

# Free Play and Small-Sided Games

## Benefits

- Enjoyment and passion for the game
- Autonomy
- Creativity
- Problem solving
- Builds confidence
- Mistakes are an opportunity for growth
- Long-term development
- Builds all around athleticism
- Intrinsically motivating
- Unconscious learning = fluency
- More goal scoring opportunities
- More touches on the ball
- More movement
- Simplified decision making
- Work together to accomplish a goal
- More opportunities to directly influence the game for the individual
- Learn when to use different skills
- Improves fitness
- Ball is in play more = more repetitions

## How to Implement

- Play games of 1v1 to 4v4
- Funino
- Adjust the size of the field or number of players to increase/decrease the time and space on the ball
- Vary ways to score each game (larger goals, multiple goals, dribble over or pass to a line, number of passes)
- Let go of structure - soccer is a chaotic game; training should be an opportunity to prepare for the games
- Allow time for players to communicate about how to solve the problems (timeouts)
- Coach does not stop the game. Instead coach addresses players during the flow or individually off to the side
- Use free play and small sided games to present problems and observe how the players solve these problems to expand their understanding of the game

## What to observe

- Observe individual characteristics of each player (social interactions, movements, leadership qualities, etc)
- Observe natural tendencies and behaviors of each individual to assist in determining which position the individual naturally adopts
- Observe fluidity of specific groups and playing styles to assist with determining team's style of play
- Observe fitness level of group and individuals to help determine periodization plan

### Sources

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3. Gilbert, W. (n.d.). Quality Coaching Framework.
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