

# 4 v 4 Soccer Program

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## I. Some Basics For 4 v 4

The priority in 4 v 4 is to motivate players in an environment that is conducive to learning. The more pleasure kids derive from their participation, the more they wish to play and practice on their own. While their instinct to play is natural, their affection and appreciation for soccer must be cultivated. The 4 v 4 game is foundational to such goals because it:

- Allows players to frequently touch the one "toy" on the field, namely, the ball.
  - Presents many opportunities to score goals and score goals often.
  - Encourages regaining possession of the ball as a productive, fun and rewarding part of the game (defending).
  - Maximizes active participation and minimizes inactivity and boredom.
  - Provides a well organized playing environment with improvised fields.
  - Reflects the philosophy of player development expressed in state and national coaching schools.
  - Eliminates complicated rules such as offsides that may hinder youngsters from "playing".
  - Reflects the appropriate roll of the coach as a *Facilitator*
  - Makes the game more "beginning coach" friendly because the game is simpler, thus making it easier to recruit more volunteer "coaches".
  - Allows the game to be the teacher!
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## What About The Goalkeeper?

Goalkeeping, as it relates to the adult version of soccer, requires a combination of skill, athleticism, and decision making. A goalkeeper is not used in the 4 v 4 game because:

- Goalkeepers **must** be field players **first**. Prior to specializing as goalkeepers, children must learn the broader parameters of "play". This is difficult to do when they hide beneath the crossbar. Goalkeepers must also learn intuition and anticipation from moving in and playing the game of soccer.
  - Goalkeepers must possess field playing skill. This is particularly true since the laws governing the 11 v 11 game require the goalkeeper to play as a field player, without the use of their hands, at certain times of the game.
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## II. Why 4 v 4?

The mode and method for children's play has changed substantially. The sandlot and playgrounds which allowed for free play have been replaced by organized sport associations and

leagues which are instead governed by adults. As a result, these leagues reflect what adults believe the game of soccer should be like for youngsters. The by-product of this is often overcoaching and the investing of an abundance of money and resources on uniforms, warm-ups, and equipment. There is always the likelihood that parents and coaches become too involved in the game during "the game".

Teaching soccer to children requires that the information provided to them is appropriate for their maturity level through some means (**THE GAME**) that makes sense to them. The environment for play must, essentially, meet the needs of players.

Reducing the number of players to 4 per team allows for **all** of the components that are present in the 11 v 11 game: the ball, teammates and opponents, realistic pressure, appropriate space, guidelines (rules), direction of play (attacking and defending), and the combination of length and width in the game (team shape).

### **What Is Developed**

Skill that is realistic. Motor ability: balance, agility, and coordination. Perception: insight and awareness. Vision. Problem solving: choices and decisions. Physical fitness. Psychological domain: fun, enjoyment, and competition. Learning by discovery, trial and error, playing!!!

### **Repetition**

This is perhaps the single most important aspect over the long term process of developing soccer playing ability. On the playgrounds and sandlots, this occurs naturally... No lines, no waiting, participation is maximized.

Youngsters recognize differing situations that are constantly repeated. Repetition influences: **Skill** required to play the game (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.). **Decisions** and choices that occur during the game.

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### **III. The Role of the Youth Coach**

In 4 v 4 soccer, the role of the coach is that of facilitator. The coach sets up the game and the conditions for learning, provides some supervision and allows the game to teach. The coach becomes a manager of the games with the comprehensive and long range objective being to develop and improve the soccer performance of the players.

The primary objective for youth players under 11 years of age is the development of technical skill. This is due, in part, to the nature of youngsters and their willingness to experiment to find their own way to execute technical skill.

Another contributing factor for an emphasis on skill development is that skill is considered a shortcoming. Remember, technique is not an objective in and of itself but a tool. Technical skill

must always have a relationship with the game (application). Problem solving, decision making, intuition, anticipation, and technical skill must be developed in the context of games.

Technical activities, outside of games, should not be considered the "end all and be all". The game, and involvement of playing the game, is most important. Too often, these activities on the individual basis are "drills" and are not realistic as far as the demands of the game are concerned. Technical skills should not be viewed as "tricks" or "gimmicks", but in the end, must be practical to use in the game.

