



Small Sided Games- **The Best Coaching/Player development Tool of All**

Small Sided Games have helped to develop the best players in the world in all sorts of team sports. Look at Brazilian soccer, US basketball, and many other sports and you will find that the foundations of the greatest players lie in the places where they played small games with friend and sometimes enemies. The Kids created the games themselves, and played them in the environment in which they felt most comfortable and made the greatest improvement.

Yet, as GAA coaches we sometimes refuse to adopt similar approaches that have served these sports so well. It is great to see the GAA have introduced the concept of GO Games, which are basically Small Sided Games with a nice name. This is a great starting point for all GAA Coaches.

Why use Small Sided Games?

- Can cater for all levels of ability.
- Individuals can improve at a rate appropriate for them.
- Coaches can put players of similar ability marking each other, or play different small sided games.
- More touches of the ball for each player
- Increased work rate/Intensity
- Develops tactical awareness.
- Makes training enjoyable and increases motivation to participate.
- Takes pressure off inexperienced coaches and creates positive interaction between players and coaches.
- Fosters a feeling of being part of a team.
- Helps avoid development of techniques that don't transfer into the game.
- Enhances players' understanding of rules.
- Provides ideal situations for a questioning approach(this could be the topic of another article), which improves players understanding and helps them figure solutions out for themselves

How can a Small Sided Approach be Implemented

The basis of Small Sided Games should be for the coach to modify the game so that the players are being placed in a situation that emphasises the skill/tactic that needs to be learnt.

Things that can be manipulated and changed to create situations

- Number of Scoring Goals- Get players to think about switch direction
- Number of players in attack/defence
- Positioning of the area that can be scored from- Getting players to think about where they shoot from
- Dimensions of the playing area- get players used to playing in tighter, more intense environments, with less time on the ball. Zoning the pitch like Go Games.
- Number of passes allowed – e.g Max of 5 passes before a score
- Banning/promoting various skills – e.g Extra points for a Good near hand tackle
- Scoring system, including bonus points for particular skills, 2 points for scoring with the weak foot, 2 Points for every score during a certain time period.
- Deducting points for Turnovers, dropped balls, etc
- Time allowed – Time on the ball, time to get a score
- Specific roles for players- not allowing certain players to solo
- Adding or deleting game rules- e.g No Solo,

Important Points for the coach

- Play the game for as long as you can without the game deteriorating in standard. Ensure players understand why you are playing.
- If the game is working well, you may want to add in some sort of progression.
- Be aware of players individual levels of readiness for things that you may introduce, and some players are more tactically aware than others.
- Make sure players are aware of what they did before you give specific feedback