



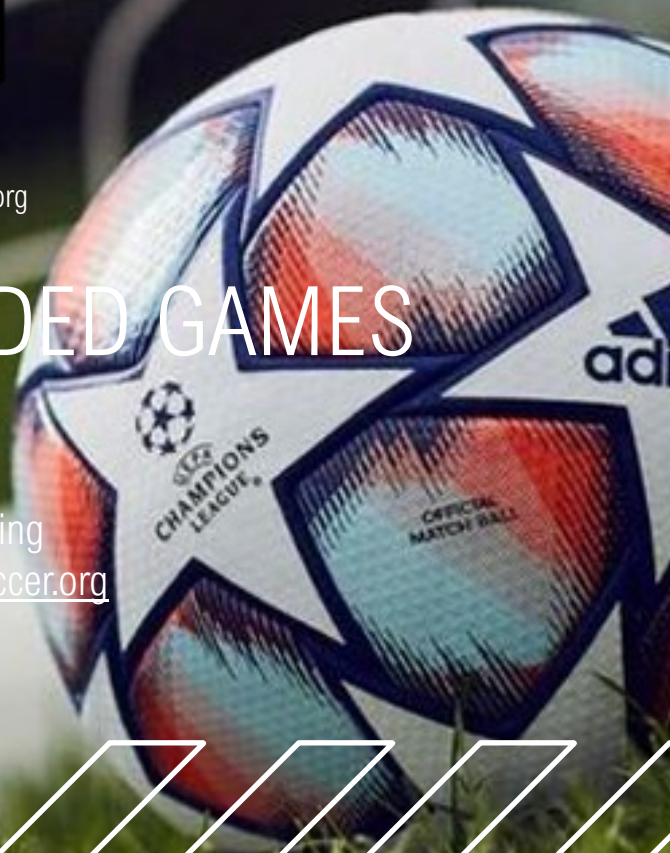
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# MANAGING LOPSIDED GAMES

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# Holden Youth Soccer – Managing Lop Sided Games

It's not uncommon for some games during a season to be lopsided, with one team significantly outmatching the other. Despite our best efforts and those of the league to create balanced teams, these situations can still arise. This document aims to provide our coaches with tips and resources for managing such games.

Our primary goal is to ensure a challenging and developmentally appropriate level of competition for all players. Excessive scoring doesn't reflect this development.



Additionally, teams facing heavy defeats may feel deflated or embarrassed, which can hinder their motivation to improve. Below are some strategies for addressing both sides of this issue.

## #1 – Shore Up Your Defense

These strategies aim to minimize the number of goals conceded, which may come at the expense of your team's scoring chances and the likelihood of a positive result. However, they will help make the game more competitive overall

- **Adopt a more defensive system of play:** For U8, use a 2-1-1 formation instead of a 1-2-1. For U10, consider a 3-2-1; for U12, a 4-3-1; and for U14 and above, a 5-3-2. This approach will help manage the number of goals conceded. For more information on formations.



- **Position stronger players strategically:** Place some of your stronger players in central positions (center midfield and center defense) where the greatest threats are likely to come from.
- **Force opponent attacks to the outside:** Aim to direct your opponents' attacks toward the wings. While this may lead to more crosses and wing plays, it can help eliminate easy scoring opportunities through the middle.

Ultimately, the opportunities to manage a game where you're conceding a lot of goals are limited. Playing your strongest players for extended minutes at the expense of weaker ones isn't fair. The best chance to make the game competitive often relies on cooperation from the opposing coach.

## #2 – Make Scoring Harder

When the score starts to escalate, especially early in the game, it's important to implement conditions right away to prevent a large goal deficit. Here are some strategies that not only make scoring more challenging but also enhance player development and increase the level of competition.

- **Limit scoring to the non-dominant foot:** Players can only score using their non-dominant foot.
- **Apply shooting restrictions:** Players must shoot from outside the 18-yard box or can only shoot from inside the 6-yard box.
- **Set specific scoring conditions:** Goals can only be scored through specific actions, such as heading (if allowed), volleys, or directly from a pass.
- **Reduce the number of players allowed to score:** Ensure that every new scorer is a different player and that no player scores twice.
- **Use alternative targets:** If necessary, designate different targets besides the goal, such as a sign behind the goal, the coach's bag, or the side netting, these can all help practice shooting without actually scoring.

Making scoring more difficult is the easiest way to prevent a runaway score. However, if the opposing team is significantly weaker, this approach alone may not be sufficient to avoid a lopsided game.

## #3 – Apply New Development Goals

It's equally important to have strategies beyond just making scoring more difficult. In many cases, these



additional approaches can be more effective and beneficial from a development standpoint. Here are some holistic strategies to consider.

- **Change your system of play or formation:** Use this opportunity to experiment with a new system that emphasizes possession and balance over attacking and scoring.
- **Switch player roles:** Play your most defensive players in offensive positions and vice versa. This allows players to learn new roles while helping manage the competitiveness of the game.
- **Reduce the number of players:** Consider removing players and playing down. While this is a more extreme strategy and can disrupt your system and development goals, it can effectively balance the game. You can always add players back in (with the referee's permission) if needed.
- **Implement a passing requirement:** Introduce a rule where the team must make a certain number of passes before they can shoot. Start with three passes, then increase to five, or require that the whole team must touch the ball before attempting a shot.
- **Adopt a two-touch rule:** Allow each player only two touches of the ball. After their second touch, they must wait for an opponent or teammate to touch the ball before they can play it again.
- **Reset with the goalkeeper:** Require the team to play the ball back to the goalkeeper before each attack. If the attack breaks down, they must reset with the goalie.

These strategies can be very effective in managing lopsided games, challenging the team in new ways while limiting scoring. However, they can be complex to implement on the fly, so it's crucial to have a plan in place before the score escalates—see #4.

## #4 – Don't Embarrass the Losing Team

All of the strategies mentioned above should be introduced subtly. Simply shouting “stop scoring” or “play keep away” can be humiliating for the opposing team. It's important to communicate these instructions quietly, perhaps using substitutions or a trigger word. Here are some additional important considerations.

- **Implement strategies early:** Don't wait until the score reaches 7-0 to start applying these strategies. Doing so eliminates all the “Making Scoring Harder” options. Begin implementing them at 3-0 or 4-0, or even earlier if you notice an uneven matchup.
- **Have a plan in place:** With many ideas outlined in this document, it's crucial to have a proactive plan. Discuss strategies with your team at the beginning of the season or game to ensure



everyone knows what to expect if adjustments are needed.

- **Communicate your plan clearly:** Make sure the team understands how you will communicate the implementation of these strategies—whether it's at a specific goal differential, using a key word, or through messages during substitutions. Avoid any yelling or shouting methods to maintain a positive atmosphere.

Winning or losing by a significant margin is neither enjoyable nor developmentally beneficial, and it reflects poorly on sportsmanship. Having a plan in place ahead of time is essential for ensuring a positive experience for everyone involved.

## Final Thoughts

All the suggestions in this document aim to enhance player development while fostering a positive sportsmanship environment for everyone on the field.

We recognize that there are many strategies here, but it can be challenging to limit scoring when there's a significant skill imbalance, particularly for younger players who may not fully grasp the implications. We also want to emphasize that scoring isn't inherently bad. Do your best to create a plan, implement it thoughtfully, and approach the situation with humility.

Lastly, remember the bigger picture. Youth soccer coaches, referees, and parents all share the responsibility of creating a positive experience for every player. When situations become challenging, collaborating with the opposing coach can help prevent misunderstandings and resolve issues. At the youth level, it's not just about winning or losing; it's about how the game is played that truly matters.



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