### **Considerations On How the Youth Soccer Coach Can Influence Players**

Coaches need to insure that the playing/practice environment is conducive for development and performance and is favorable for learning to take place. They also need to ensure that the three main areas of the game occur in this environment.

The 4 v 4 game allows youth coaches to become familiar with the three main areas of the game.

- When the team is in possession of the ball (attacking).
- When the team is trying to regain possession of the ball (defending).
- When the ball changes possession (transition),

The 4 v 4 game provides a much clearer environment to analyze the match and its individual components and is therefore not as intimidating to beginning coaches. The coach can observe:

- If players are comfortable and confident playing against an opponent individually (dribbling).
- If players are capable of maintaining possession of the ball both as individuals and as a group.
- If players can create opportunities to score goals both individually and as a group.
- If players are successful at scoring goals.
- If players are composed while trying to regain possession of the ball (defending).
- If players can adapt to the unexpected and adjust their behavior and improvise appropriately.

Youth soccer coaches contribute to player development by:

- Observing the game.
- Analyzing the problems.
- Setting simple objectives for practice.
- Planning the practice session.
- Managing the game and practice environments.

While technique, decision making and physical talent can be distinguished from one another, they are not related.

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## IV. The Basic Game and Variations



4 v 4 The Basic Game

### Size of Field

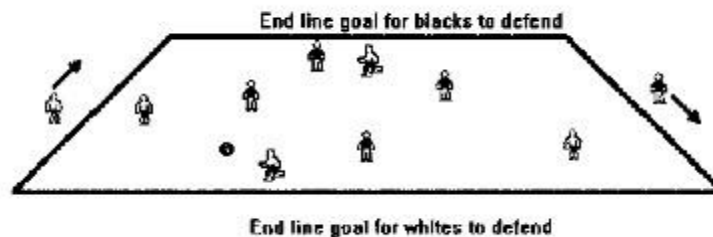
Depends on the age of players. Can vary from 30 yd. x 20 yd. up to 40 yd. x 25 yd.. The goals are 8 feet wide.

### The Team In Possession of the Ball

- Can employ buildup by using the entire playing area in terms of length and width (spread out, possession).
- Can learn and determine team shape, which, in a group of 4 resembles a diamond.
- Can create goal scoring opportunities by taking action either individually or collectively.

### When the Other Team Has the Ball

- The aim is to prevent goals from being scored by getting behind the ball and to regain possession of the ball.
- Simple principles of defending are reinforced and amplified since there is no spare defender or goalkeeper.



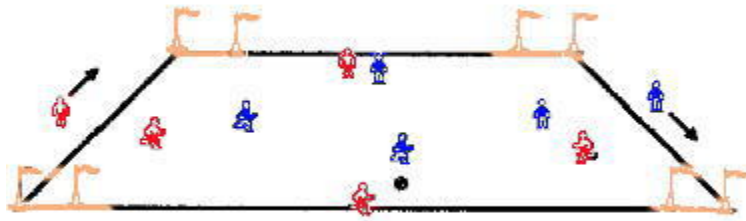
## 4 v 4 Line Soccer

### Variations of the 4 v 4 Game

Using slightly different sizes of goals, differing methods to score, and slightly altered size and shape of field can guide players to solve problems by emphasizing certain aspects of play.

### 4 v 4 Line Soccer

- Each team has a line to defend and attack.
  - Score a goal by dribbling the ball over any portion of the line that your team is attacking.
  - The size of the field is the same as a standard 4 v 4 game, but it is turned sideways. The wider, shorter field allows for maintaining good shape (diamond), but also creates many good 1 v 1 situations which challenge the player's dribbling skills.
  - Players need to evaluate and identify when to dribble and pass. This variation highlights: The correct attitude (when to take a risk aggressively) and the technical development and execution of dribbling.
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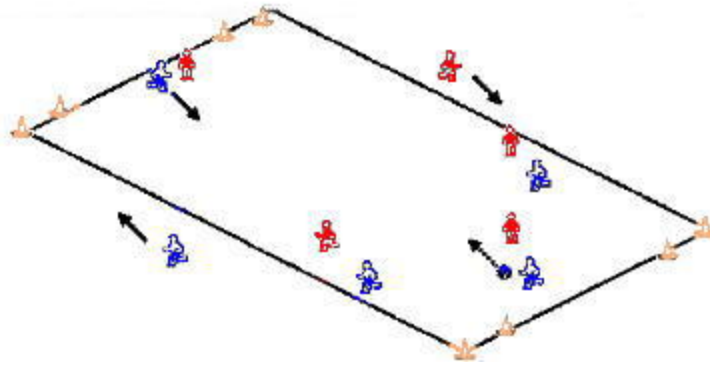
### 4 v 4 The Dribbling Game

#### The Game

Same field as the "Line Soccer" game, a wide, short field. teams can score in one of 2 ways. Passing into an open goal or by stopping the ball on the endline between the two goals they are attacking.

