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# Optus Small Sided Football

HANDBOOK

EFFECTIVE FROM 1 JANUARY 2011



FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION  
AUSTRALIA

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## CONTENTS

Forward	2
Introduction	3
What is Optus Small Sided Football?	4
Rationale for introducing Optus Small Sided Football throughout Australia	6
Experience of other countries	7
Statistical evidence of the benefits of Optus Small Sided Football	9
Optus Small Sided Football formats	10
Laws of Optus Small Sided Football	11
How to organise Optus Small Sided Football	18
Codes of conduct: Creating the right environment for young players	24
Frequently asked questions	26
Contacts	27







## Foreword

On behalf of the board and management of Football Federation Australia (FFA), I would like to thank the entire football community for the continued support and commitment to Optus Small Sided Football.

FFA is delighted with its involvement with Optus Small Sided Football and looks forward to the increased opportunities this relationship will provide to players and clubs throughout Australia.

Following the release of FFA's National Curriculum in 2009 the development has already proved beneficial with around 150,000 children set to participate in Optus Small Sided Football around the country in 2011.

The National Curriculum's aim is to provide guidance and an integrated and consistent

approach to the development of players and coaches.

Since its initial implementation, Optus Small Sided Football has grown substantially, with Qantas Socceroos members taking active roles as Ambassadors for the program.

To suitably address the needs of our young players - clubs, coaches, volunteers and parents need to continue to ensure Optus Small Sided Football is a positive and enjoyable experience; one that allows all children to develop into the best players they can be.

FFA remains committed to working together with Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs to continue the roll-out of Optus Small Sided Football and recognise and appreciate the

hard work of many staff and volunteers within grass roots football in this country.



Ben Buckley  
Chief Executive Officer  
Football Federation Australia



## Hi – I'm Lucas Neill, Captain of the Australian team and Optus Football Ambassador.

The past 12 months have been a busy time for Australian Football with the 2010 FIFA World Cup taking place. As an ambassador for the game, I'm proud to continue working with Optus and the FFA to develop football at a grassroots level and find the Australian team of the future!

Last year we had great success in continuing to roll out the Optus Small Sided Football program to clubs all across the country. An exciting new way for children to get involved in football, the small sided format has encouraged many kids that play the game to develop their skills whilst having fun and getting plenty of exercise. Having simplified the rules, children enjoy a much faster

game that focuses on maximum participation and enjoyment for all levels of ability.

In 2011 we will launch the first ever Optus Small Sided Football Awards. I am very excited to be part of this program, which will recognise and reward young Optus Small Sided Football players and coaches. There will be four award categories including the Leadership Award, Promising Player Award, an award for teams and importantly, the Coach's Award.

Nominations for awards will open in February with the winners announced in October 2011. Check out [optus.com.au/footballawards](http://optus.com.au/footballawards) to read more about the awards and nominate your Optus Small Sided Football team and teammates.

2011 promises to be a great year for football. I wish all of the future football superstars all the best of luck for the season ahead!

## Introduction



Since the introduction of Optus Small Sided Football in Australia in 2007 many of those unconvinced by the changed format have since witnessed firsthand the many benefits that this format espouses. My predecessor and countryman Robert Baan gave a very good explanation by saying that as a parent you do not just throw your child in the ocean in order to teach them to swim. Therefore you also do not put a young child on the big football pitch to learn to play football.

The distances they have to cover are far too large and, more importantly, the number of touches on the ball too few to develop the necessary skills and discover the fun of playing the world's biggest and most popular sport.

In the big European and South American football nations nobody needs to be convinced anymore that small sided football is the most logical and scientifically proven way to develop the basic skills and discover the game in a 'fun' and acquiescent environment for children. Years ago the late great Australian football legend Johnny Warren said after a visit to Brazil where he saw young children play small sided football: "I began to appreciate that all the amazing skills of the

senior Brazilian players come from having played games in a restricted area as a young kid. As a kid they were forced to work out their own solutions to the problems they faced on the small pitch and I think that's why the Brazilians often produce such amazing and unpredictable football players in terms of their skill level."

Football is developing rapidly in Australia. It is only a matter of time before it will be the biggest sport as it already is almost everywhere else in the world. The fact that the Qantas Socceroos have qualified for successive FIFA World Cups in 2006 and 2010 and the Westfield Matildas have qualified for their fifth consecutive FIFA Women's World Cup, this year in Germany, will give football another big boost.

Recently the National Football Curriculum (NFC) was released by Football Federation Australia and in it; the significance of Optus Small Sided Football is once more explained.

As we embark on our fifth year employing the values of the Optus Small Sided Football concept, and following the successful implementation of the adjustments made to the program in 2010, we look

forward to the development of our young players and the acceleration of the technical development of children who start to play football and provide a more logical pathway leading up to playing 11 v 11.

This is all done for the development of the game and sake of the children. Children love Optus Small Sided Football. It's their game, we as adults only need to create a stimulating and entertaining environment for them.

Let's all do that and enjoy Optus Small Sided Football with them.



Han Berger  
National Technical Director  
Football Federation Australia



## What is Optus Small Sided Football?



Optus Small Sided Football is a modified form of 11-a-side football, designed to meet the needs of players between the under 6 and 11 age groups, who have very different developmental characteristics and needs to adult players. The philosophy of Optus Small Sided Football focuses on enjoyment and freedom of expression with limited emphasis on coaching per se, particularly in the formative years of a player's development.

Almost without exception, young players in the major footballing nations of the world are introduced to the game through Small Sided Football. Brazil, France, England, Scotland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Germany, Japan, USA and Korea all introduce their young players to the game using this approach. Considerable research has been conducted into the benefits of Small Sided Football in many of these countries. Overwhelmingly, the findings have shown that Small Sided Football are enjoyed

more by children and are a more effective method of improving their technical ability as footballers (compared to 11-a-side football).

Whilst there are exceptions, in most parts of Australia Rooball has been the widely-accepted format of the game for new players up until the age of eight or nine. The rules and regulations of Rooball vary in terms of field size and goal size as does the age at which players progress to 11-a-side football. At the age of 9 or 10, the general trend is for these players to then move to 11-a-side football on a full-size field where they compete against other clubs in the local area.

There has also been an inconsistent approach in terms of the philosophy of football at this age, with the emphasis or otherwise on competition, winning, points tables, finals and the like, with variations depending upon the particular state or territory and/or association. Whether players compete and/or play against

other clubs or within their own club is generally decided on a local basis.

