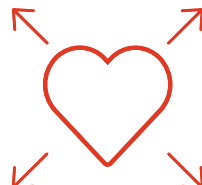
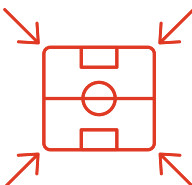


ENGLAND
FOOTBALL

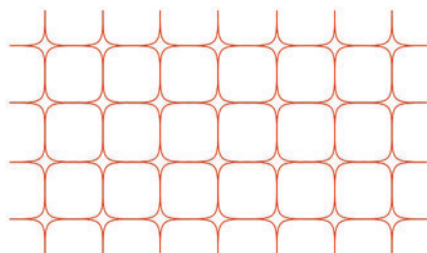


FutureFit



3v3

2026/27 Guidance



Improving young players' experience



Over the past three years, we've explored new and exciting opportunities to improve the experience of our youngest football players.

Working closely with the grassroots game, a comprehensive consultation was augmented by a study into playing formats for youth players in other European nations and supported by our own research and testing.

As a result, starting from the 2026-27 season, we are updating playing formats in youth football. This will help all young players increase their physical activity and develop their technical skills.

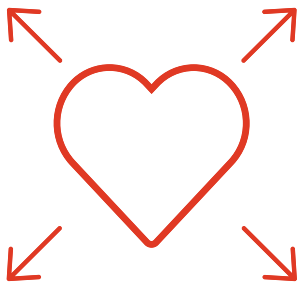
A key element of FutureFit is the introduction of a new entry format, 3v3. This format is for the youngest players where they will have more time on the ball, more time on the pitch and more opportunity to develop their skills.



At the forefront of progressive change

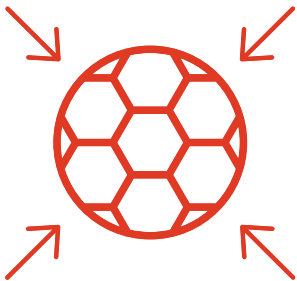


FutureFit, and the introduction of the new 3v3 format reflect our commitment to being at the forefront of positive change in the grassroots game:



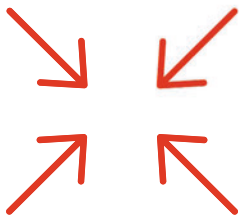
We will always ensure we deliver a game every young player can love by enabling them to reach their **full potential**.

We will continue to refine football for youth players so it remains the **activity of choice** for current and future generations.



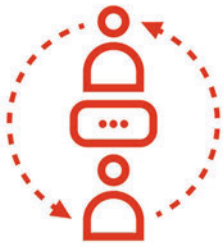
We will provide a safe, fun and active game for every young player, with **increased physical activity** and more touches of the ball to **improve technical ability**.

Extensive research and insights



We gathered views from County FAs, leagues, clubs, players, coaches, parents and match officials from across the grassroots community.

We met regularly with grassroots stakeholders in a comprehensive consultation process. This included face-to-face meetings and online surveys in our 'A conversation about our game' national consultation.



We conducted a study of youth football in over 40 European countries to look at their structures and approaches to learn from them.

We explored the impact the potential changes may have in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University. Here we studied more than 400 grassroots games, across the country, from U6 to U14, to gain a better understanding of the technical and physical returns of different playing formats.



Driving change in youth football



There are two themes that have shaped our approach:

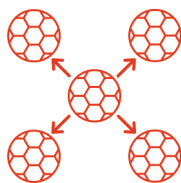
1 **Championing children's rights**

Together we recognise that all children have rights and it's our responsibility as adults to continually honour these for all children who play football.

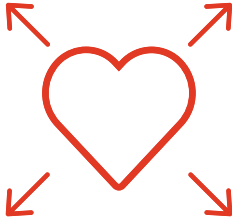
2 **Promoting the Spirit of the Game**

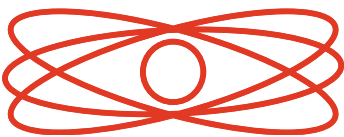
Not all football looks the same but there's a spirit that always exists. This spirit is built around the basics of the game: two teams respectfully competing, trying to stop their opponent from scoring whilst themselves trying to score. The emotions we feel and the lessons we learn are a shared experience.

Within these themes, there are four elements that work together to maximise a child's experience of football:

			
Playing Opportunities Giving all children lots of chances to play the game in a variety of different ways	Coaching Coaches who approach learning and teaching in a way that grows the person and player through the games they play	Environment Creating safe, fun and inclusive spaces for all children, both on and off the pitch	Parents & Carers Helping parents, carers and families make football the best place for all children

These four elements, combined with the themes of Championing Children's rights and promoting the Spirit of the Game will:

			
Encourage the joy of being physically active, to support happy, healthy lives	Develop more skilful players who reach their footballing potential	Set up young people to thrive inside and outside football	Grow a life-long attachment to the game for more people



Youth Development Framework





Why 3v3?

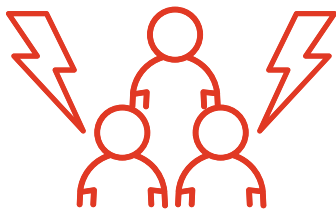


The conclusion of our extensive research is beyond doubt.

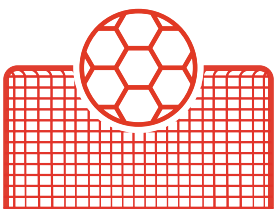
3v3 encourages more physical activity and increases technical play. It means more touches on the ball, more playing time on the pitch for young players and more opportunity to develop their skills in a team setting.

Over half of the European nations we surveyed already use formats smaller than 5v5 for U7s, and 3v3 is already used across England Football boys' and girls' talent pathways.

