

Touches On The Ball - A Comparison Between 11 v 11 And 4 v 4

by Glen Buckley

While I was Director of Coaching of the Eden Prairie Soccer Club in Minneapolis I did a survey of the difference in the amount of touches a player can have in a small sided [4v4] game as opposed to an 11 v 11 game. Three different games were assessed, the players were average ability. They were 10 and 11 years of age. The following quite remarkable results were recorded. If these figures do not help change the opinions of the anti small sided game coaches and parents then I fear nothing will.

11 v 11 friendly game, 22 touches in 60 minutes, (0.37 touches on the ball per minute).

4 v 4 games (205 touches in 48 minutes, (projected 60 minutes = 256) (4.3 touches on the ball per minute).

4 v 4 games (217 touches in 48 minutes, (projected 60 minutes = 271) (4.5 touches on the ball per minute).

The player in the 4v4 game touched the ball 12.31 more times in the same time period against the same opposition as the 11v 11 game. The assessments were done on four different occasions against different opposition, and assessing different players each time to reinforce the above figures.

The reason to implement small- sided games into the program was to increase the time and amount of touches a player had on the ball and these results clearly back this up. It would be useful if other coaches tried the same experiment and showed the results to anyone who just simply doesn't understand why we do it and why it is important.

I have heard it said by someone who falls into the above category that yes they get more touches on the ball but they aren't all quality touches? Of course they aren't all quality touches because if every touch was a quality touch then our players would all be great players with nothing to learn and we know it doesn't work like that. Even the best players in the world have non ? quality touches on the ball. Lets say for arguments sake 50% of touches were ?Quality? touches, then in the 11 a side game that player got 11 quality touches and in the 4 a side games the same player got 135 quality touches. Players learn from doing it right but also from doing it wrong. I believe players must make mistakes to help them learn how to do things correctly as well as learning from doing it correctly in the first place. From the 135 non - quality touches they will have gained valuable experience of what not to do e.g. a first touch was bad and the ball went to the opposition so next time that player concentrates on making a good first touch and so on. In comparison in the 11 a side game the same player hardly touched the ball making only 11 quality touches but also only 11 non ? quality touches meaning very little opportunity to learn from quality work and non ? quality work.

My experience in the game has taught me this is an important way to help players develop their technique and improve their game and these results act as confirmation of this. I am sure this presentation goes some way to show how important it is to continue to use this type of developmental work as a part of our overall coaching programs.

By Glen Buckley