

ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES TO FIND THEIR FOOTBALL

Understanding Small-Sided Football Fact Sheet



What is small-sided football?

There are many types of small-sided football being played in England including Teams & Leagues, Recreational and Informal.



- **Small-sided football** is a broad category and includes playing with friend and family with jumpers for goalposts, to organised five-a-side games at a purpose-built facility.
- It might be **3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9** aside and also includes **Walking Football** and **Futsal**.
- It can be played in a number of different environments, both indoors and outdoors from local parks, green spaces to leisure centres, schools and specialist 3G facilities.
- It may have a **competitive element**, but the majority is **informal**.
- **Recreational and informal football** is usually the entry point for people new to football and people who are inactive, but can also be the destination for players who can no longer meet the demands of the affiliated game but still want to kick a ball. R
- Recreational and informal football can be relevant to new, lapsed and current players.
- Insight from the FA shows that recreational and informal football engages higher numbers of lower socio-economic and female players.



There're big differences between how men and women play...

Men

- Have personal experience of playing and talking about football. They know the game and how it's played.
- More likely to have a social circle they can call upon to play but require help to co-ordinate and organise a game.

Women

- Less likely to have personal experience of playing (didn't play at school) and talking about football. Still feels like a man's game and a man's world.
- They respond positively to a strong activator to help motivate and mobilise a chance to play.

There are some barriers to overcome to get people playing small-sided football...

- **Lack of perceived time**
Other sporting activities and life commitments compete for their time
- **Bad weather and early darkness**
Many want to play outside but without sports lighting it's difficult between October to April evenings
- **Self-conscious**
Perceived skill level, age, fitness and body shape can lead to self-consciousness and embarrassment (especially if observed by others)
- **Fear of injury**
Perceived injury from poorly maintained pitches and surrounding metal fences
- **Public safety**
Intimidating youths on pitch, anti-social behaviour in parks and vandalism

Here are some tips to help encourage people to take part in small-sided football...

- **Grow awareness of opportunities to play**
There's a lot of potential audiences who don't know where it's possible to play.
- **Reassure on what the venue experience** will be like (friendly, welcoming, family friendly, affordable, inclusive), especially the Specialist Centres (*"it's not just aggressive leagues, you can play with your mates here"*).
- Design the **facilities to facilitate socialising** where possible – so players can make the most of time with friends. Consider proximity to food and drink opportunities, for example a local bar or café nights or events with activators to drive participation.
- **Focus on providing good value for money experience** rather than just being a cheap place to play.
- **Local parks and leisure/sports centres** are the most popular venues for recreational and informal football.
- **Venues need to be easily accessible** and in **a convenient location**. The ideal venue is close to home (under 20 minutes), easy to find and book and accessible via cars and public transport.
- **A tiered pricing model** can help make it accessible for everyone including opportunities to play for free.



- When recreational or informal football is being played at local parks, **access to toilets** should be provided. Showers and changing rooms are not expected, but are nice to have.
- **Surfaces should be clear of debris** and protected from dog fouling and dedicated football spaces should have basic markings.
- **The design of facilities** can help to alleviate self-consciousness – pre-match waiting areas, hedges/furniture to obscure pitch side view
- **To sustain participation and motivation** WhatsApp/Facebook group messenger are useful as part of future activation strategies to aid continued engagement off the pitch.