3v3 delivers a great early experience of the game because:



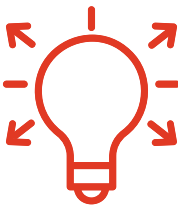
**It allows every player
to have an impact on the game**



**It provides lots of opportunities to
score and stop goals**



It's fun, fast and forward-thinking play



It encourages creativity



**It's about individual action –
not positions**

3v3 is already proving to be a fantastic format for developing young players and their football skills which they will carry with them into more traditional game formats.



3v3 principles

There are four principles that shape our approach to the delivery of 3v3:

- 1

Every child can participate for the maximum time possible. There are no substitutes.
- 2

Every child will learn to play as a team and receive the best introduction to the game.
- 3

Every child's experience prioritises holistic development over game outcomes. Results and scores are not recorded. Games are competitive but the result is not the focus.
- 4

Every child's technical engagement is maximised through an age-appropriate games programme.



3v3 set-up

The four key areas of setting up 3v3 are:

- 1

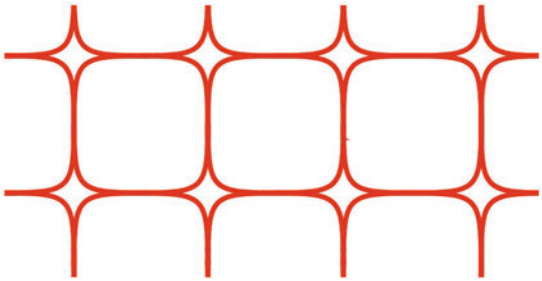
VENUE AND EQUIPMENT
- 2

LEAGUE OPERATIONS
- 3

ROLE OF ADULTS
- 4

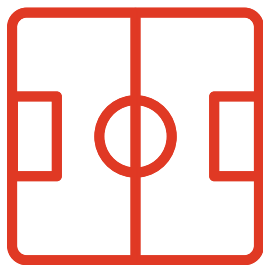
MATCHDAY SET UP

The following pages provide more detail on these four key areas.



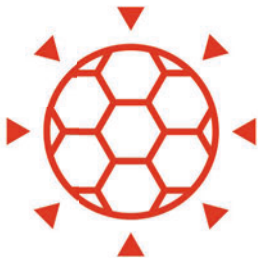
Setting up 3v3 – venue and equipment

Pitch Size, Surface and Markings

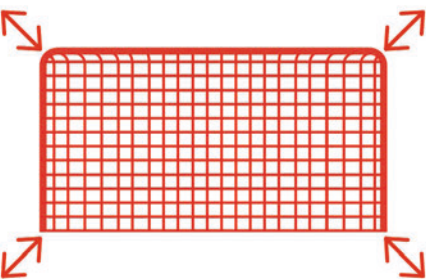


- The recommended pitch size is 10x15m and the maximum size permitted is 15x20m.
- 3v3 can be played on grass or 3G.
- Pitches can be marked with either lines or cone/flat markers.

Ball Size



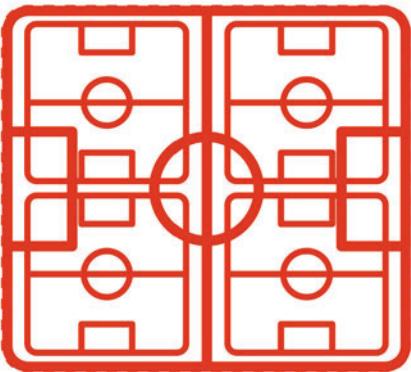
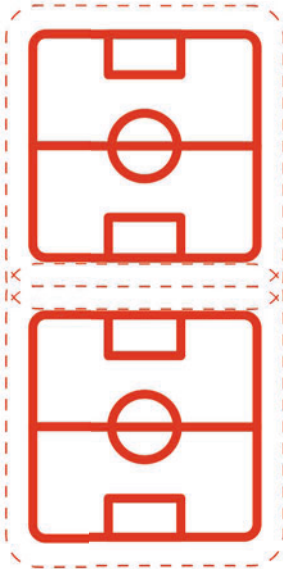
Size 3 (psi 5).



Goal Size

The recommended goal size is 120x75cm (4x2.5ft), but a maximum goal size of 150x90cm (5x3ft) is also permitted.

Run Offs

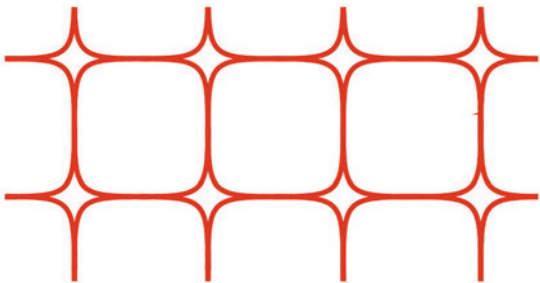


Pitch Layouts

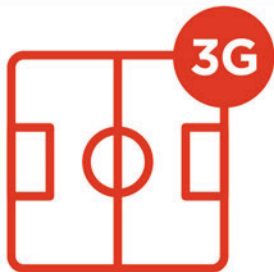
A standard matchday will need more than one pitch and could accommodate many more. Think about the set up and orientation of pitches for the smooth transition of players between games.

- Minimum run-offs will be 3m.
- Minimum run-offs between other pitches will be 6m where no spectators are present.