#### What The Game Incorporates

- Vision
  - Changes in the direction and speed of play due to the shape of the field and presence of multiple goals.
  - Decision making skills because the player has a variety of options at his disposal (dribbling, passing, "shooting", changing directions)
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**4 v 4 The Passing Game**

### **The Game**

Since the playing area is longer than it is wide, the emphasis is on creating length (height) in the game. In this game, there is a premium placed on playing the ball forward early. The ball can be played early:

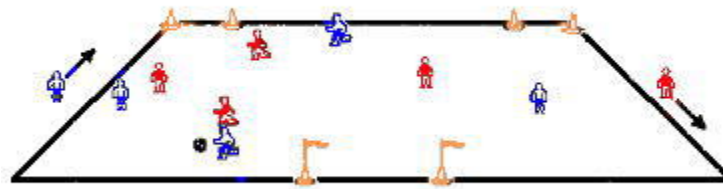
- To a target player who is coming back for the ball with a defender behind them (as shown in diagram).
- To a player running forward away from the server.

### **Scoring**

- Stopping the ball anywhere on the line.
- Passing the ball through an open goal.

### **This Game Emphasizes**

- Vision
- Changes in direction and speed of play.
- Appropriate use of firm touch.
- Long and short passing.



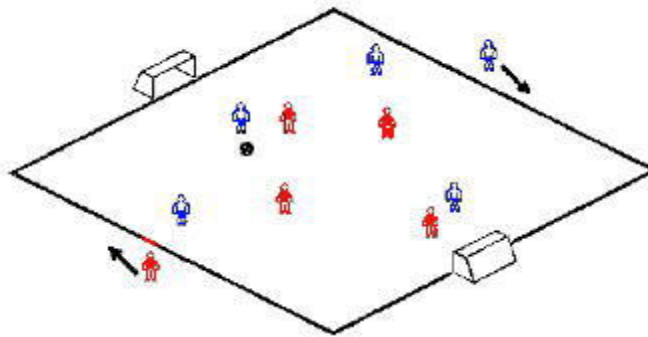
**Transitions**

## The Game

While one team attacks the large goal, the opposition attacks either of the two smaller goals. When the team scores in one of the two smaller goals, they must change directions and take a turn at attacking the larger goal.

### This Game Emphasizes

- Attitude and confidence that is essential for scoring goals. (Large net)
- Passing, shooting and dribbling skills required in the other 4 v 4 games.
- Transition awareness since the team can attack quickly in the other direction.
- Team shape and the roles of each player because when there is a transition, the back becomes the front and vice versa.



**4 v 4 The Shooting Game**

The priority of this game is shooting and scoring. Since the field is wide and short, players should be looking to shoot almost whenever they get the ball. Game played like a regular 4 v 4 match.

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## ROSTERING AND COMPETITION: The Weekly Tournament

Rostering youngsters enable association or league organizers to acquire name, address, phone number, correct birthdates and parental consent. This information is then used to obtain the required insurance for each player. At this level of play, rostering serves on the purposes of player registration and insurance.

The group of players who are rostered together are considered, in very broad terms, a "team". Although they are rostered to the same "team" the groups of 4 will change from practice to practice and game to game. The number of players on each team will be determined by the way your league or association organizes the playing structure of the weekly competition. Let's look at 2 examples:

- The players will be organized into groups of 5 (4 playing and one substitute). Rostering 15 to a team would be sensible since it should easily make 3 teams of 5 players.
- The players will be organized into groups of 4. Everyone playing with no substitutes. Rostering 16 to a team would result in 4 groups of 4. Rostering 12 would yield 3 teams of 4.

