



Best Practices to Avoid Lopsided Games

Recreational soccer is designed to follow the “Pleasure and Participation Model” of Youth Sports.

- Access for all who desire to participate.
- Emphasis on active participation – equal playing time.
- Success is developing each player to their potential.
- Objective is for players to enjoy the experience.
- Players learn the game thru learning to make decisions (The Game Within Each Child).
- Focus is on the player, the team is de-emphasized with frequent shuffling/redraws.

To that effect, our goal is to provide an enjoyable experience for all soccer players involved. Below is a list of best practices to avoid lopsided games. If you see that your team is more dominant on the fields or disproportionate in the number of goals being scored, coaches are advised to employ the following practices, which will in turn challenge your players and allow the players on the opposing team to continue to be involved in the game. No one benefits when the ending score is a blow-out.

- Cannot bring the ball across midfield until x number of passes are completed on your side, including a back pass to the keeper. Once you bring the ball across, if you lose possession and then regain it, start again.
- Requisite number of passes once the ball comes across midfield.
- Short passes. No long balls.
- Limit the number of attacking players.
- No shots from inside the box.
- Require some sort of move before shooting - Cruyff, Rivelino, scissors, etc.
- No shots unless the ball is crossed in.
- Switch lines. Play the defense up and the strikers back.
- Defend deep. This is a good one as it leaves space in the middle 3rd during the transition, giving weaker opponents the opportunity to move the ball in with little/no pressure.
- For the younger kids, step defenders back to the top of the arch or farther on goal kicks, giving the team space to put the ball into play.
- Change strategy from scoring to defending. Focus on maintaining possession of the ball. This practice will help all players develop their skills with the ball at their feet.
- For older players, score on head balls only.
- Goals can only be scored with the opposite foot.
- Avoid “set pieces” for free & corner kicks.
- Have those less skilled taking free & corner kicks.
- Shooting/free & corner kicks with the weak foot only.

Some coaches will take a sound thrashing and turn it into a coaching/motivation tool for use with their players. Disappointment is a fact of life, and an athletic field is as good a place as any to learn how to deal with it. Most players will have forgotten about the score by the time they get to the parking lot, and it's the parents who tend to make an issue of it rather than just letting it go and supporting the lesson learned. At League level, our opinion is that if coaches can task their players with strategies that will challenge them in developing their skills, while keeping the lesser opponent in the game at the same time, it minimizes said disappointment, which is a win/win situation for all.

With all this in mind, if you know that your team is not as strong as you'd like it to be, and you'd like to avoid getting whomped, you can always have a conversation with opposing coaches prior to the start of a game and address your concerns, so if/when a game tips one way or the other, everyone is on the same page.