Grass pitch marking guidance



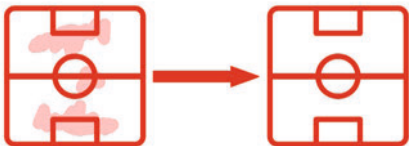
Use 3G pitches where possible



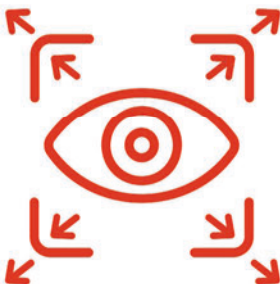
Pitches can be marked with either lines or cone/flat markers



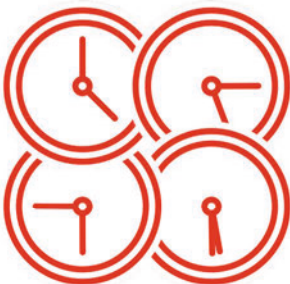
Where possible identify space not currently used for grassroots football on your site for 3v3 use



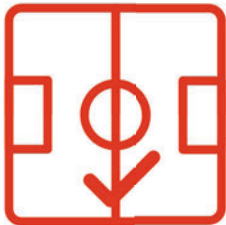
Rotate pitches around your site where possible for 3v3 use



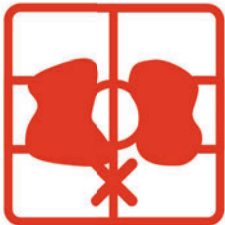
If your site is at capacity, look for additional pitch space elsewhere



Vary kick-off times to manage wear



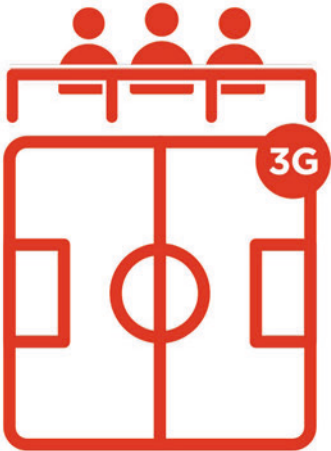
Consider overmarking existing pitches if your pitches are rated 'Good' on PitchPower



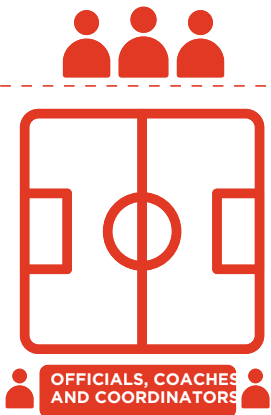
Try to avoid overmarking existing grass pitches, however if required to do so, it is recommended to avoid heavy wear areas of pitches



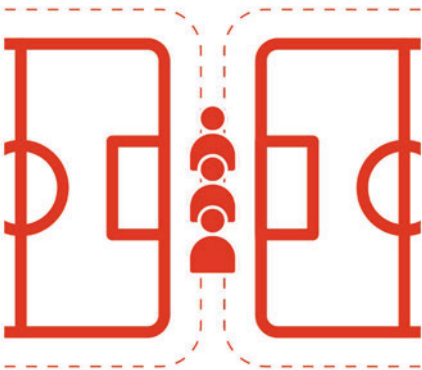
Spectators



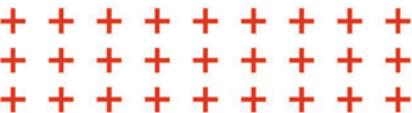
For 3G pitches, spectators will only be permitted in designated hardstanding spectator areas outside the pitch perimeter fence and are not permitted to stand on the 3G pitch.



For grass pitches, spectators should be positioned around the touchline opposite team officials, coaches and match coordinators with a 3m space between the pitch and the Respect Line.



If a grass pitch backs onto another pitch, then a further 2m is needed to create a designated spectator area, creating an 8m space in total.





How 3v3 is set up by leagues

- Leagues still organise the fixtures programme.
- Clubs and Teams will still need to register teams with the league.
- Players still need to be registered and approved by the league.
- Consider any local/domestic rules you have around squad limit numbers for U7s.
- Leagues can still split the season to regroup teams at the end of each block.



Squad sizes

For 3v3 the idea is not to have smaller squads playing a single 3v3 fixture. Instead, the focus is on having appropriately sized squads competing on matchdays with multiple games taking place at once. This allows every child in the squad to play for to play for the maximum time possible. There are no substitutes.

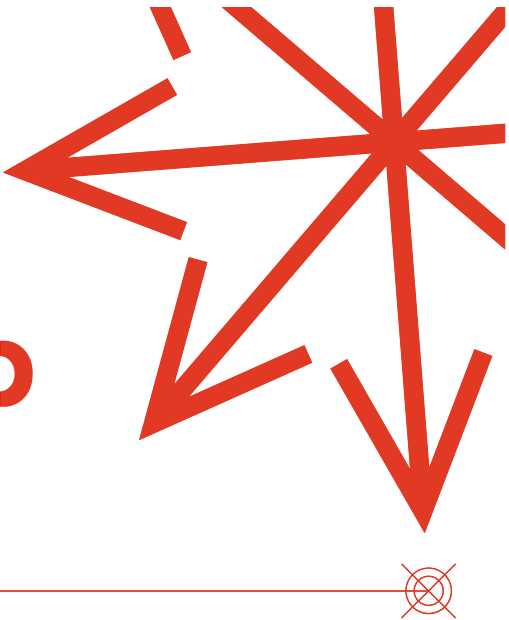
We recommend a matchday squad of between 6 and 12 players, but local league rules will ultimately apply. When selecting a suitable squad size, you should consider:

- How fixtures will be administered, and the optimum number of players you need to support this.
- The ease of transition between a squad size for playing 3v3 at U7 and moving through to 5v5 at U8.

Creating fixtures

It is the league's responsibility to organise the fixtures programme. This will focus on having an appropriate number of players for the pitch space available. It can be administered by a Home & Away or Central Venue Model.

Leagues can still group teams to form fixture blocks and regroup teams after the end of each block. Results will not be recorded because multiple games will be taking place rather than a single fixture.



How 3v3 is set up by leagues

Leagues and clubs can work together to explore the best ways of running multiple games at the same time. But here are three examples based on three different leagues:



- Sets a matchday squad limit of 9 players.
- Chooses to deliver via a Home and Away model.
- Administers the fixtures with the home team being responsible for setting out the maximum 3 pitches needed.*
- Agrees the matchday game programme between the two squad managers.



