

Game Format 9s

PLAYER JOURNEY - SMALL SIDED GAMES FORMAT OPTIONS 5-12 YEARS									
YEAR 2026	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2015 FROM AUG	2014	2014 FROM MAY
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	Focus on in-house, club based games. Mixed age groups and formats to encourage fun, social interaction, and skill exploration. Some local festival activity permitted				Clubs should continue to provide a variety of activity, enabling players to play in club-based activity sessions and/or more regular festivals or fixture-based football.				
1v1, 2v2, 3v3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4v4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5v5			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7v7				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9v9						✓	✓	✓	
11v11									✓

For young players the small sided game has been proven through research to be the best format to develop their love for the game along with the opportunity to maximise involvement and help with player development.

The game format described below is the MAXIMUM format that players of this age should play. It is entirely acceptable that players at this stage play any smaller format of the game, involving fewer players but should not play any larger format games

Games should be organised on a round robin festival basis and be trophy free.

Teams will comprise 8 outfield players plus a goalkeeper. Team squads may consist of up to 14 players with rolling substitutions used throughout the game. Players who have been substituted may return to the field of play as often as necessary. All team members should receive equal playing time where possible.

- All team members should receive equal playing time.
- A Game Supervisor and/or an official referee, if available, must be a club official, will officiate from the side of the field and will not be allowed to coach either team.
- At the end of every game, team coaches should encourage both teams to shake hands with each other and the officials.
- It is unacceptable for a league and/or club to post results from development games on to any website or publish in any newsletter, newspaper or social media.

Playing Area

The Scottish FA promote the use of small-sided games festival formats to maximise participation and inclusion. For children, playing the game in a festival format provides a great way to ensure everyone is engaged, involved and having fun.

Recommendation

The field of play shall approximately be 42 to 47 metres wide and 65 to 75 metres long or as an alternative half a full size pitch.

Goalposts should be no more than 4.9 metres x 1.8 metres (16ft by 6ft).

The penalty area is defined at each end of the field as follows:

Two lines are drawn at right angles to the goal lines 20 metres apart from each other. These lines extend into the field of play for a distance of 12 metres and are joined by a line drawn parallel with the goal line. If there are no pitch markings a pitch can be marked out using cones.

Alternative Pitch Markings

The penalty area can be designated by cones and/or markers placed on each touchline 12 metres from the corner of the touchline and by-lines. Where possible flat markers should be placed to form a line across the pitch between the cones/markers.

Within each penalty area a penalty mark is made 9 metres from the midpoint between the goalposts and equidistant to them.

A centre mark at the midpoint of the halfway line.

Alternative

Field and goalposts as supplied by the local authority may be used. Leagues/Clubs should adapt the recommendations according to the venue specifications.

Equipment

- Goalposts should be no more than 4.9 metres x 1.8 metres (16ft by 6ft).
- A size 4 ball should be used.
- All players must wear shin-guards.
- Metal studs are suitable for grass fields only.
- Players must wear the appropriate clothing dependent on weather.
- Glasses may be worn provided they have safety frames and lenses.

The Duration of the Game

The duration of the game shall be a maximum of 2 periods of 30 minutes with a 5 minute interval or alternatively 3 periods of 20 minutes. Games should be organised on a festival basis or as weekly fixtures and shall be trophy free. Festival format may require some flexibility in timing dependant on the venue and booking times.

Flexibility should prevail. The team leaders have joint discretion to alter this in the event of poor weather conditions, pitch conditions or an obvious mismatch.

The Start and Restart of Play

On scoring a goal, the team that scores will retreat to the halfway line. The team conceding the goal will restart the game with a kick off at the centre of the pitch. Opponents should be 6 metres away from the ball.

Retreating Line – No retreating line at 9s required, penalty box comes into play.

Pass Back - The deliberate pass to the goalkeeper law does apply.

The Ball in and out of Play

Free Kicks - Normal rules apply except that the distance an opposing player must be is 6 metres from the ball.

The Throw In - In the event of the ball going out of play a throw-in will be awarded. Players should take throw-ins.

The Goal Kick - Normal rules apply.

Kicking From Hands – Is not prohibited, but goalkeepers should be encouraged to throw the ball out or pass from the ground as often as they can.

The Corner Kick - Normal rules apply except that the distance an opposing player must be is 6 metres from the ball. It is recommended that short corners should be encouraged.

Offside - Normal rules apply

Results

It is unacceptable for a league and/or club to post results from development games on to any website or publish in any newsletter or newspaper.

7v7 to 9v9 Transition –

The transition from 7-a-side to 9-a-side football can only commence on 1st June. No 9-a-side matches can be played BEFORE this date. Teams must complete their current fixture programme before moving to the new format. Clubs are also strongly encouraged, where possible, to attend one of the 9v9 transition workshops to help players, coaches and parents understand the changes and support a smooth transition.

9v9 to 11v11 Transition -The transition from 9-a-side to 11-a-side football can commence on 1st May. All teams must complete their scheduled 9-a-side fixtures, and no fixtures should be cancelled to move into 11-a-side football earlier than planned. 9's fixtures cannot be converted to 11v11 matches at the discretion of individual teams.

Before transitioning, clubs must ensure they comply with Rule 22 of the SYFA Supplementary & Playing Rules ([Scottish Football Association Self Service Portal - SYFA Supplementary & Playing Rules](#)). Scottish FA Coaching Qualifications in the Children's Pathway are **no longer valid**.

All teams intending to participate in 11-a-side football in August must have at least one coach who holds the Scottish FA Level 1.2 – Youth/Adult Coaching Certificate. This can be booked here or via MyComet: [Youth/Adult Coaching Certificate | Football Coaching | Scottish FA](#)

Prior to the commencement of any league fixtures, teams participating in friendly matches must obtain a permit. For more information, visit - [Tournaments And Festivals | Scottish Youth Football Association \(SYFA\)](#)

There is also a Frequently Asked Questions section on the Player Journey landing page that may help answer any additional queries.

Required Coach Education for 9s

Required Coach Education Award is Level Children Coaching Certificate of the Scottish FA Children's Pathway.

[Click here](#) for further information on the coach education pathway

Recommended Coach in Service

All coaches should attend 'Transition to 9's player pathway workshop.

Heading Guide for Coaches, Teachers, Leaders and Parents

For guidelines on heading, please [click here](#).