Around six years ago, ACT's Capital Football and Football Federation Northern Territory decided to begin the process of implementing Small Sided Football within their respective regions. The staged implementation process was completed in 2007 so that all players up to Under 11 are now playing Small Sided Football in the Northern Territory and the ACT. In 2007, Ku-ring-gai District Soccer Association also began to roll out Small Sided Football for all of their Under 6 and 7 players.

In 2010, over 120,000 children across all Member Federations in varying age groups played the nationally consistent Optus Small Sided Football formats. The results of a national survey in 2008 have been extremely positive, providing lots of valuable feedback which will help to ensure that the continued implementation

## What is Optus Small Sided Football?



of Optus Small Sided Football is successful. Some statistics of particular interest can be seen below:

- 91% of parents felt their club emphasised the player's development, enjoyment and philosophy of Small Sided Football over winning games
- Over 90% of parents reported that their child enjoyed playing football in the Small Sided Football format
- Over 80% of parents reported that the reasons for implementing Small Sided Football were communicated to them
- Over 70% of parents were offered appropriate information and education supporting the move to Small Sided Football
- Over 90% of parents felt the coach of their child's team embraced the Small Sided Football philosophy

- Over 85% of parents felt their child touched the ball lots of times and was very active
- Over 85% of parents felt Small Sided Football promotes a positive playing environment for children
- Over 80% of parents felt their child's playing ability and skills improved throughout the season
- More people felt it was easier to become involved as a volunteer in Small Sided Football and there was not a feeling you needed to be a football expert.

It is very important that FFA, Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs continue to educate, provide and distribute resources to assist with the implementation of Optus Small Sided Football. Most beneficial to the education process has been the use of practical Small Sided Football demonstrations at zone, association and club level that allow

parents to see the benefits of Small Sided Football and certainly compliment the parent flyers.

FFA and Member Federations need to continue to provide leadership, support and assistance to zones, associations and clubs in regards to the implementation of Optus Small Sided Football, particularly in the areas of resources, facilities and equipment.

In 2011 and beyond the implementation of the Optus Small Sided Football formats will continue across Australia up to and including Under 11's in a staged approach. FFA supports and encourages all Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs that have completed or wish to accelerate the implementation of Optus Small Sided Football.

# Rationale for introducing Optus Small Sided Football throughout Australia



One of the key recommendations to come out of the recently concluded Talent Development and Identification Review (TDIR) is the need to introduce Optus Small Sided Football as the standard playing format for children under the age of 11 in Australia. The justification for taking such an approach is based on the following criteria:

- 11-a-side football is in essence an adult game devised by and for adults to play
- more fun and individual enjoyment due to smaller fields and simplified rules
- more playing time, which maximises individual participation and involvement
- far more repeated touches of the ball by all players on the field
- more shots on goal
- more involvement leads to greater improvement in fitness.

Whilst the recommendation for the implementation of Optus Small Sided Football in the context of the TDIR has as an underlying motivation – the development of players with better technical skills – there are certainly many other associated benefits that will be realised as a direct result of their inception, as follows:

- First and foremost, Optus Small Sided Football is truly aimed at young people of all abilities, not simply the more talented players in each age group.
- With the emphasis on participation and enjoyment, and an associated removal of the current emphasis on the importance of winning, children are much more likely to enjoy their football playing experience, will be keen to play more often and are less likely to drop out of the game.

- Parents who are new to the game are likely to be more comfortable playing the role of “game leader” or “supervisor” of teams playing Optus Small Sided Football. Given that children playing at this age do not need to be “coached”, and by extension, these adults don’t need to have a great understanding of the game to be able to carry out this role effectively, finding parents to volunteer for these roles should become significantly easier.
- Optus Small Sided Football also make more efficient use of facilities, given there can be multiple games on one standard-size field.

Importantly, a significant amount of research has been conducted in countries where Small Sided Football are prevalent (including Australia), which overwhelmingly highlights benefits such as more touches, greater participation as well as more enjoyment for the children.



## Experience of other countries



### Scotland

Small Sided Football is designed to meet the needs of children aged between five and twelve years. These games are the preferred method of training by professional players and are the most appropriate way of acquiring skills and developing young players.

All research into how young people learn about sport confirms that the well-being of the child and the good of the game are best served by the use of modified games and a sensible approach to competition.

Appropriate sizes of goalposts, ball and playing field, allied to simple rules and tactics contribute to improved development within the game.

Too often, the focus within children's football has been the result of the game and winning the tournament, cup or medal. An ethos which promotes fun and learning, and measures success in terms of enjoyment as well as fostering skills development, is more likely to interest and motivate a young player and enhance his/her progress.

### England

The main theme throughout mini-soccer is to meet the needs of children. Eleven-a-side football does not meet those needs. We need a modified game that fits the needs of children: too often children are modified to meet the requirements of the game. Mini-soccer modifies 11-a-side football without losing the essence of the game.

Mini-soccer is the appropriate introduction to football. All available research and observation shows that children will have more fun and learn more playing a game with smaller teams and modified rules. Mini-soccer is, therefore, a game children can actually play, rather than struggle to understand a game that was created for adults.

### USA

US Youth Soccer has thought long and hard about the answer to the question, "Why Small Sided Football?"

What does "Small Sided Football" mean? These are soccer games with fewer players competing on a smaller-sized field. These are fun games that involve the players more because fewer players are sharing one ball.

All ages can play Small Sided Football but it has a definite developmental impact on our younger soccer players.

## Experience of other countries



Here are some of the reasons why we believe, as soccer coaches, administrators and parents we must guarantee that our young soccer players play Small Sided Football:

1. Because we want our young soccer players to touch the soccer ball more often and become more skillful with it. (Individual technical development.)
2. Because we want our young soccer players to make more, less-complicated decisions during the game. (Tactical development)
3. Because we want our young soccer players to be more physically efficient in the field space they are playing in. (Reduced field size.)
4. Because we want our young soccer players to have more individual teaching time with the coach! Less players on the field and less players on the team will guarantee this. (Need to feel worthy and need to feel important.)
5. Because we want our young soccer players to have more, involved playing time in the game. (More opportunity to solve problems that only the game presents.)
6. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunity to play on both sides of the ball. (More exposure to attacking and defending situations.)
7. Because we want our young soccer players to have more opportunities to score goals. (Pure excitement.)