- Sets a matchday squad limit of 12 players.
- Chooses to deliver via a Central Venue model.
- Administers the fixtures with teams being allocated their time slot, opponents and pitch allocations (4 pitches).
- Agrees the matchday game programme with the league and the squad managers.



- Sets a matchday squad limit of 8 players.
- Chooses to deliver via a Home and Away model with a Team A v Team B v Team C structure.
- Administers the fixtures with the home team being responsible for setting out the maximum 4 pitches needed.*
- Agrees the matchday game programme with the three squad managers.

*In some instances, the away team(s) may be required to bring goals with them to ensure the right number of pitches can be created.

Important adult roles in delivering 3v3

Here's what adults need to be doing to make 3v3 games a success. Match Officials are not required in 3v3 because players self-officiate their own games with the support of an adult. The match day roles are fulfilled by Team Managers / Team Coaches.



Matchday Organiser*

When numbers are lower (i.e. up to 4 pitches) this role can be filled by a Pitch Facilitator.

- Decides the number of pitches needed and how many players are in each team (i.e. whether each pitch has 2 or 3 players per team).
- Decides the length and number of fixtures that will be played (if not dictated by the league).
- Acts as the central timekeeper providing a clear indication when each game starts and ends.



Pitch Facilitator*

There should be a Pitch Facilitator for each of the pitches used on matchdays.

- Ensures a safe playing environment and provides positive encouragement to all players.
- Supports players in the understanding of 3v3 playing rules.
- Makes sure both teams are ready to play after each break.



Pitch Assistants*

If there are enough volunteers, they can support the Pitch Assistant by:

- Maximising playing time by keeping footballs nearby.
- Supporting the Pitch Facilitator should any issues arise.



Parents/ Spectators

- Spectators are encouraged to clap and cheer after each game.
- Have minimal input while the game is in play to give players the opportunity to express themselves freely.

*All on-pitch personnel need to have an in-date DBS check and an up-to-date safeguarding children qualification. A minimum safeguarding ratio of 1:6 is required when working within this age group.



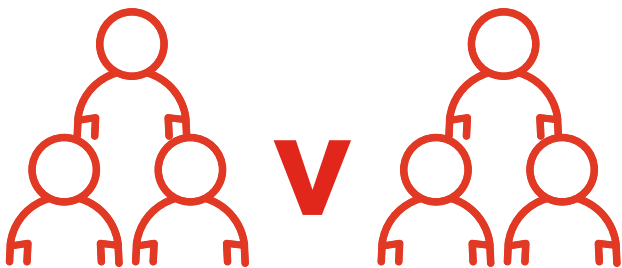
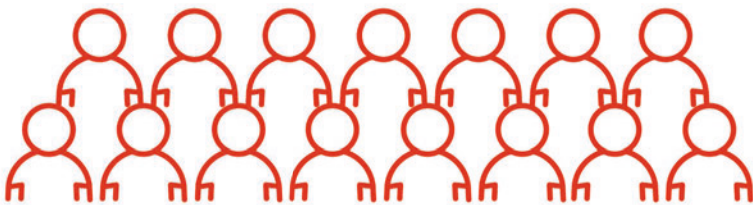
Setting up 3v3 on matchday



On matchdays, you should think about the:

Number of Players

It is important to determine exact player numbers on matchday. This allows your Team Managers to arrange the number of 3v3 teams and pitches required.



OR



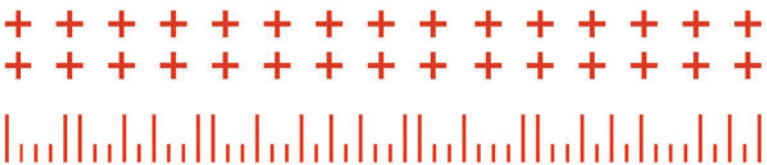
Team Formations

In an ideal world each team would have a squad of players divisible by 3. This won't always be the case. Sometimes a team of 2 is necessary so every child can take part. Teams are normally created from the same squad but occasionally it may be necessary to have mixed teams from opposing squads.

Not all children will be comfortable playing in a mixed team, so Team Managers will need to work together to select the right combination of players. The 'Managing Numbers Effectively' section shows how teams can be made up for different player numbers. Consider having one team with bibs and one without.

TOP TIP FOR MANAGERS

When confirming match arrangements, managers can let each other know how many players they are expecting. While numbers can change on the day, this helps prepare the correct number of pitches.





Setting up 3v3 on matchday



Game Playing Time

Each game should last between 6 and 10 minutes. 3v3 provides high-intensity activity so shorter games are recommended. Players participate in multiple games to create an enjoyable matchday experience.

Fixtures are best structured in a carousel format where one team from each pitch is rotated around after each game with the other team remaining in place.

This results in new match opponents and lots of variety. A bibbed team could be designated as the rotating team.

The recommended game play for every child is between 30 and 40 minutes, with a maximum time of 60 minutes. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, and leagues and Matchday Organisers have flexibility to choose how they do this:



