

More goals, better soccer!

Improving tactical understanding with games on multiple goals

by Mike Parsons, director of coaching, South Texas Youth Soccer Association

Small-sided games involving multiple goals have become an effective tool for teaching young players to make better decisions on the field. The multitude of choices available to help players solve the problems of the 11 v. 11 game can be easily replicated over and over in the context of small-sided activities.

AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMES ON MULTIPLE GOALS

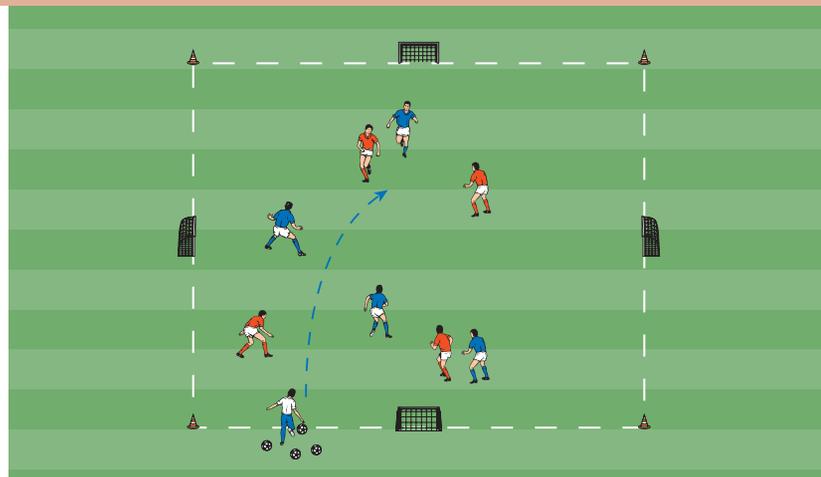
Four-goal game (U8)

Setup and sequence

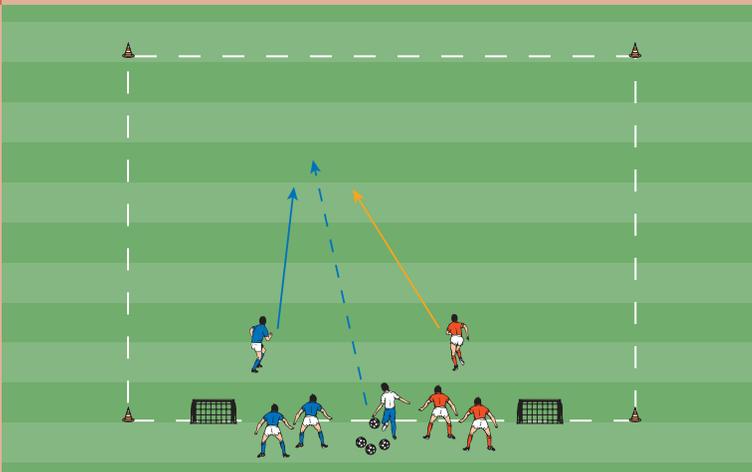
- Mark out a 20 x 25-yard field with four small goals, one on each side (two yards wide).
- Divide players into two teams of four.
- The coach starts the game by playing a ball onto the field.
- Players can score on any goal.

Leading questions

- Where can I dribble to make it easier to keep the ball?
- Which foot should I use to dribble?
- What parts of my foot can I use to dribble?
- How can I change direction?
- If one goal has a player in front of it, where should I dribble?



Two-goal game (U10)



Setup and sequence

- Mark out a 25 x 35-yard field with two small goals on one endline.
- Players line up in two teams, each team beside its goal.
- The coach starts the game by playing a ball onto the field. The first two players run onto the field. Each one tries to gain possession and score. Attackers can score on either goal.
- Progression: Teams play 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, etc.

Leading questions

- As I work to gain possession, what am I looking for on the field?
- Which fakes are most effective?
- What tells me where to go to help the player with the ball?
- Which way should I face when receiving the ball?

YOUTH TRAINING

A superior tactics training tool

Possession, losing the ball, opposition in possession, winning the ball: These are the four phases of every soccer game. Small-sided games on multiple goals are a great way to familiarize players with the defensive and offensive choices available in each phase.

Playing with small teams on small fields helps youth players understand game situations; it also means every player is actively involved in both offensive and defensive situations. And small-sided games make it easy for players to learn proper tactics:

- Possession: getting open and showing for passes, overlapping, wall pass
- Losing the ball (transition): going after the ball to immediately win it back

- Opposition in possession: disciplined defending in formation
- Winning the ball (transition): securing the ball, quickly playing it forward.