These are the reasons why we adults must foster Small Sided Football in our youth soccer programs. The small-sided environment is a developmentally appropriate environment for our young soccer players. It's a FUN environment that focuses on the young soccer player.



## Statistical evidence of the benefits of Small Sided Football



Studies of young footballers playing Small Sided Football have proven the following when comparing 4 v 4,

### 7 v 7 and 11 v 11:

- Players touch the ball five times more in 4 v 4 and 50% more in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- Players attempted three times more 1 v 1s and two times more 1 v 1s in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- Goals were scored an average of every 1.5 minutes in 4 v 4, 3.6 minutes in 7 v 7 and 8 minutes in 11 v 11.
- Technical skills performed by a goalkeeper were between two and four times more in 7 v 7 than in 11 v 11.
- The ball is out of play 8% of the match in 4 v 4, 14% in 7 v 7 and 34% in 11 v 11.

Other demonstrated benefits of Small Sided Football over the 11 v 11 game based on observational research are as follows:

- far more repeated touches of the ball by all players
- more touches throughout all areas of the pitch
- more passes attempted and in a forward direction
- more attacking 1 v 1s, final third and penalty area entries
- repeated decision-making experience
- the ball is in play far more often
- repeated experience of basic tactical situations
- active participation is directly related to increased fitness and enjoyment
- more experience in all phases of the game. There is less hiding or dominant player “hogging” the ball. Every child has to participate in all facets of the game, attack and defend. The emphasis is on player development
- better success rate leads to improved quality of play, self-esteem and player retention
- the game is easier to understand
- freedom of expression – no positions in early stages
- less perceived stress on the player
- 80% of children believed that they touched the ball more often in Small Sided Football
- less perceived pressure from coaches and parents
- children enjoyed the progressive and sequential game formats.



## Optus Small Sided Football Formats

In 2009 Football Federation Australia (FFA) released the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum was a key initiative put forward in the FFA National Football Development Plan released in November 2007.

The National Curriculum aims to provide national guidance and an integrated and consistent approach to the development of players and coaches throughout the country.

In 2011, the Optus Small Sided Football formats remain unchanged and are summarised in the table below.

Playing Format	Under 6 & 7	Under 8 & 9	Under 10 & 11
Numbers	4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9
Field Size	Length: 30m Width: 20m	<b>¼ Full Size Pitch</b> Length: 40m - 50m Width: 30m - 40m	<b>½ Full Size Pitch</b> Length: 60m - 70m Width: 40m - 50m
Field Markings	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings
Penalty Area	Nil	5m depth x 12m width	5m depth x 12m width
Goal Size	Width: 1.5m – 2.0m Height: 0.9m x 1.0m	Width: 2.5m - 3.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m	Width: 4.5m - 5.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m
Goal Type	Goals, Poles or Markers	Goals, Poles or Markers	Goals, Poles or Markers
Ball Size	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
Goalkeeper	No	Yes	Yes
Playing Time	2 x 15 minutes	2 x 20 minutes	2 x 25 minutes
Half Time Break	5 minutes	5 minutes	7.5 minutes
Referee	Game Leader	Instructing Referee	Instructing Referee
Point's Table & Finals	No	No	No

# Laws of Optus Small Sided Football

## The field of play

### Dimensions

The field of play should be rectangular in shape. Sizes for each age group are as follows:

#### Under 6 & 7

Length: 30m

Width: 20m

#### Under 8 & 9

Length: 40m – 50m

Width: 30m – 40m

¼ full size pitch – when converting a full size pitch into Optus Small Sided Football fields

#### Under 10 & 11

Length: 60m – 70m

Width: 40m – 50m

½ full size pitch – when converting a full size pitch into Optus Small Sided Football fields

Note: In the Under 11 age group, the final stage of development in the Optus Small Sided Football formats before players commence 11 v 11 football, it is recommended that where facilities and scheduling allows, clubs set-up the field from penalty box to penalty box and adjust the width of the field with use of markers to meet the maximum specified width.

### Markings

Markers or painted line markings.

### Goal size

The size of the goal should be:

#### Under 6 & 7

Width: 1.5m - 2.0m

Height: 0.9m - 1.0m

#### Under 8 & 9

Width: 2.5m - 3.0m

Height: 1.8m - 2.0m

#### Under 10 & 11

Width: 4.5m - 5.0m

Height: 1.8m - 2.0m

Note: For the Under 8 and 9 age groups, it is recommended that clubs that wish to and have the capacity to do so use 3m x 2m goals. Should a club not be able to do this in the first instance, the 5m x 2m goal is most acceptable for use on fields for the Under 8 and 9 age groups as well as the Under 10 and 11 age groups. FFA understands that clubs may have existing goals for the Under 8 – 11 age groups; however when they need to replace existing goals or are in a position to make a change they should move to the dimensions specified above.

### Goal type

It is preferable that pop up style or portable goals are used where possible, however, the use of poles and markers as the goals particularly in the Under 6 to 9 age groups is also suitable.

### Penalty area

#### Under 6 & 7

No penalty area

#### Under 8 – 11

Rectangular – 5m depth x 12m width

The penalty area can be marked through the use of marked lines, flat or soft markers or cones.

## The ball

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### Under 6 – 9

Size 3

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### Under 10 & 11

Size 4

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## The number of players

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### Under 6 & 7

4 v 4 – no goalkeeper

Maximum of two substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

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### Under 8 & 9

7 v 7 – including goalkeeper

Maximum of three substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

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### Under 10 & 11

9 v 9 – including goalkeeper

Maximum of three substitutes who may rotate during the entire game. The coach or parent is allowed to make the substitutions while the ball is in play, but must wait until the substituted player has left the field.

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## Goalkeeper

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### Under 6 & 7

No goalkeeper

The game leader, coaches and managers should continually discourage children from permanently standing in front of the goal.

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### Under 8 – 11

Goalkeeper

The goalkeeper is allowed to handle the ball anywhere in the penalty area. To restart play after a save or gathering the ball with their hands, the ball must be thrown or rolled from the hands or played from the ground with their feet, within 6 seconds. The goalkeeper is not allowed to kick or drop kick the ball directly from their hands. Opponents must be at least 5m outside the penalty area and cannot move inside the penalty area until the ball is in play. The ball is in play once it moves out of the penalty area or when the goalkeeper places the ball on the ground\*.

An indirect free kick is awarded if the goalkeeper touches the ball with his hands after it has been deliberately kicked to him by a team-mate.

