

Conditioned Small-Sided Games – “Stimulate your players’ MINDS!”

This article explores the benefits of small-sided games within football training sessions. It promotes the “game as the teacher” ethos and suggests various ways to modify and manipulate a basic small-sided game to give additional technical, tactical and psychological benefits for the players

FC Internazionale coach, Jose Mourinho has a very clear methodology when it comes to training and small-sided games (SSG) form a major part of his team’s coaching sessions. He says he uses small-sided games to: -
“To develop technical, tactical and physical elements – a global view of training.

I believe in the global method”

Jose Mourinho (2005, UEFA Technician, No. 27)

What is a small-sided game?

- *Directional* game situation
- Even teams, normally 3v3 → 9v9
- Targets for each team, i.e. a goal
- Develops the principles of play & team understanding
- Coach normally works with one team on one theme

Benefits of small-sided games?

- Appropriate size pitch & goals (age of players)
- More touches of the ball
- Simpler situations to understand & coach
- More space = more time to make decisions
- More involvement & opportunities to attack and defend
 - Realistic distances for corners, goal kicks etc
- Chance for players to interchange positions regularly



Normally, a session ends with a small-sided game and is the part of the session the players enjoy most. This is the final challenge for the players where they can put into practice what they have learnt until that point. Coaches can manipulate games to make them less of a “5-a-side free for all” and more of a continuation of the previous work. This can be done by altering the pitch set up or with simple rule/conditions.

What are the benefits of conditioned small-sided games:

- Can help to amplify a specific coaching theme
- Players enjoy playing games! – Use this enthusiasm
- Promote skill acquisition (random practice)
- Allow for problem solving by the players (psychological benefits)
- Encourage creativity & innovation
- Variety – games can be modified to suit the theme of work
- Physical benefits, i.e. have high physical demands
- Social benefits, i.e. co-operation in teams
- Easy to organise & supervise for the coach



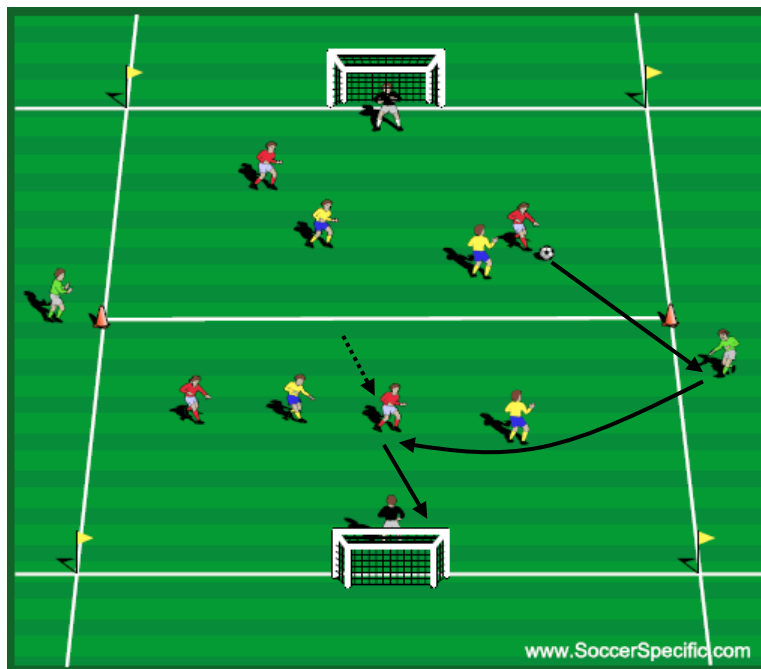
Considerations when planning:

- ✓ Consider the age and ability of your players when planning
- ✓ Remember the topic of your session
- ✓ Think about the possibilities in terms of game organisation (see page 3)
- ✓ Choose a game set up and rules that complements your coaching topic?
- ✓ Keep it *simple* – too many conditions may spoil the players’ enjoyment and detract from the topic
- ✓ Keep it *realistic* – “everyone on 1-touch” Does this happen on Saturday????
- ✓ Limited interventions – let the game be the teacher

When it comes to the game, the coach needs to reinforce the key messages that have been worked on previously and look to apply the principles of the game, whether it be attack or defence. When planning a

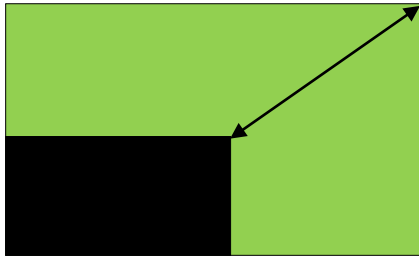
conditioned game, the coach should give consideration to the following possibilities with regards pitch organisation and game conditions. Select the organisation that complements your coaching topic.