6 x 6-minute games =
36 mins total playing time

5 x 7-minute games =
35 mins total playing time

4 x 8-minute games =
32 mins total playing time

5 x 8-minute games =
40 mins total playing time



TOP TIP FOR CLUBS

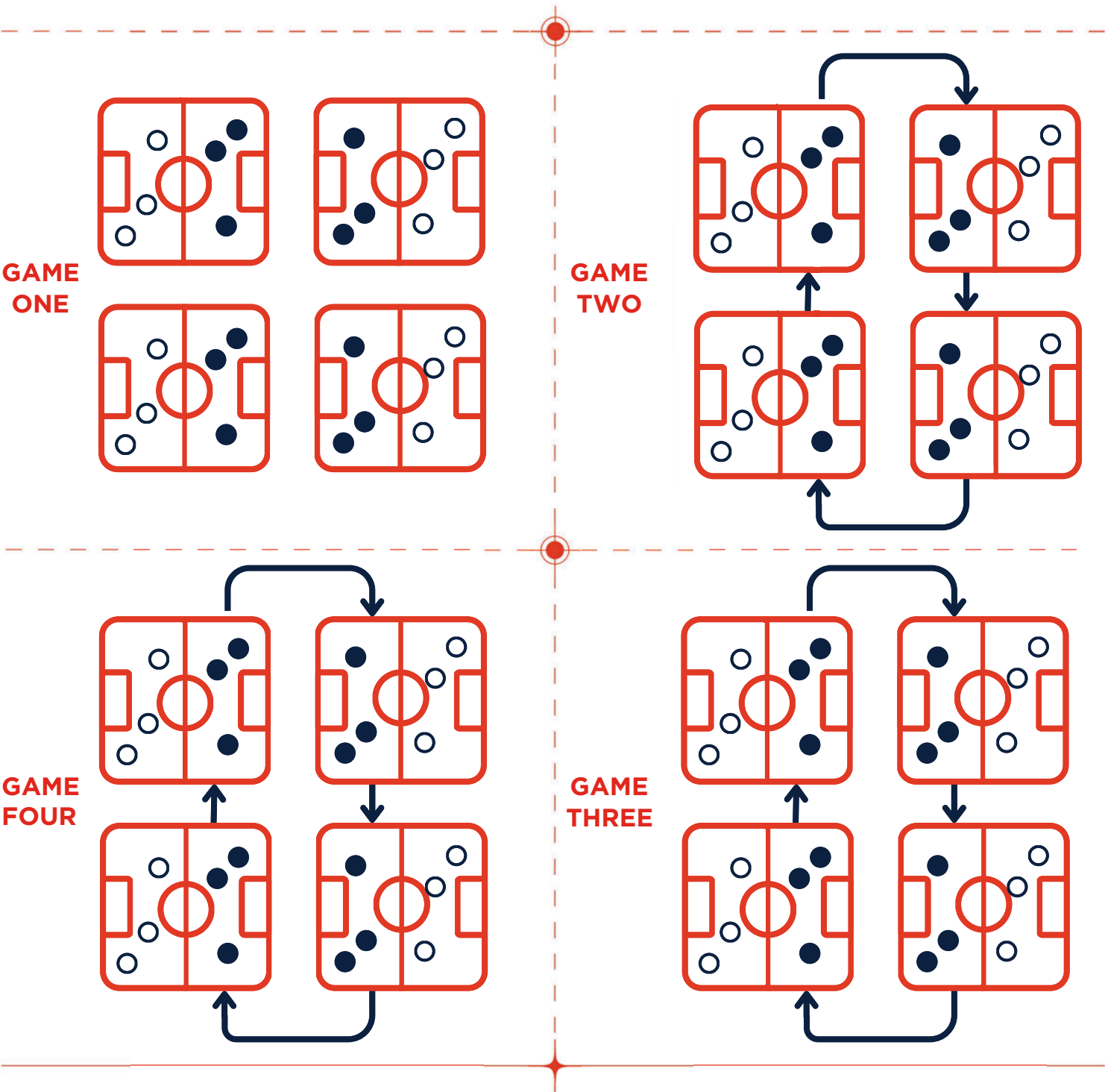
There's no need to over complicate it. Fundamentally 3v3 is still team A v team B.



Matchday Set-Up - the carousel approach



At the end of each game the white teams stay on the same pitch and the blue teams move around the pitches.