#### *\* Goalkeeper Progression*

*The developmental progression of the game becoming “live” when the goalkeeper places the ball on the ground provides the necessary learning phase for players transitioning to the 11 v 11 format of football.*

## Duration of the game

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### Under 6 & 7

2 x 15 minutes (half-time break 5 minutes)

This may be flexible depending on the implementation format; i.e. in a hub, it may be 3 x 10 minutes

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### Under 8 & 9

2 x 20 minutes (half-time break 5 minutes)

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### Under 10 & 11

2 x 25 minutes (half-time break 7.5 minutes)

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# Laws of Optus Small Sided Football

## Game Leader and Instructing Referee

### Under 6 & 7

Game Leader

### Under 8 – 11

Instructing Referee

#### Game Leader

The main role of the game leader is to keep the game moving fluently, limit stoppages and assist players with all match re-starts. Most importantly, they must make every effort to create an environment that ensures that all players have fun and have maximum involvement. The children are learning the game at this level, be flexible and patient. The game leader can be a club official, parent, older child or player or beginning referee and should always be enthusiastic and approachable.

#### The Game Leader should;

- Encourage all children to have fun and different children to take re-starts.
- Ensure the correct number of players are on the field.
- Discourage players from permanently over-guarding the goal.
- Use a “Ready, Set, Go” prompt to encourage quick decisions when restarting play.
- Encourage children to dribble or pass ball into play from all re-starts rather than a big kick.
- Ensure opposing team is back to the half way line, for all goal line restarts.
- Ensure team officials and parents create a safe, enjoyable and positive playing environment for the children and do not emphasise winning or losing.
- Encourage children to be involved in all aspects of the game, attacking and defending.
- Remember most acts of handball or fouls and misconduct at this level are caused by a lack of coordination, with no intent. If you decide a deliberate or serious act of handball or foul and misconduct has occurred, explain to the child they have done the wrong thing and that they should not do this again.

- Let the game flow and give instruction to all players on the run where you can.
- Praise and encourage both teams.
- Be enthusiastic and approachable.
- **Most Importantly - Remember the children are learning the game – be flexible and patient.**

#### Instructing Referee

The main role of the instructing referee is to control the game to ensure it is played fluently and instruct the players (with minimal blowing of the whistle) on how to behave and what the rules are, e.g. what a foul is, what a free kick is and how to throw in etc... Should these indiscretions happen a second time the referee should stop the game and apply the appropriate action and decisions. This person can be a club official, capable parent, older child or player, beginning or official referee from the federation or association.

#### The Instructing Referee should;

- Encourage all children to have fun and different children to take re-starts.
- Ensure the correct numbers of players are on the field
- Discourage players from permanently standing in blatant offside positions and instruct them to move into onside positions. In the Under 10 & 11 age groups children should be made aware of the offside rule during training and be encouraged to adopt this philosophy during the game at all times.
- Let the game flow and give instruction to all players on the run where you can
- Instruct players in the first instance before blowing the whistle where possible
- Ensure team officials and parents create a safe, enjoyable and positive playing environment for the children and do not emphasise winning or losing
- Be enthusiastic, consistent and approachable

## The start of play and restart after a goal

### Under 6 - 11

Pass forward to a team mate from the middle of the half way line. All players must be in their own half of the field of play. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball until it is in play. The ball must touch a team mate before a goal can be scored.

### Ball in and out of play

The ball is out of play when it has wholly crossed the goal line or the touch line on the ground or in the air, or when play has been stopped by the game leader or instructing referee.

### Ball crossing the touch line

#### Under 6 & 7

There is no throw in. A player from the opposing team to the player that touched the ball last before crossing the touch line will place the ball on the touch line and pass or dribble the ball into play. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball until it is in play. The ball must touch a team mate before a goal can be scored.

#### Under 8 - 11

Throw-in: Player faces the field of play, has part of each foot on the ground either on or behind the touch line, uses both hands and delivers the ball from behind and over their head. The thrower must not touch the ball again until it has touched another player. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball until it is in play. The ball is in play once it enters the field of play. A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw in.

### Ball crossing the goal line after touching the defending team last

#### Under 6 & 7

There is no corner kick. Regardless of which team touched the ball last, a player from the team whose goal line the ball has crossed will place the ball anywhere along the goal line and pass or dribble the ball into play. Opponents must retreat to the half way line and can move once the ball is in play. The ball must touch a team mate before a goal can be scored.

#### Under 8 - 11

Corner kick. A player from the attacking team places the ball inside the corner arc nearest to the point where the ball crossed the line. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball until it is in play. The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves. A goal may be scored directly from a corner kick.

### Ball crossing the goal line after touching the attacking team last

#### Under 6 & 7

Regardless of which team touched the ball last, a player from the team whose goal line the ball has crossed will place the ball anywhere along the goal line and pass or dribble the ball into play. Opponents must retreat to the half way line and can move once the ball is in play. The ball must touch a team mate before a goal can be scored.

#### Under 8 - 11

Goal kick from anywhere within the penalty area. Opponents remain at least 5m outside the penalty area until the ball is in play. The ball is in play once it is kicked directly out of the penalty area.

## Method of scoring

A goal is scored when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, between the goalposts and under the crossbar. When goal posts are not available and cones are used for goals, a goal is scored when the ball passes between the cones without touching them, below shoulder height of the player.

## Offside

### Under 6 – 11

No offside

Note: In the Under 8 – 11 age groups, team coaches and managers should strongly discourage children from permanently standing in blatant offside positions. In the Under 10 & 11 age groups children should be made aware of the offside rule during training and be encouraged to adopt this philosophy during the game at all times. Instructing referees should direct players permanently standing in blatant offside positions to move into onside positions.



# Laws of Optus Small Sided Football



## Fouls and misconduct

### Under 6 & 7

Indirect free kicks are awarded for all acts of handball or fouls and misconduct. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball when the indirect free kick is taken. (An indirect free kick is where a goal can be scored only if the ball subsequently touches another player before it enters the goal).

Most acts of handball or fouls and misconduct at this level are caused by a lack of coordination, with no intent. In this case try and give the advantage to the attacking team and continue play. If you decide a deliberate or serious act of handball, foul or misconduct has occurred, explain to the child they have done the wrong thing and that they should not do this again.

### Under 8 – 11

Indirect free kicks are awarded for all acts of handball or fouls and misconduct. Opponents must be at least 5m away from the ball when the indirect free kick is taken. (An indirect free kick is where a goal can be scored only if the ball subsequently touches another player before it enters the goal).