As can be seen, rostering has some flexibility depending on how a league or team organizes the weekly tournament. Players rostered to these "teams" also share a weekly practice time, The team would then spend this time with one or more youth coaches.

### **Basic Rules For The 4 v 4 Game**

Part of the effectiveness of modifying the game to 4 v 4 is also modifying the rules. These rule changes contribute to 4 v 4 meeting the developmental needs of young players. The adult version of soccer includes adult oriented rules suitable for adult understanding, behavior, ability, and competition. The basic rules are:

- Elimination of the specialized position of goalkeeper.
- No offsides.
- When the ball goes out of bounds over the sideline (touchline), it is put back into play with a kick-in. The kick-in can not go directly into the goal.
- When the ball goes out over the end line, it is put back into play either by dribbling or kicking the ball back into the playing area. *There are no corner kicks!*
- After a goal has been scored, it is put back into play by either dribbling or passing from the end line.
- There are field "supervisors" or "managers" instead of referees. The intent of this adult facilitator is to ensure a safe environment. The role of the field "supervisor" is that of a facilitator: ensuring that players put the ball back into play properly. This allows the players to learn how to regulate the games (decisions on **who** caused the ball to go out of play). The field supervisors are dressed distinctively but not necessarily in the traditional back uniform.
- Kickoffs that begin each period of play are taken from the approximate center of the field.
- Players can score from anywhere on the field.
- All fouls are penalized with an indirect free kick. The opponent must be three yards away from the ball at the time of the kick.
- With the following tournament schedules, each game is 12 minutes in duration.

### **Schedule For 48 Players & 6 Fields**

3 teams of 16 players divided into 4 groups of 4 players each.

- Team 1: A, B, C, D
- Team 2: E, F, G, H
- Team 3: I, J, K, L



Each team plays a balanced schedule of 5 games and has 2 consecutive games on the same field at one point during the tournament.

### Schedule For 48 Players & 6 Fields

Game 1 Game 2 Game 3 Game 4 Game 5 Field 1 A v. J A v. H H v. J E v. I D v. L Field 2 F v. L B v. L A v. E H v. L C v. F Field 3 E v. K C v. E C v. K B v. K B v. H Field 4 B v. G F v. I B v. I C v. G G v. K Field 5 D v. H G v. J D v. F D v. J A v. I Field 6 C v. I D v. K G v. L A v. F E v. J

Competition Assignments	
Team A plays: J, H, E, F, I	Team G plays: B, J, L, C, K
Team B plays: G, L, I, K, H	Team H plays: D, A, J, L, B
Team C plays: I, E, K, G, F	Team I plays: C, F, B, E, A
Team D plays: H, K, F, J, L	Team J plays: A, G, H, D, E
Team E plays: K, C, A, I, J	Team K plays: E, D, C, B, G
Team F plays: L, I, D, A, C	Team L plays: F, B, G, H, D

### Schedule For 48 Players & 5 Fields

3 teams of 16 players divided into 4 groups of 4 players each.

- Team 1: A, B, C, D
- Team 2: E, F, G, H
- Team 3: I, J, K, L

As 5 fields are not sufficient to accommodate continuous play for each group, 2 groups must sit out for each time slot. The groups scheduled to play on the 6th field are now designated "rest" or "idle" teams. A completely balanced schedule is not possible as there are 2 groups which play 5 games while the remaining 10 groups play only 4 games. For this reason, it is recommended that the allocation of teams (16 players) to letter groups is rotated on a weekly basis.

### Schedule For 48 Players & 5 Fields

Game 1 Game 2 Game 3 Game 4 Game 5 Field 1 A v. J A v. H H v. J E v. I D v. L Field 2 F v. L B v. L A v. E H v. L C v. F Field 3 E v. K C v. E C v. K B v. K B v. H Field 4 B v. G F v. I B v. I C v. G G v. K Field 5 D v. H G v. J D v. F D v. J A v. I Idle C & I D & K G & L A & F E & J

Competition Assignments	
Team A plays: J, H, E, I	Team G plays: B, J, C, K

<b>Team B plays: G, L, I, K, H</b>	<b>Team H plays: D, A, J, L, B</b>
<b>Team C plays: E, K, G, F</b>	<b>Team I plays: F, B, E, A</b>
<b>Team D plays: H, F, J, L</b>	<b>Team J plays: A, G, H, D</b>
<b>Team E plays: K, C, A, I,</b>	<b>Team K plays: E, C, B, G</b>
<b>Team F plays: L, I, D, C</b>	<b>Team L plays: F, B, H, D</b>

### Schedule For 44 Players & 5 Fields

2 teams of 16 players and 1 team of 12 players divided into 4 groups of 4 players each.

