

Below is an excerpt from the Dec. 13/2010 issue of Brian McCormick's Volume 4, Issue 41, of the "Hard 2 Guard Player Development Newsletter" article titled 'Small-sided Games and Periodization'.

Small-sided Games

Small-sided and modified games are an effective tool for technical and tactical development. Parkin (1980; cited by Weidner, 1998) found that with 9-11 year-old boys, the best-qualified players obtained possession of the ball 30-160 times, while for the least qualified it ranged from 12-82 times. Engelhorn (1988) obtained similar results for girls, as did Ortega et al. (2006) for boys, showing the vast differences in participation by 14-15 years of age. More possession equals more opportunities for skill development, and these studies show a reduced opportunity for the players who need the most skill development, the least qualified players. Full-sided games accentuate the differences in skill levels and increase the discrepancy between the most talented and the least talented.

A **Playermakers Basketball Development League (PBDL)** coach compared a PBDL and a full-sided recreational league in terms of meaningful touches and engaged defensive plays. *Meaningful touches* were defined as "the opportunity to execute a practiced skill in a game situation: a pass vs. a defender, a triple-threat move, a dribble move vs. a defender, any shot attempt." An *engaged defensive play* was defined as "any time the player actively plays defense: guarding the ball, defending a cutter or actively helping and recovering; and any defensive rebound; standing in the key in help defense or protecting the weak side would not count."

The coach found:

Offensive Meaningful Touches

3v3 both teams' total touches 101

5v5 both teams' total touches 80

Engaged Defensive Plays

3v3 both teams' total touches 104

5v5 both teams' total touches 84

While unscientific, if one divides those plays evenly amongst all players – which we know won't happen – 3v3 players averaged 37 meaningful touches and 38 engaged defensive plays, while 5v5 players averaged 16 meaningful touches and 17 engaged defensive plays.

The average 3v3 player had twice as many opportunities to make a play with the ball against a defender and twice as many opportunities to defend an opponent. Multiply the difference over a recreational season (let's assume 8 games) and the average player receives over 160 more offensive and defensive opportunities to execute skills, read opponents and make plays.

Small-sided games, and specifically 3v3, are a modification aimed at improving the developmental and competitive elements of the game by creating more space, more time and more ball possessions, meaning more opportunities for technical and tactical skill development. However, since they produce a similar physiological load as full-sided games, small-sided games are not an *easy* or less stressful alternative for the off-season. Coaches need to plan their off-season and pre-season accordingly and understand the goals and aims for different activities. Small-sided games may be an appropriate activity during the off-season, just as playing full-sided games may be appropriate. However, players need general training as part of the annual cycle too.

These studies do suggest that SSG may be the answer as an alternative to full-sided games at the developmental level because of the similar physiological load plus the additional technical and training repetitions. In this sense, and with any aspect of planning, one must understand the goals for the activity and make appropriate choices. SSG may not be appropriate as the off-season conditioning activities because of the high physiological demand and the lack of preparedness of players for those continued demands. Instead, more technique work on general strength development and movement skills may be the more effective approach in the off-season prior to the beginning of pre-season practices.