

General Player Development - FAQs

1. What is the Player Journey, and why is it important?

The Player Journey is a structured framework designed to support young footballers. It ensures they progress through appropriate stages, gaining the right skills and experiences to enjoy the game and reach their potential. Remember at this stage football is 'Trophy Free' and the main objective is to create positive environments for all players to develop and not creating a 'Win at all cost mentality'

2. How does the Player Journey help children stay in the game longer?

By focusing on enjoyment, equal opportunities, and age-appropriate development, the Player Journey creates a positive environment that keeps players engaged, reduces drop-out rates, and allows them to develop at their own pace.

3. What role do coaches play in the Player Journey?

Coaches are vital in creating a safe, fun, and challenging learning environment. They help players develop skills, build confidence, and foster a love for the game through positive coaching methods.

Small-Sided Games and Game Formats

4. Why are small-sided games encouraged for younger players?

Small-sided games (e.g. 4v4, 5v5, 7v7) provide more touches on the ball, increase player involvement, and enhance decision-making skills in a fun and developmentally appropriate way.

5. What is the purpose of the retreating line in younger age groups?

The retreating line is a development tool that helps young players transition to larger game formats by encouraging play from the back, improving composure on the ball, and creating more meaningful involvement for all players.

Playing Time and Player Development

6. Should all players get equal game time?

Yes, especially at younger ages, equal game time is crucial for skill development, confidence-building, and ensuring all players feel valued and engaged in the game.

7. How can I help my child improve outside of training?

Encourage them to play informally (e.g., with friends in the park), practice basic skills like dribbling and passing, and most importantly, enjoy playing the game in different environments.

Rules and Match Guidelines

8. Are there offside rules in small-sided games?

No, in most small-sided formats (e.g., 5v5 and 7v7), there is no offside rule to encourage attacking play and allow players to develop their game awareness more naturally. This rule changes in the 9v9 version of the game when offside becomes active.

9. Can goalkeepers pick up a pass from their own teammate?

In small-sided formats, goalkeepers are allowed to pick up a direct pass from a teammate's feet.

10. How do kick-ins, dribble-ins or throw-ins work in younger age groups?

Many small-sided games use kick-ins or dribble-ins instead of throw-ins to keep the game flowing and give players more time on the ball. However, in older age groups, throw-ins become the standard.

11. How do substitutions work in children's football?

Rolling substitutions are generally used to ensure all players get fair game time and to keep the match fluid. This allows players to rest and rejoin the game as needed.

12. What happens if a match is one-sided?

Many leagues encourage "game management" approaches, such as rotating players into different positions or introducing a "managing the scoreline" guideline to keep the match competitive and enjoyable for both teams.

13. Can the goalkeeper kick from hands?

In small-sided games, it is encouraged that young players do not kick from hand and instead try to throw the ball or play from the ground. As goalkeepers develop, coaching will focus on helping them learn the best technique to 'kick from hand.' The rules state that in all games 7v7 and below, kicking from hands is not permitted. However, as players progress to 9v9, this aspect will be considered for further development from the 2015 age group onwards, with updates being provided. Please remember that this is 'Trophy Free' development football, and the objective is to help all players develop in a positive environment.

14. What is the recommended squad size for a team playing a game?

Again, remember this is 'Trophy Free,' and the objective is to create a positive environment. The recommended maximum squad sizes (outlined on the Scottish FA website) are in place to ensure that young players get the maximum game time possible. We understand that for some festivals and/or events, teams might consider taking one or two more players. However, we encourage teams to have fewer players to enhance game time. It is encouraged that clubs seek to provide various playing opportunities and experiences so that all young players can participate and enjoy the game.

15. Can a player head the ball in the game?

We encourage all teams to play with the ball on the ground and refer you to the heading guidance for further information - [add link here].

16. When can a team transition to 9s or 11s?

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 2026 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.