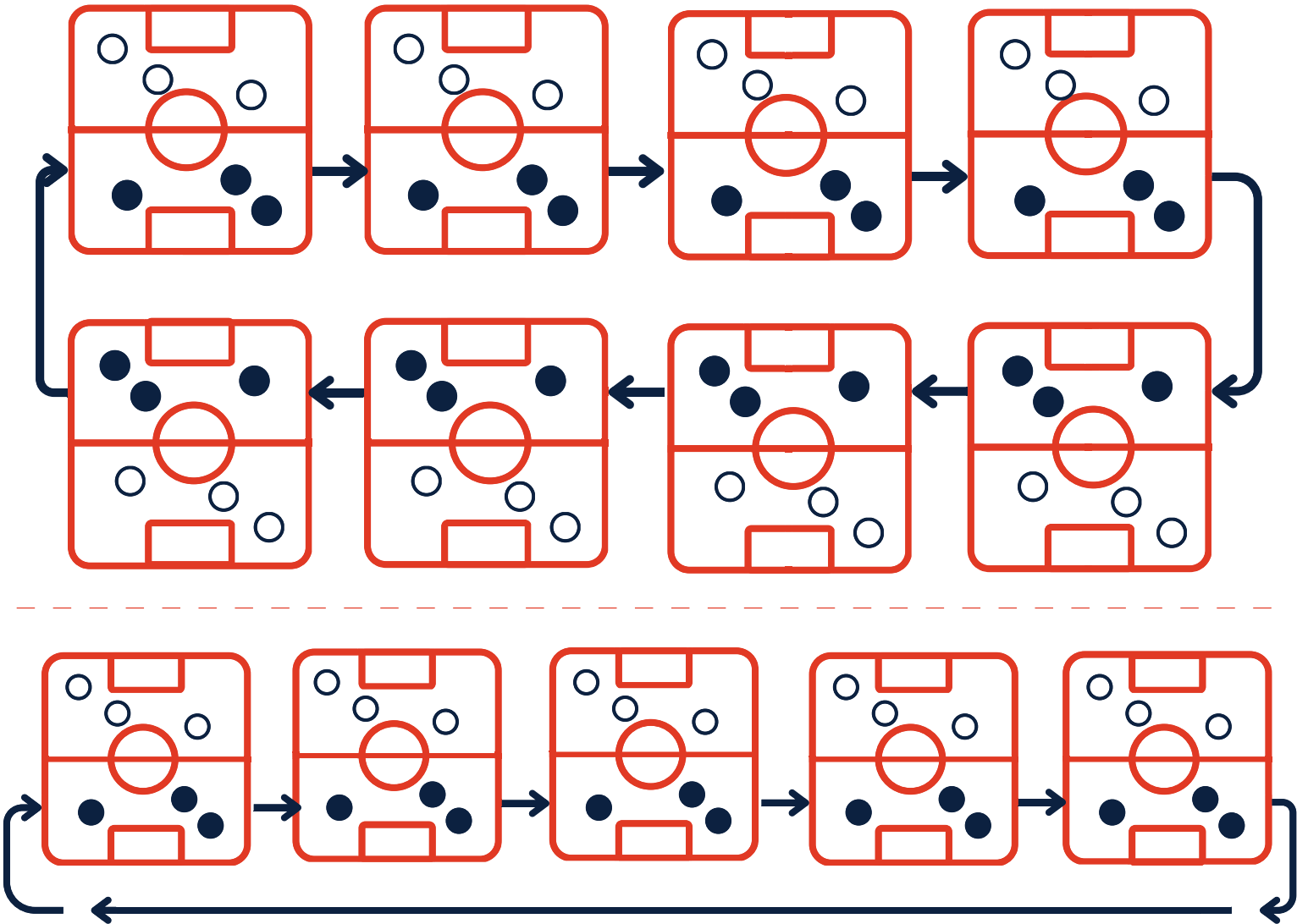




Matchday Set-Up – the carousel approach



Here's how you can use the carousel approach on different pitch configurations, scan the QR code to take a look at how a 3v3 match day is set-up:



Playing rules for 3v3

To start, players will need more adult support. Over time this will diminish. The role of Pitch Facilitators is not to act as a match official but to support players in managing their own game. This may be by asking questions to ensure players are following the rules and playing fairly.



1. Rock, paper, scissors are used to decide who starts the game.



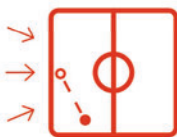
2. The game will start and end with a high five.



3. Players have the option to either dribble or pass in at all restarts (goal line, corners, sidelines and free kicks). Opposition players should be a minimum of 3m away.



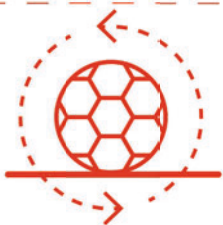
4. For goal line restarts, opposition players retreat to their own half of the pitch.



5. A player must be in their opponent's half for a goal to count when shooting.



6. After a goal is scored, all players (from the team that scored) return to their goal line.



7. After a goal, the game restarts with a goal line restart for the team that has just conceded.



8. There are no goalkeepers and no penalty areas. Any free kick must be at least 3m from the goal.



9. There are no match officials. Games are supported by Pitch Facilitators with players empowered to self-officiate.



10. There are no substitutes. Every child plays the whole game.

TOP TIP FOR CLUBS

The first few weeks might look a bit messy until people start to get used to the new format.