For deliberate or serious acts of handball or fouls and misconduct in the penalty area, a penalty kick is awarded from an 8m penalty mark with only a goalkeeper in position. All other players must be outside the penalty area and be at least 5m behind the penalty mark.

### Fouls and misconduct are:

- kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- jumps at an opponent
- charges an opponent
- strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- pushes an opponent
- tackles an opponent from behind to gain possession of the ball
- making contact with the opponent before touching the ball
- holds an opponent
- spits at an opponent
- handles the ball deliberately
- plays in a dangerous manner
- impedes the progress of a player.





## Point's tables and finals

To ensure that Optus Small Sided Football is played in the correct spirit and gives all players the best possible chance to develop into the best players they can be. FFA advises that Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs adopt and promote the following advice and recommendation:

### Under 6 - 9

FFA advises that the keeping of point's tables and playing of finals must not be done.

### Under 10 - 11

FFA advises that the keeping of point's tables and playing of finals must not be done. It is also advised, the keeping of point's tables and playing of finals will only commence when children are playing 11 v 11 football on a full size pitch in the Under 12 age group.

## Practical recommendations

Below are some practical recommendations that you may wish to consider in your role of game leader, coach or manager;

- All players should get an equal amount of playing time.
- When an individual player is completely dominating the game and has already scored three goals and their team is winning by a three-goal margin, he/she can only score another goal when one of their team-mates has scored a goal. This is to encourage good players to include other members of their team and to force them to create opportunities for others.
- In the Under 6 & 7 age groups directly after each match each player is allowed to take a "penalty" from the 8m spot. First, all players from Team A and second, all players from Team B take their penalty kicks (free shot from 5m spot – no goalkeeper).
- Depending on how Optus Small Sided Football is being implemented in the Under 6 & 7 age groups, the intra-club format allows team coaches and managers to use breaks to make some internal changes to the team when one team is far too strong and leading by more than three or four goals.
- Member Federations, Zones, Associations and Clubs should attempt to ensure where possible that teams of reasonably equal ability are playing each other. Each respective governing body will have their own system to achieve this. Should you require any advice with this, please contact your Member Federation or FFA. Whatever system is used in the various age groups, you will need to consider that children like to play with their friends.

# Laws of Optus Small Sided Football



## Role of Coach / Parent Helper

The major role of the coach / parent helper is to make the football experience of every player and their families in their team as enjoyable as possible. The team coach/parent helper will provide the best environment for children to learn and enjoy the game through organising fun game based practices. Having good personal and organisational skills are most important for coaches and parent helpers working with children in this age group to allow them to learn through playing the game with minimal instruction and a focus on player development.

Clubs should service their coaches, parent helpers, game leaders and volunteers through the community coach education pathway. The Grassroots Football Certificate is a course of three hours duration and is aimed at beginner

coaches and teachers of players in the Under 6 & 7 age groups. It is designed to give them a basic understanding of their role and to provide them with practical ideas for training sessions. Coaches looking after children in the Under 8 - 11 age groups are encouraged to do a junior licence course. Clubs can contact their association or Member Federation to organise a course at their club or find out where the next one is.

For more information on the community coach education pathway go to the coaching section of;

[www.footballaustralia.com.au](http://www.footballaustralia.com.au)

# How to organise Optus Small Sided Football

Since 2008, FFA has been working closely with Member Federations, zones, associations and clubs on the phased implementation of Optus Small Sided Football throughout the country. Optus Small Sided Football will replace Rooball as the playing format for six to nine-year-olds and by the time it is completely rolled out it will be the format played by all players up to and including the Under 11 age group.

Whilst the success of this implementation is based on the adoption and use of the standard game formats and rules described in earlier sections, there is some flexibility with respect to the delivery or operational model which associations and their clubs choose to adopt.

In essence there are two alternatives when considering the most appropriate method of organising Optus Small Sided Football. The first is the intra-club option where teams are arranged from within a club's membership. These teams then play against each other on a weekly basis. The other option is the inter-club model where teams from within clubs play against other teams from other clubs on a weekly basis. The two should not necessarily be seen as mutually exclusive given that they could both be used simultaneously for different age groups within a club or association.

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview and some experience of these two options together with an outline of the most effective “game day” approach to organising Optus Small Sided Football, including field layouts, operational issues and codes of behaviour.

## Intra-club model

Capital Football, the governing body for football in the ACT, began introducing Small Sided Football back in 2004. In 2007, the roll-out of Small Sided Football in the ACT culminated in the Under 11 age group playing Small Sided Football for the first time.

In 2008, Football Federation Victoria adopted the Optus Small Sided Football formats in an intra-club format combined with gala days for the Under 6 and 7 age groups.

In implementing Optus Small Sided Football, Capital Football effectively chose to use both of the models described previously. For Under 9 years and below, the majority of clubs use the intra-club model where teams from within the club play against each other. Where clubs are unable to do this due to insufficient numbers, they combine with another smaller club and play against each other. From the Under 10 age group upwards, Capital Football fixtures matches for all clubs against other clubs on a home and away basis.

With regard to the intra-club model, the individual clubs are responsible for putting players into teams and organising games between those teams each week. This can either be done at the beginning of the season so that a player remains with the same team for the whole year and know in advance which team they are playing against each week, or alternatively, some clubs choose to allow the children to “turn-up” each week, be put into a team and then arrange who plays against who. This flexibility easily allows players to be moved between teams if required.

In view of the fact that no point's tables are kept at these ages, the intra-club model is simply a case of grouping players into teams, assigning a parent/volunteer to be game leader and organising a draw which is either done over a season or is developed each week.

### Characteristics of the intra-club model are:

- Parents only need to travel to the same location each week (which is very likely going to be in close proximity to where they live); they do not have a “home and away” situation.
- There is less emphasis on competition given the games are not against other clubs.
- There is flexibility in terms of being able to move players or parent helpers between teams if required.
- The club can provide a greater level of support to game leaders as they are all at the club's home ground rather than travelling to other clubs. In this way, these people can be “mentored” by other more knowledgeable and experienced coaches from within the club.
- There is likely to be a greater number of people at the ground each week to help out in various roles as well as generating more sales at the canteen.
- Responsibility for organising draws and field allocations rests with the club as opposed to the association.