- Team 1: A, B, C, D
- Team 2: E, F, G, H
- Team 3: I, J, K,

As 5 fields are not sufficient to accommodate continuous play for each group, 1 group must sit out for each time slot. The groups scheduled to play on the 6th field are now designated "rest" or "idle" teams. A completely balanced schedule is not possible as there are 2 groups which play 5 games while the remaining 5 groups play only 4 games. For this reason, it is recommended that the allocation of teams (16 players) to letter groups is rotated on a weekly basis.

### Schedule For 44 Players & 5 Fields

Game 1 Game 2 Game 3 Game 4 Game 5 Field 1 D v. H A v. F C v. H B v. G B v. G Field 2 B v. J C v. E E v. I C v. I C v. F Field 3 G v. I G v. J A v. J A v. G D v. J Field 4 A v. E B v. K D v. K D v. E A v. I Field 5 F v. K H v. I B v. F F v. J E v. K Idle C D G K H

<b>Competition Assignments</b>	
<b>Team A plays: E, F, J, G, I</b>	<b>Team G plays: I, J, A, B</b>
<b>Team B plays: J, K, F, H, G</b>	<b>Team H plays: D, I, C, B</b>
<b>Team C plays: E, H, I, F</b>	<b>Team I plays: G, H, E, C, A</b>
<b>Team D plays: H, K, E, J,</b>	<b>Team J plays: B, G, A, F, D</b>
<b>Team E plays: A, C, I, D, K</b>	<b>Team K plays: F, B, D, E</b>
<b>Team F plays: K, A, B, J, C</b>	

**Schedule For 40 Players & 5 Fields**

1 team of 16 players and 2 teams of 12 players divided into groups of 4 players each.

- Team 1: A, B, C, D
- Team 2: E, F, G,
- Team 3: H, I, J

Each team plays a balanced schedule of 5 games and has 2 consecutive games on the same field at one point during the tournament.

**Schedule For 40 Players & 5 Fields**

Game 1 Game 2 Game 3 Game 4 Game 5 Field 1 E v. H A v. I E v. I D v. E D v. F Field 2 A v. G C v. G C v. J F v. J B v. I Field 3 C v. F F v. H B v. H B v. G C v. H Field 4 B v. J D v. J A v. F C v. I G v. K Field 5 D v. I B v. E D v. G A v. H A v. E

Competition Assignments	
Team A plays: G, I, F, H, E	Team G plays: A, C, D, B, J
Team B plays: J, E, H, G, I	Team H plays: E, F, B, A, C
Team C plays: F, G, J, I, H	Team I plays: D, A, E, C, B
Team D plays: I, J, G, E, F	Team J plays: B, D, C, F, G
Team E plays: H, B, I, D, A	
Team F plays: C, H, A, J, D	

**Schedule For 36 Players & 4 Fields**

3 teams of 16 players divided into 4 groups of 4 players each.

- Team 1: A, B, C,
- Team 2: D, E, F.
- Team 3: G, H, I,

Each team plays either 4 or 5 games and has 2 consecutive games on the same field at one point during the tournament.

## Schedule For 40 Players & 5 Fields

Game 1 Game 2 Game 3 Game 4 Game 5 Field 1 B v. G A v. E E v. G D v. G D v. I Field 2 E v.  
 I B v. D B v. I F v. I B v. H Field 3 C v. H F v. H A v. F A v. H C v. F Field 4 A v. D C v. G C v.  
 D B v. E A v. G Idle F I H C E

Competition Assignments	
Team A plays: D, E, F, H, G	Team G plays: B, C, E, D, A
Team B plays: G, D, I, E, H	Team H plays: C, F, A, B,
Team C plays: H, G, D, F	Team I plays: E, B, F, D
Team D plays: A, B, C, G, I	
Team E plays: I, A, G, B	
Team F plays: H, A, I, C,	

This program was put together by **Jeff Pill** and **Dave Simeon**. Jeff and Dave are National Staff Coaches with US Soccer.