Scan here to watch the 3v3 rules in action





Creating a great matchday experience

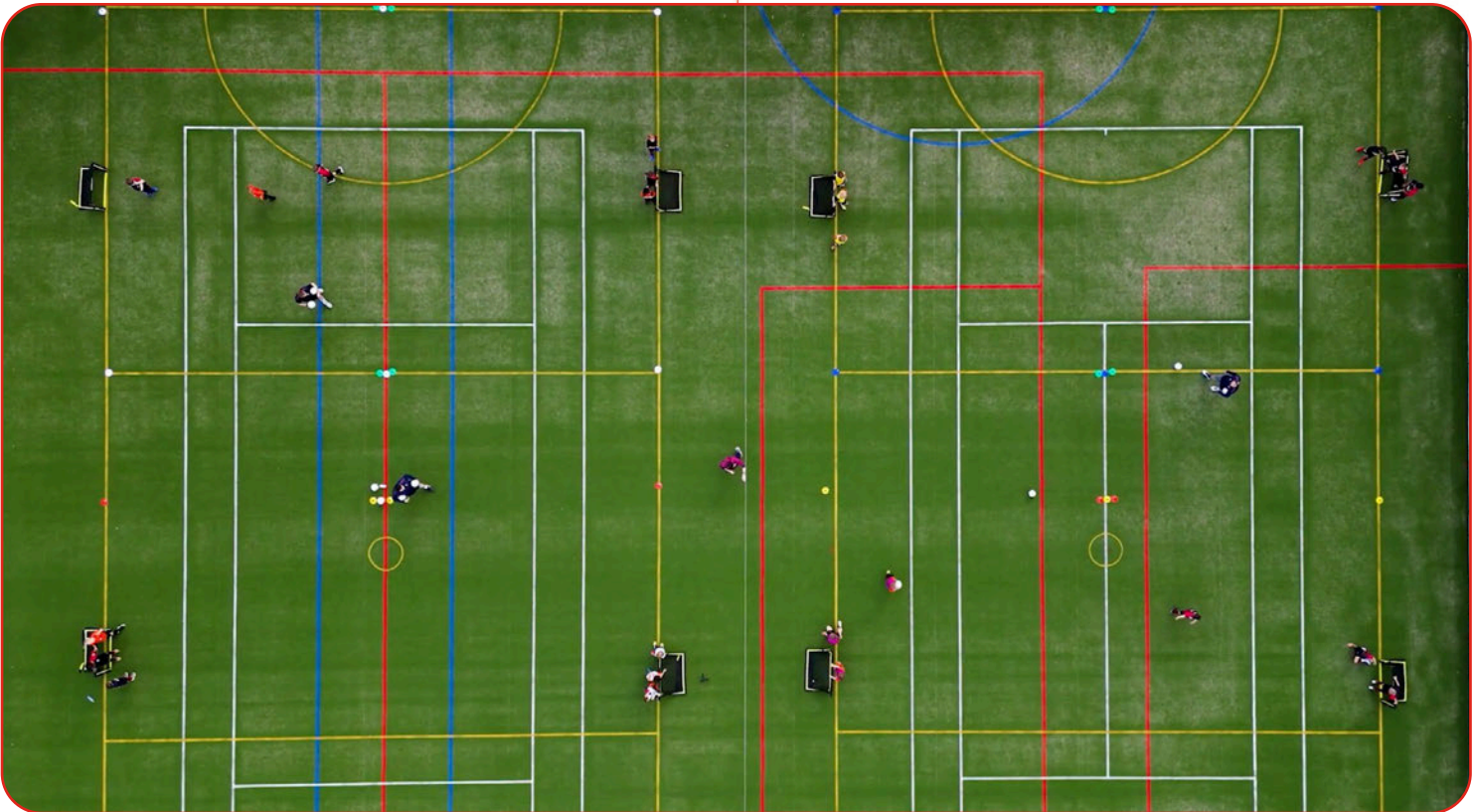


As adults, it is our responsibility to make sure every child's matchday experience is one they'll enjoy.

Managing Player Difference

While 3v3 games are much shorter, between 6 and 10 mins, there is still potential for games to be lopsided. With no ability to enact a PowerPlay rule as there are no substitutes, Pitch Facilitators can suggest player swaps between teams to create better competitive balance. This is where having a bibbed team and a non-bibbed team can be particularly helpful.

At the end of the game, players can be switched back or stay in their new teams. This provides them with opportunities to develop socially, compete in more balanced games and enjoy a better experience.





Creating a great matchday experience



As adults, it is our responsibility to make sure every child's matchday experience is one they'll enjoy.

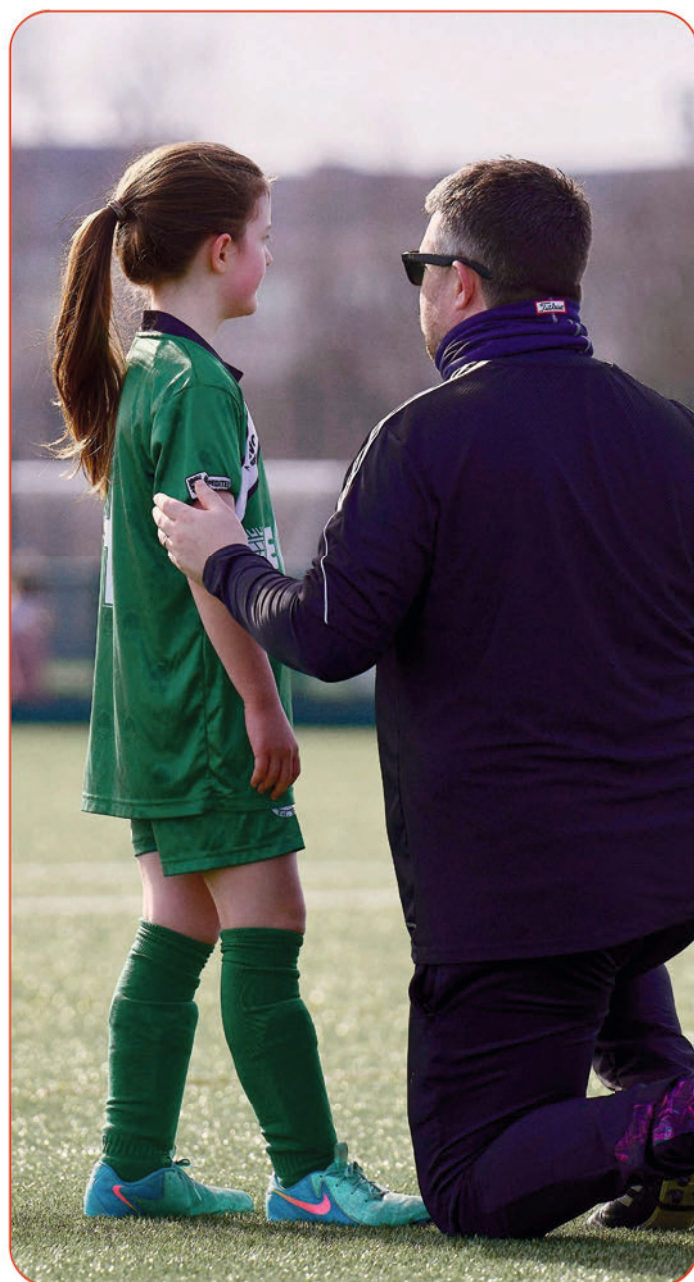
Managing Additional Player Needs

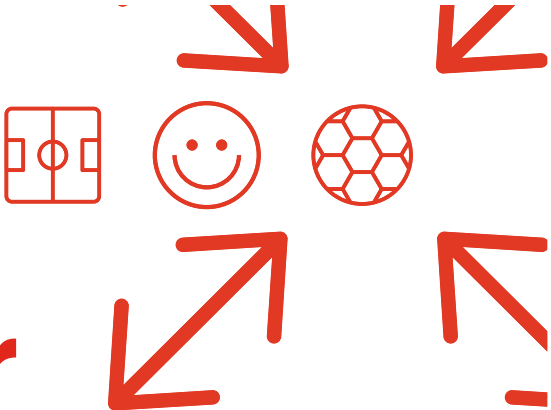
Every child is different, and their needs vary. Some players have additional or complex needs and they should be considered for 3v3:

- A consistent environment can help in these cases. Consider keeping a player on the same pitch throughout the matchday session to avoid constant moving around.
- Be aware that players may feel less comfortable switching teams. Aim to place them in teams alongside teammates who are familiar to them.
- Similarly, if they are situated on a single pitch throughout, ensure the Pitch Facilitator is someone familiar to them.