## How to organise Optus Small Sided Football



### Inter-club model

As previously mentioned, Capital Football has adopted an inter-club model of Optus Small Sided Football for their older age groups whereby they fixture games throughout the season and clubs play against other clubs on a home and away basis. Football Federation Northern Territory (FFNT), as well as the Ku-ring-gai District Soccer Association (KDSA) in Sydney, have also adopted the inter-club model; however, their model begins at the Under 6 age group and extends to the Under 11 age group. Further to this in 2008 and 2009, Football Queensland and Football Federation Tasmania adopted Small Sided Football formats for the Under 6 - 9 age groups, these were fixtured by each of their zones and associations in an inter-club approach.

In contrast to the home and away model, Northern NSW Football, Football West, FFNT and KDSA use a "hub model" where clubs travel to a centralised location each week and play against other clubs. For KDSA, they have eight dedicated Small Sided Football venues where only Under 6 and 7 age groups play. The club

whose ground is used has overall responsibility for the operational aspect of the day. However this is generally shared between clubs.

The fact that these venues are not used for any other football means that they can be permanently marked for Optus Small Sided Football and the particular age group that plays at that ground.

There are a number of differences between the inter-club model in which clubs are required to travel and the hub model where the venue is the same each week. Generally speaking, the advantages of the inter-club (hub) model are similar to those of the intra-club model.

#### Characteristics of the inter-club model are:

- Games are played against other clubs as opposed to other teams within the same club (some parents believe this is particularly important and as players get older they also share this view).

- There is likely to be less work for the club in terms of organising draws; this would instead be carried out by the association.
- All clubs can derive benefits from their canteen given that Optus Small Sided Football will be played there every second week.

#### Characteristics of the inter-club (hub) model are:

- Parents only need to travel to the same location each week (in contrast to the intra-club model, in which the venue may not be quite as close to their residence).
- There is flexibility in terms of being able to move players or parent helpers between teams if required.
- Optus Small Sided Football ensure a more efficient use of fields in general, however, having dedicated venues for Optus Small Sided Football means that open spaces that may not be suitable for full-size fields can still be used for football.



### Game day requirements

Regardless of the type of model that is chosen, the requirements of a club and/or association on game day are going to be very similar. It is important to emphasise that the organisational requirements of Optus Small Sided Football are not vastly different from what clubs need to undertake at present (through Rooball and other junior football), though there are obviously going to be more players, more games and more fields. FFA would certainly encourage clubs and associations to approach Optus Small Sided Football with the view to minimising both the number of extra volunteers required and the expectations placed upon them.

This section discusses some of the factors that need to be considered in relation to Optus Small Sided Football, such as field layouts, ground management, equipment and participant codes of behaviour. Through your Member Federation,

FFA is able to provide ongoing advice and support from individuals and clubs that have already successfully implemented Optus Small Sided Football.

If required, they can offer practical suggestions based on their “real-life” experience.

### Accommodating multiple fields

Recommendations for the layout of the small-sided fields appear below. Obviously they may differ according to the available space, however this information should be useful when dealing with “standard-sized” fields.

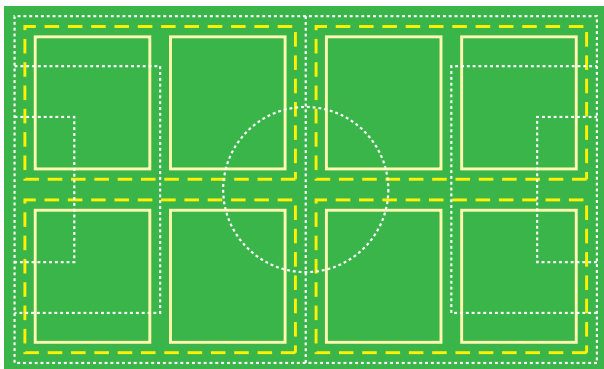
Remember, Optus Small Sided Football can be played on any suitable open grass area and does not necessarily have to take place on a dedicated football pitch.

# How to organise Optus Small Sided Football

## Field layouts

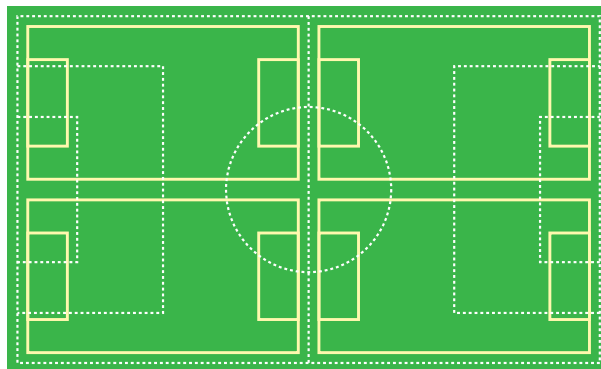
### Under 6 & 7

Six to eight Optus Small Sided Football pitches per full-size pitch if required. Optus Small Sided Football pitches to the correct dimensions are also set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



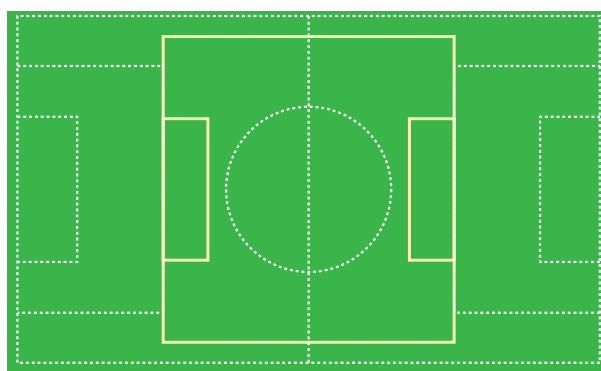
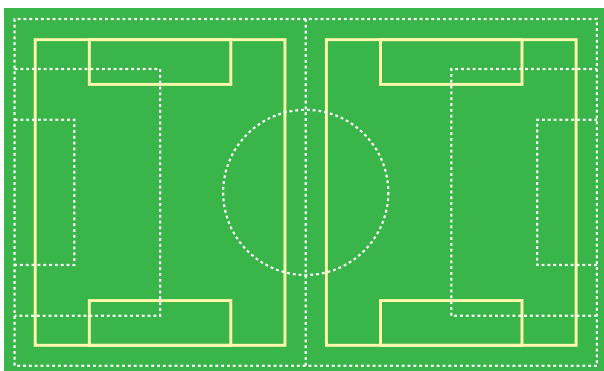
### Under 8 and 9

Two to four Optus Small Sided Football pitches per full-size pitch if required. Optus Small Sided Football pitches to the correct dimensions are also set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



### Under 10 and 11

One to two Optus Small Sided Football pitches per full-size pitch if required. In the Under 11 age group, the final stage of development in the Optus Small Sided Football formats before players commence 11 v 11 football, it is recommended that clubs where facilities and scheduling allows, set-up the field from penalty box to penalty box and adjust the width of the field with use of markers to meet the maximum specified width. Optus Small Sided Football pitches to the correct dimensions can also be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



# How to organise Optus Small Sided Football



## Equipment requirements

### Players

Players will need to wear all of the same clothing/equipment that they would currently do at this age – shorts, shirt, socks, boots and shin pads. In the event that a club chooses the intra-club model, coloured bibs would need to be supplied to differentiate teams.