Organisation	Variations	Examples
Pitch size or shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alter dimensions 	<i>To suit topic, i.e. big pitch → long passing</i>
Limited access areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Side channels Safety zones 	<i>For wide players/crossers</i> <i>Areas where player can receive unopposed</i>
Scoring method (Could be different at each end *)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full size goals + GK's 	<i>To suit topic, i.e. shooting</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small target goals – no GK's 	<i>i.e. each team attacking 2 goals → switching play</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End zones (full width) 	<i>Pass <u>or</u> run the ball into?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corner zones 	<i>i.e. a scoring zone in each corner of the pitch</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gates (numerous) 	<i>Where? How many? Pass <u>or</u> run ball through?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triangular gates 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target players 	<i>END of pitch How many?</i>
Additional players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Servers 	<i>END of pitch. How many?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral players / playmakers 	<i>ON the pitch. How many?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support players 	<i>SIDES of pitch. How many?</i>
Imposed conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On players (some or all) 	<i>i.e. man for man marking</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the practice 	<i>i.e. 1-touch finish only</i>



Example: A small-sided game for “Finishing Inside The Penalty Area”
2v2 in each half + side support players

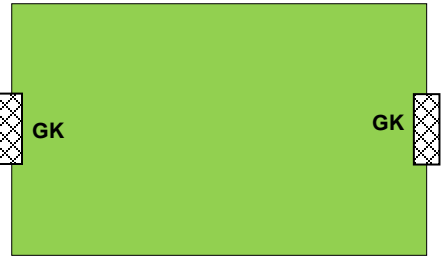
Some Possible Variations:



Size / shape of field



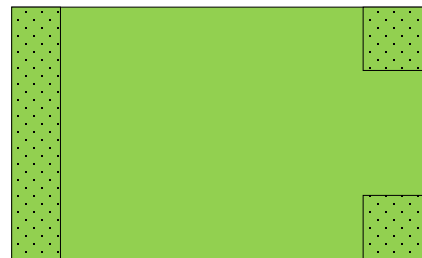
Channels or safety zones



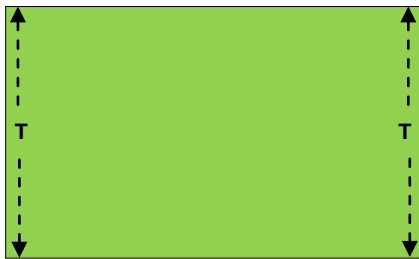
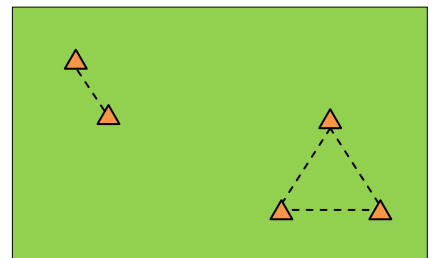
Full Size Goals + GK's



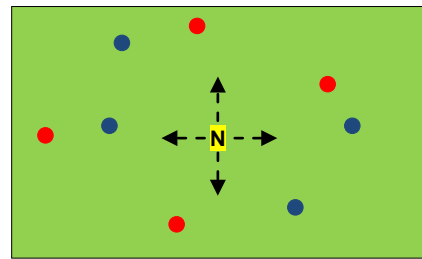
Small target goals (2 goals +)



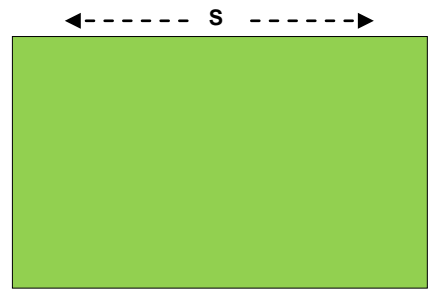
Scoring zones (end or boxes)



Target players



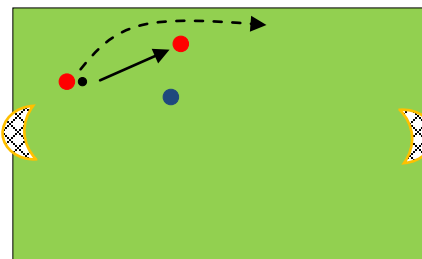
Neutral players



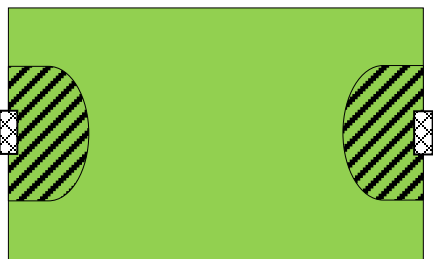
Support players



Combination of above * (example)



Condition players
(i.e. must overlap)



Small goals with scoring zones



Neil Winskill | UEFA 'A' Coach
Football Development Officer (Newcastle City Council
Team Coach – Ashington Football Club