Player Support

Across a matchday there may be times when players need additional support. In the first instance the Pitch Facilitator is on hand to deal with any challenges. However, they may not always be familiar to the player. Where a familiar face is required, Pitch Facilitators can simply switch pitches to ensure that the player is supported by an adult familiar to them in that moment.



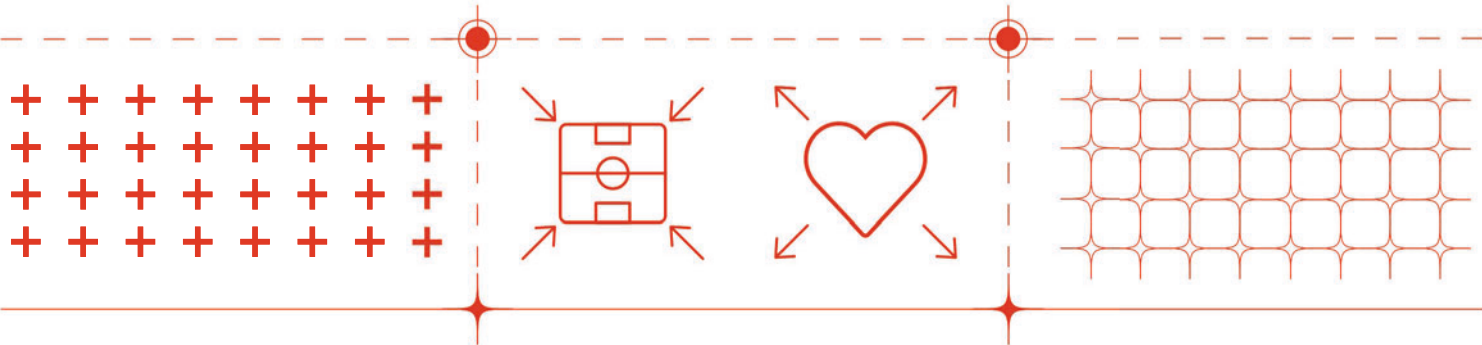


Managing player numbers

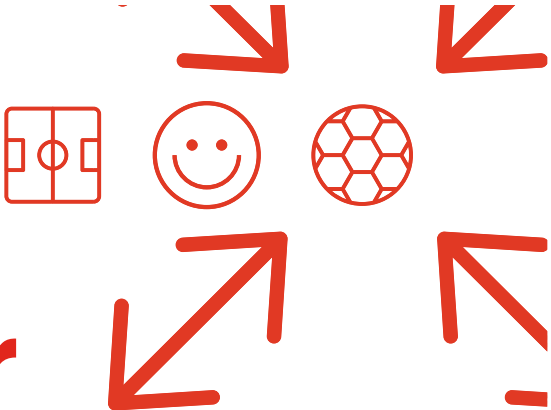


Here's how you can organise matchday session across multiple pitches to accommodate different total player numbers.

Total Players	Pitch 1	Pitch 2	Pitch 3	Pitch 4
9	3v2	2v2		
10	3v3	2v2		
11	3v3	3v2		
12	3v3	3v3		
13	3v2	2v2	2v2	
14	3v3	2v2	2v2	
15	3v3	3v2	2v2	
16	3v3	3v3	2v2	
17	3v3	3v3	3v2	
18	3v3	3v3	3v3	
19	3v3	3v2	2v2	2v2
20	3v3	3v3	2v2	2v2



TOP TIP FOR LEAGUES
Review any local/domestic rules you have around squad size limits etc.

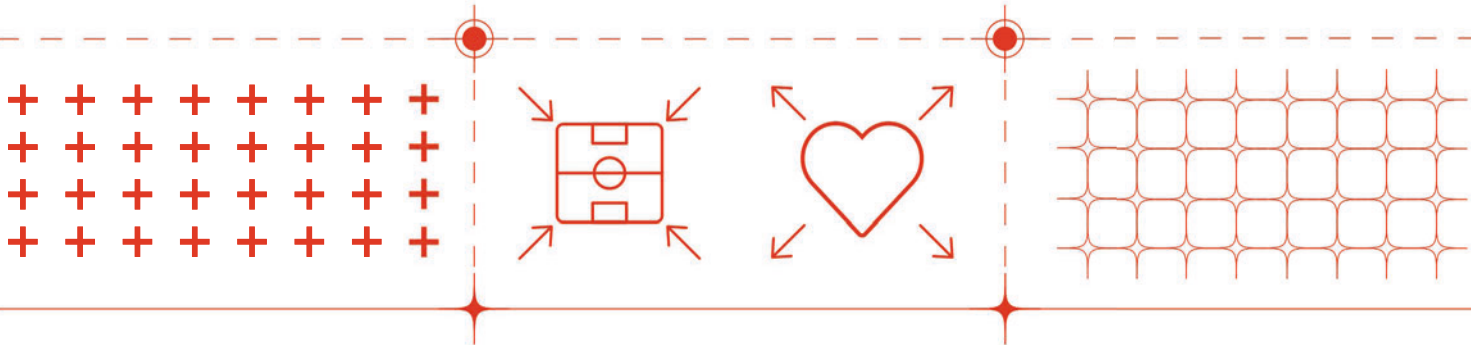


Managing player numbers



Here's how you can organise matchday session across multiple pitches to accommodate different total player numbers.

Total Players	Pitch 1	Pitch 2	Pitch 3	Pitch 4	Pitch 5	Pitch 6	Pitch 7	Pitch 8
33	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2	2v2		
34	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	2v2		
35	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2		
36	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3		
37	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2	2v2	2v2	
38	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	2v2	2v2	
39	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2	2v2	
40	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	2v2	
41	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2	
42	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	
43	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v2	2v2	2v2
44	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	3v3	2v2	2v2



FutureFit