### Club

The best case scenario would be for clubs to be able to provide pop-up or portable goals for their games as well as fields that are permanently marked. However this should absolutely not prevent them from being able to offer Optus Small Sided Football. In fact, a number of the clubs in Australia that already play Optus Small Sided Football use markers for both their goals and to mark out the lines on the field.

### For each field you will need:

- a pair of goals or four poles/markers
- a marked field with lines or sufficient markers to be able to do this
- a whistle for the game leader or instructing referee
- adequate balls – at least two to three
- drinks for players (should be provided by parents).

### For each venue (Intra Club / Hub model) you will need:

- a large whiteboard or equivalent showing a “field map” as well as a daily draw
- a horn or equivalent to signal the start of play, half-time and full-time in each game
- a central position with table to assist in the administration of the day
- a first aid kit/s
- adequate parking given that there is likely to be an increased volume of both players, parents and spectators. One solution is to schedule sufficient gaps between age groups/time slots so that one group of people can leave and the next can arrive. In the inter-club (hub) model, part of the criteria for selecting grounds may be the amount of available parking.



## How to organise Optus Small Sided Football



### Ground management

Regardless of the model that is chosen, each venue needs to have at least one ground controller or manager who has overall responsibility for what occurs on game day. This includes monitoring the timing of games, ensuring teams are aware of who and where they are playing, recording results (if appropriate), coordinating the setting up of fields and dealing with any issues that may come up from time to time.

One of the most crucial tasks is to ensure that the fields are set up (and removed) in a timely manner. This should be delegated to a small group of people and is probably best allocated to representatives of the particular age group that is playing and can be shared between teams throughout the season. In an inter-club (hub) model, it needs to be allocated both to an age group and to a club given that there will be multiple clubs sharing a venue.

Team managers/supervisors/game leaders also need to understand their role on the day ranging from determining where they are playing to what is acceptable behaviour. Team managers should be briefed by the ground controller before matches begin each week.

Note that the team manager can act as game leader (referee) though this role is perhaps best undertaken by a beginner referee or young player from within the club who has no connection with either of the teams.



# Codes of conduct: Creating the right environment for young players

The behaviour of players, their parents, spectators, officials and administrators is absolutely critical in ensuring that our young players enjoy an appropriate environment in their formative years of playing football. Bearing in mind that the whole philosophy of Optus Small Sided Football is based on replicating street football, where children play without adults and referees, the major focus should be on letting the children play with minimal instruction and plenty of encouragement.

Below are a series of codes of behaviour that all people involved in junior football, and in particular Optus Small Sided Football, must be aware of and abide by. Some clubs who already conduct Optus Small Sided Football require team managers to exchange a Code of Behaviour before every game with each person giving an undertaking, on behalf of their players, parents and spectators, to behave in an appropriate manner. If this does not eventuate, the other team manager is entitled to refer the other person back to the Code, and if inappropriate behaviour persists club representatives (probably the ground controller) would need to become involved.

## Players Code of Behaviour

- Play by the rules.
- Never argue with an official. If you disagree, have your captain, coach or manager approach the official during a break or after the competition.
- Control your temper. Verbal abuse of officials, sledging other players or deliberately distracting or provoking an opponent are not acceptable or permitted behaviours in any sport.
- Work equally hard for yourself and/or your team. Your team's performance will benefit and so will you.
- Be a good sport. Applaud all good plays whether they are made by your team or the opposition.
- Treat all participants in your sport as you like to be treated. Do not bully or take unfair advantage of another competitor.
- Cooperate with your coach, team-mates and opponents. Without them, there would be no competition.
- Participate for your own enjoyment and benefit, not just to please your parents and coaches.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.
- Display control, respect and professionalism to all involved with the sport. This includes opponents, coaches, officials, administrators, the media, parents and spectators. Encourage players to do the same.
- Show concern and caution towards sick and injured players. Follow the advice of a physician when determining whether an injured player is ready to recommence training or competition.
- Obtain appropriate qualifications and keep up to date with the latest coaching practices and the principles of growth and development of young people.
- Any physical contact with a young person should be appropriate to the situation and necessary for the player's skill development.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

## Coaches Code of Behaviour

- Remember that young people participate for pleasure, and winning is only part of the fun.
- Never ridicule or yell at a young player for making a mistake or not coming first.
- Be reasonable in your demands on players' time, energy and enthusiasm.
- Operate within the rules and spirit of your sport and teach your players to do the same.
- Ensure that the time players spend with you is a positive experience. All young people are deserving of equal attention and opportunities.
- Avoid overplaying the talented players; the "just average" need and deserve equal time.
- Ensure that equipment and facilities meet safety standards and are appropriate to the age and ability of all players.

## Parents Code of Behaviour

- Remember that children participate in sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- Encourage children to participate, do not force them.
- Focus on your child's efforts and performance rather than whether they win or lose.
- Encourage children to play according to the rules and to settle disagreements without resorting to hostility or violence.
- Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing a competition.

## Codes of conduct: Creating the right environment for young players

- Remember that children learn best by example. Appreciate good performance and skilful plays by all participants.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.
- Respect officials' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- Show appreciation for volunteer coaches, officials and administrators. Without them, your child could not participate.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### Officials Code of Behaviour

- Modify rules and regulations to match the skill levels and needs of young people.
- Compliment and encourage all participants.
- Be consistent, objective and courteous when making decisions.
- Condemn unsporting behaviour and promote respect for all opponents.
- Emphasise the spirit of the game rather than the errors.
- Encourage and promote rule changes that will make participation more enjoyable.
- Be a good sport yourself. Actions speak louder than words.
- Keep up to date with the latest trends in officiating and the principles of growth and development of young people.
- Remember, you set an example. Your behaviour and comments should be positive and supportive.