When designing games, coaches should look to vary the size and shape of the field along with the number of players used. These variations will present different challenges for players and can make activities either simpler or more complex. Players should be able to understand and recognize specific problems as the game presents them:

- Games on two goals per team: passing, shifting the point of attack
- Games with neutral players: combination play (e.g. wall pass, overlapping, three-player combinations)

- Games on two goals with even teams: dribbling, including fakes and turns
- Games with passers: quick transitions
- Games on long, narrow fields: playing the ball forward
- Games on short, wide fields: attacking on the wings, using the width of the field
- Games in funnel-shaped spaces: playing the ball forward

It's the coach's role to help players find solutions to the game's problems through the use of leading questions. By repeating the same questions using different phrasing, you can help players retain the information you're teaching them. You can also freeze specific game situations and work out appropriate solutions with your players.

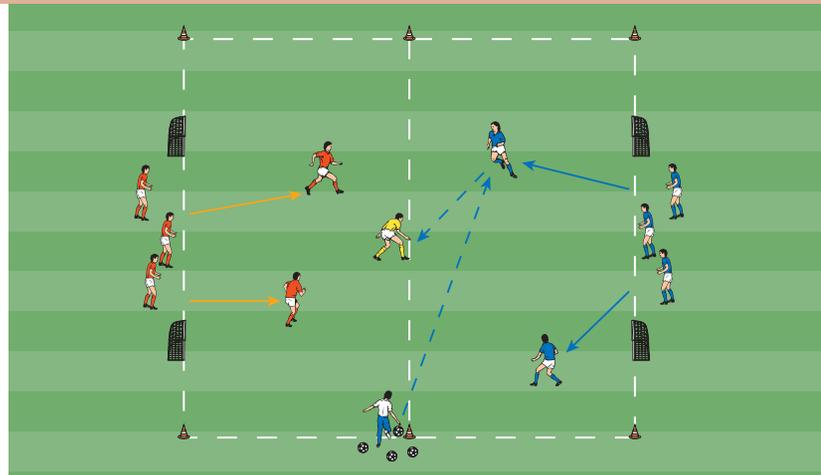
Four-goal game (U12)

Setup and sequence

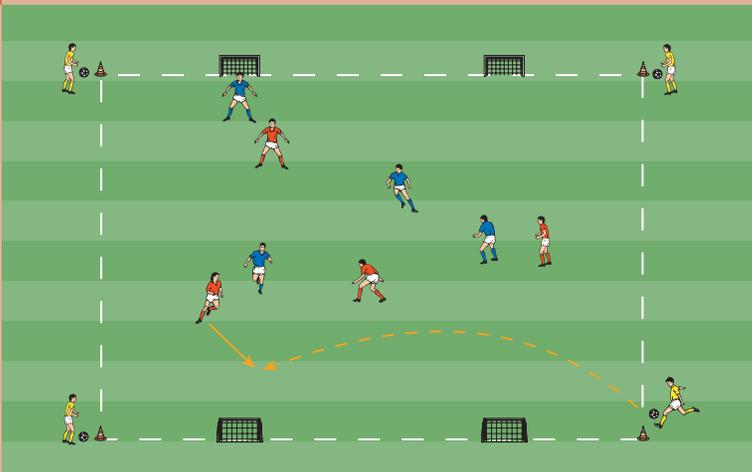
- Mark out a 35 x 40-yard field with two small goals on each end-line. In the middle of the field stands a neutral player.
- Players line up in two teams, each team between its goals.
- The coach plays in a ball and the first two players from each team play 2 v. 2 + 1. Attackers must pass to the neutral player at least once. They can score on both of the opposition's goals.

Leading questions

- What tells me which goal to attack?
- If there is space between me and the defender, where do I go?
- Where can I go without the ball to help the player who has it?
- Where should I go when I have the ball?



Four-goal game (U14)



Setup and sequence

- Mark out a 60 x 40-yard field with two goals on each sideline.
- Divide players into three teams of four. Two teams take the field; the third team's players (passers) stand at the corners.
- One of the passers plays in a ball, and the two teams on the field play 4 v. 4. Attackers can score on any of the four goals.
- When a goal is scored or the ball goes out, a different passer plays a new ball in to the other team.

Leading questions

- What happens if I stand still without the ball?
- Where should I run when the ball is pressured?
- Where should I run when there is no pressure on the ball?