

# **Under-12 House League Game Format**

## **9-a-side vs. 11-a-side**

### **2009 Outdoor Season**

#### **Background**

Having 11- and 12-year-olds playing on a full adult-sized field (100 metres long) has always been a concern for the club. When the opportunity arose to reconfigure some fields, the club decided to create three junior-sized fields (80 metres long) for the U12 divisions. During planning for the 2009 season, the Recreational Committee discussed whether the number of players on the field should be reduced to 9-a-side on these new junior fields. A decision was made to stay with 11-a-side on the junior fields on the basis that we were just trying to reduce the field dimensions for the smaller players, not change the fundamentals of the game. Since all-star and rep players in this age group would still be playing 11-a-side, it was felt at the time that we should not place our house league players who play all-star or had aspirations of playing rep at a disadvantage. Furthermore, it is recognized that when players make the transition from mini-field soccer to full field soccer, there is a tendency at first for the players to cluster around the ball, creating an impression of congestion. It was suggested that this congestion would exist no matter how many players were on each team and no matter what size field is used, and that this congestion would be relieved as the season progresses and the players learn to spread out and play their positions.

Once the pre-season started, the club received a number of complaints that 11-a-side on a junior-sized field creates too much congestion and we were asked to consider switching to 9-a-side.

There are no CSA or OSA guidelines on this topic. It is up to each club to make their own decisions on how to handle the transition from mini-fields to full-sized fields. Anecdotal evidence suggests that 9-a-side on a junior field is common practice for this age group (e.g., Scarborough, Unionville, some rep tournaments), but we are not aware of any clubs that play 11-a-side on a junior field. (That doesn't mean they don't exist – it's easy to check web sites and see examples of clubs playing 9-a-side for U12, but for clubs that play 11-a-side, it's not so easy to determine what size fields they are using.)

The teams in the two U12 divisions currently have 14 or 15 players each, with a maximum of 16 players allowed. Given that it is too late to reduce the roster size and create more teams, the concern with switching to 9-a-side at this point is that there will be too many players on the sidelines when all players show up and that many players would end up sitting off for half a game. While this would not be a concern for most games during the summer months when players are on vacation, it would be a concern for the early season and the play-offs, when attendance is usually high.

#### **Procedures for 2009 Outdoor Season**

As a temporary solution for this season only, we will implement the following procedures for the U12 Boys and Girls divisions:

1. If BOTH teams have 13 or fewer players for the game at the scheduled kick-off time, then the game will be played as 9-a-side.
2. If one or both teams have 14 or more players for the game at the scheduled kick-off time, then the game will be played as 11-a-side.
3. If the game starts as 9-a-side, the game will finish as 9-a-side. If the game starts as 11-a-side, the game will finish as 11-a-side. After the game has started, no change to the format will occur due to players arriving late or leaving early.
4. Game sheets must be marked either "9-a-side played" or "11-a-side played". Among other things, this will facilitate monitoring the equal play rule.

5. The minimum number of players required to play will be 6 (not 7 as is required for 11-a-side full-field teams). Therefore, section 1.2.9(b) of the House League Playing Rules is modified for U12 to read: “If a team fails to field at least six (6) players for a game within the 10-minute grace period, then that team shall forfeit the game to the opposition. The game shall be started immediately when each team has at least the minimum number of players. The period of grace shall only be allowed if a team has less than the minimum number of players present.”
6. For the call-up rules (see 2.2.1(f) in the Policies and Procedures document), the “normal field strength” for U12 will be considered to be 9 players, not 11. As stated in the rules, the “normal field strength” cannot be exceeded by more than two players as a result of players being called up (i.e., number of players dressed for the game in question cannot exceed 11; if they do, call-ups in excess of 11 players cannot play).

One of the benefits of this solution is that we will have an opportunity to observe both 9-a-side and 11-a-side games at different points in the season. At the conclusion of the season we would like to do a final analysis of the situation and make a final recommendation for a permanent solution for next season.

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