### Administrators Code of Behaviour

- Place the safety and welfare of the participants above all else.
- Give all young people a "fair go" regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.
- Involve young people in planning, leadership, evaluation and decision-making related to the activity.
- Give all young people equal opportunities to participate.
- Create pathways for young people to participate in sport, not just as a player but as a coach, referee, administrator etc.
- Ensure that rules, equipment, length of games and training schedules are modified to suit the age, ability and maturity level of young players.
- Provide quality supervision and instruction for junior players.
- Remember that young people participate for their enjoyment and benefit. Do not overemphasise awards.
- Help coaches and officials highlight appropriate behaviour and skill development, and help improve the standards of coaching and officiating.
- Ensure that everyone involved in junior sport emphasises fair play, rather than winning at all costs.
- Give a Code of Behaviour sheet to spectators, officials, parents, coaches, players and the media, and encourage them to follow it.

- Remember, you set an example. Your behaviour and comments should be positive and supportive.
- Make it clear that abusing young people in any way is unacceptable and will result in disciplinary action.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

### Spectators Code of Behaviour

- Remember that young people participate in sport for their enjoyment and benefit, not yours.
- Applaud good performances and efforts from all individuals and teams. Congratulate all participants on their performance, regardless of the game's outcome.
- Respect the decisions of officials and teach young people to do the same.
- Never ridicule or scold a young player for making a mistake. Positive comments are motivational.
- Condemn the use of violence in any form, whether it is by spectators, coaches, officials or players.
- Show respect for your team's opponents. Without them, there would be no game.
- Encourage players to follow the rules and the officials' decisions.
- Do not use foul language, sledge or harass players, coaches or officials.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

## Frequently asked questions

### What is Optus Small Sided Football?

They are football games designed especially for children, with fewer players competing on a smaller-sized field. Players have more contact with the ball because fewer players are playing in a smaller playing area. Optus Small Sided Football meets the developmental needs of younger football players whilst maintaining a strong focus on maximum participation and enjoyment.

### Why change to Optus Small Sided Football?

It makes the game of football a better experience for children. More touches on the ball, more opportunities to make decisions, more actual play. Players will be more active due to playing both attacking and defensive roles within a match and will understand the importance of team-mates and playing and working together.

### How will they learn to play 11 v 11?

11 v 11 is a game designed for adults, progressing from 4 v 4, 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 BEFORE 11 v 11 is a sound educational method and process. The progression helps players discover the differences in the size of the field and size of the goal, and the benefits of having more space, learning to use different and better developed techniques to play a more tactical game, as well as understanding the role of different positions and determining what best suits them.

### Why no goalkeepers in Under 6's and Under 7's?

The role of the goalkeeper in football is uniquely specialised and typically players develop as keepers at a later age. In the youngest age groups, keepers can be uninvolved in the game for long periods, which can be uninteresting and means they are not part of the team for long periods of the game. The role of the goalkeeper has changed in the modern game, they need to be capable to act in the game as "sweeper" who can kick a ball, control a ball and build up the game without using their hands. Most goalkeepers have played for many years as field players before deciding to become goalkeepers.

### Will a club need lots of equipment for Optus Small Sided Football?

Equipment will not be a barrier to not conduct Optus Small Sided Football. Whilst the use of goals are ideal, there is no need to purchase new goals should your club not wish to or be able to. In the first instance, many clubs that have already implemented Optus Small Sided Football using markers or poles both as goals and markers to set out the field and have found that it has worked really well in the younger age groups, at minimal cost.

### Do other countries play Small Sided Football?

Small Sided Football is played and endorsed throughout England, Ireland, The Netherlands, Scotland, Germany, France, Korea and USA, to name a few. The idea of Small Sided Football is not new.

### Where can I get more information on Optus Small Sided Football?

Optus Small Sided Football in the younger age groups has been simplified and under-regulated so it is easy to understand for both the children and volunteers. The website [www.smallsidedfootball.com.au](http://www.smallsidedfootball.com.au) provides a number of education resources for parents to find out more about Optus Small Sided Football as well as having lots of activities and tips for children and coaches.

Clubs should service their coaches, parent helpers, game leaders and volunteers through the community coach education pathway. The Grassroots Football Certificate is a course of three hours duration and is aimed at beginner coaches and teachers of players in the Under 6 & 7 age groups. It is designed to give them a basic understanding of their role and to provide them with practical ideas for training sessions. Coaches looking after children in the Under 8 - 11 age groups are encouraged to do a junior licence course. Clubs can contact their association or state federation to organise a course at their club or find out where the next one is.

For more information on the community coach education pathway go to the coaching section of;

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# Contacts

Organisation		Telephone	Email Address	Website
Football Federation Australia		02 8020 4000	info@footballaustralia.com.au	www.footballaustralia.com.au
Capital Football		02 6260 4000	info@capitalfootball.com.au	www.capitalfootball.com.au
Football Federation Northern Territory		08 8941 2444	info@footballnt.com.au	www.footballnt.com.au
Football Federation South Australia		08 8340 3088	info@ffsa.com.au	www.ffsa.com.au
Football Federation Tasmania		03 6273 3299	admin@footballfedtas.com.au	www.footballfedtas.com.au
Football Federation Victoria		03 9474 1800	info@footballfedvic.com.au	www.footballfedvic.com.au
Football Queensland		07 6420 5866	admin@footballqueensland.com.au	www.footballqueensland.com.au
Football West		08 9422 6900	info@footballwest.com.au	www.footballwest.com.au
Northern New South Wales Football		02 4964 8922	admin@northernnswfootball.com.au	www.northernnswfootball.com.au
Football New South Wales		02 8814 4400	info@footballnsw.com.au	www.footballnsw.com.au



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Australian Sports Commission

FFA Optus Small Sided Football ambassadors

UEFA Grassroots Football

The Football Association

Scottish FA

US Youth Soccer

Canadian SA

Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB)



## With Optus behind football, anything's possible.

We're committed to supporting the next generation of Australian Football Stars through the Optus Small Sided Football Program. To recognise and reward the achievements of players and coaches across the country, we're pleased to announce the Optus Small Sided Football Awards.

Register your interest now. Visit [optus.com.au/footballawards](https://optus.com.au/footballawards)



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FEDERATION  
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