away from any form of opposition or other aspects of the game), the use of lightweight balls (foam, balloon, etc.) would be acceptable for teaching heading technique

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9v9 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 1 – Field of Play

- 70-80 yards (length)
- 45-55 yards (width)
- Goals should be no larger than 7 feet (height) x 21 feet (width)
- A 6.5 feet (height) x 18.5 feet (width) goal is recommended based on the age and ability of the players
- Diagram contains recommended field markings and dimensions

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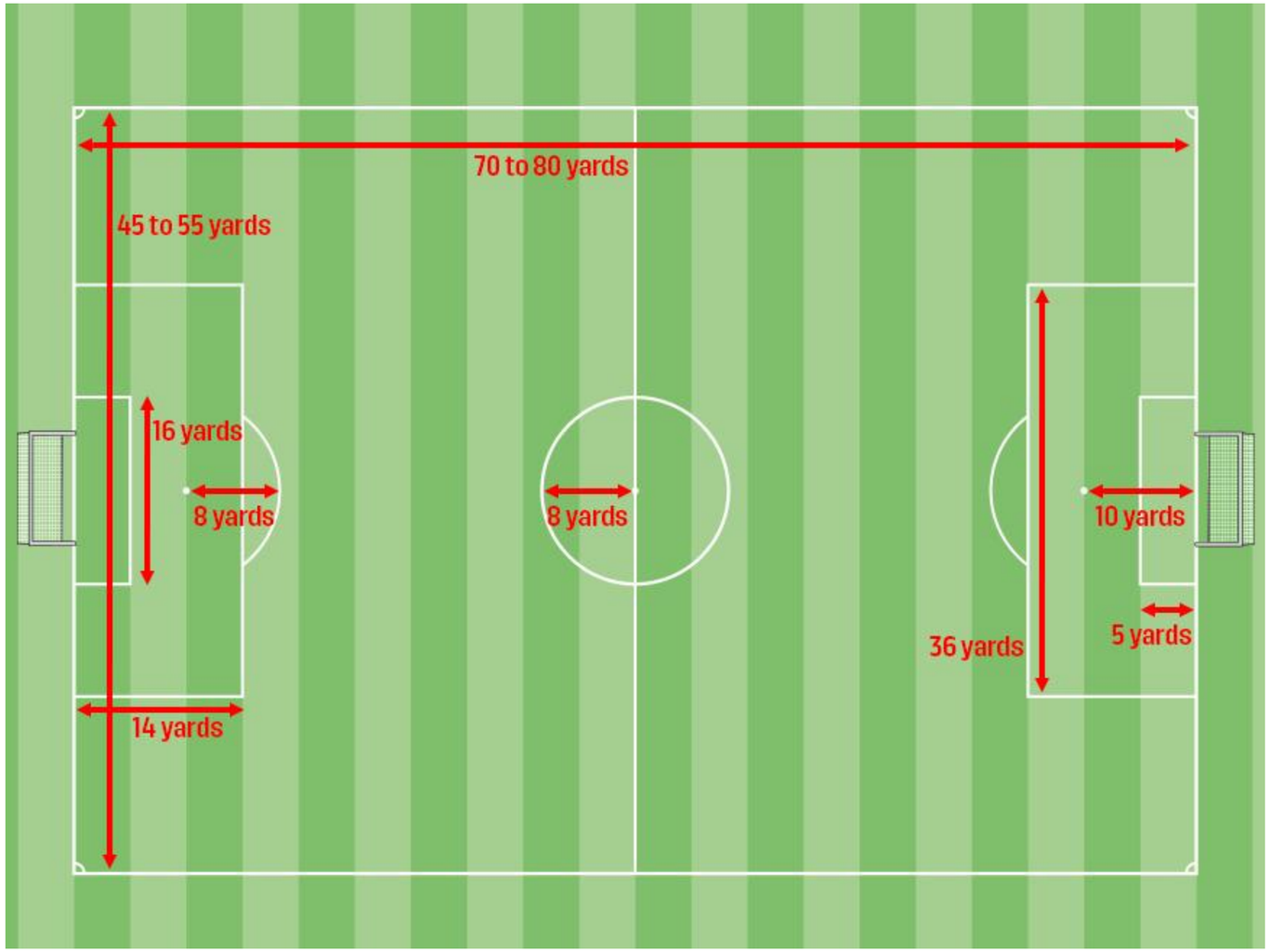
9v9 Standards of Play



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9v9 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 2 – Ball

- Size 4

Law 3 – Number of Players

- 9v9 (8 field players and 1 goalkeeper)
- Game may not start or continue if there are less than 6 players on a team
- Substitutions are unlimited and can occur at any stoppage

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9v9 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 5 – Referee

- Minimum certification as a U.S. Soccer Grade 9 Referee

Law 6 – Other Match Officials

- Used at the discretion of the competition authority

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9v9 Standards of Play

Modified Laws of the Game

Law 7 – Duration of the Match

- 2 halves
- 30 minutes halves
- 10 minute halftime
- No added time

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9v9 Standards of Play

Standard Laws of the Game

Law 4 – Players' Equipment
Law 5 – The Referee
Law 8 – Start and Restart of Play
Law 9 – Ball In and Out of Play
Law 10 – Method of Scoring
Law 11 – Offside
Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct*
Law 13 – Free kicks
Law 14 – Penalty Kick
Law 15 – Throw-in
Law 16 – Goal kick
Law 17 – Corner kick

*With the exception of deliberate heading in U11 games

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Implementation

Timeline

All information about the Concussion Initiative is implemented with immediate effect

Birth year registration and the small sided standards will be mandated in August 2017

- Some members have chosen to adopt earlier as a best practice and will begin implementing in August 2016
- Please contact your local member for more information on implementation

The Player Development Philosophy information is provided as best practice standards

- Although not currently mandated, U.S. Soccer believes members should adopt these principles to align with our values and objectives for player development

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What You Can Do

How to Best Support the Changes

Have patience

Stick to the facts

Read the FAQ

Communicate with and get answers from your local member and leaders

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