

SMALL-SIDED & JUNIOR FOOTBALL REGULATION CHANGES 2025-26 SEASON

SSF or Junior Football	Regulation	Regulation
Both – Competition football from U12-U17	SSF – 16.18.1 JF – 9	MANAGING UNBALANCED MATCHES IN JUNIOR COMPETITION FOOTBALL Matches that finish 18-0, 15-1 or even 35-0 are demoralising for the losing team and do nothing for the development of the players on the winning team. In addition, such scorelines can have a major impact on player enjoyment, well being and participation in the sport. In an attempt to prevent such high scorelines being recorded where matches are clearly unbalanced, the FAW have introduced the following mandatory rules for Junior competition football (Under 12 to Under 17): Introduction of the ‘Mercy’ rule. When one team is ahead by eight (8) goals, the match is declared over, the score is recorded on Comet and any remaining game time is to be played out as a friendly. For example, a scoreline may finish 8-0, 9-1, 10-2. When a goal difference of eight (8) has been reached, the Comet platform will automatically prevent further match goal events being added, meaning no additional workload for grassroots volunteers. Coaches are encouraged to use interventions to challenge players appropriately during unbalanced fixtures to aid player development. Guidance and resources on how to manage unbalanced matches will be made available. In addition, any disciplinary action in the subsequent part of the game must be recorded in the usual way.
Both – Competition football from U12-U17	SSF – 16.18.2 JF - 9.2	Goal Difference The recording of goal difference is not permitted to be used by junior leagues as a determining factor for league standings.
SSF (U12 & U13 9v9 format)	SSF – 16.4.2	GOAL FRAME – 9V9 In order to comply with the IFAB Laws of the Game (International Football Association Board) football clubs participating in 9v9 competition football will be required to ensure that the goal frames being used meet the requirements of the ‘FIFA Quality Programme for Football Goals’. ‘A rope or any flexible or dangerous material may not replace the crossbar’ as this reduces the stability of a goal frame.
Junior Regulations (U14-U17)	JF - 1.2	Two Year Age Band Leagues Removal of this regulation given that all players are now able to play up one year regardless of the playing format.
Both – Competition football from U12-U17	SSF – 16.20 JF – 5.3	Team Rosters in competition football (U12-U17 formats) • All teams (U12 to U17), competing in grassroots competitions provided by Area Associations, must complete a team roster on Comet, for each competition they have entered, which includes cup competitions. • Team rosters will be locked at the beginning of a league season, on a set date determined by the relevant Junior League.



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		- The maximum number of players that can appear on a team roster is set out within each Area Association rule book. Clubs will need to request permission to add/remove players from a team roster to the relevant Junior League. - If a club has more than one team in a Junior League or cup competition at U12-U17, a player can only be assigned to one of those teams and appear on that team roster only. Failure to do so may result in Disciplinary Action being taken by the relevant League or Area Association. - Each Area Association is empowered to set internal transfer limits on team rosters for clubs wishing to move players. This is to maintain competition integrity. - A junior player can only be registered to one team roster at any given time. For example, where an U14 junior player is playing up a year at U15, the player can only represent the U15 team unless an internal transfer is made. This is to support the maintaining of competition integrity. Club wishing to make internal transfers should refer to their Area Association rules.
SSF & Junior Football (Competitive age groups)	SSF – 2.5.1 JF – 2.1.6	Junior Leagues – Age parameter settings on Comet (U12 & Above only) Where a Junior League operates single age bands, i.e. U12, U13, U14, U15 U16 & U17, the age parameters on Comet must reflect the single age groups being delivered and not be set at 2 year age band. Players wishing to play up or down a year can do so in accordance with Small-Sided Regulations 2.4, 2.5 & 2.6 and Junior Football Regulations 2.1.
SSF & Junior Football	SSF – 2.5.2 JF - 2.1.7	Players to be rostered to one team only A junior player can only be registered to one team roster at any given time. For example, where an U14 junior player is playing up a year at U15, the player can only represent the U15 team unless an internal transfer is made. This is to support the maintaining of competition integrity. Club wishing to make internal transfers should refer to their Area Association rules.
Junior Football (U14-U17)	JF - 5.2	Match Day squad Limits At the 11v11 junior football format, teams will be able to select a maximum of 18 players in the match day squad.
SSF (U12)	SSF – 3.7.1 (Organisation of Small-Sided Football section)	Under 12 – Competition Weeks to be extended from 20 to 24 weeks For the Under 12 format (9v9) Junior Leagues are now permitted to deliver a maximum of 24 weeks of competition football. This has been increased from 20 weeks. Junior Leagues are still required to ensure a non-competitive block of fixtures are delivered at the start of the season to ascertain team ability prior to structing teams into divisions. This will help to support the creation of ability banding leagues and an provide an appropriate playing offer.
Both – Competition football (U12-U17)	SSF – 16.19 JF - 10	Fixture flexibility In the spirit of promoting participation and enjoyment in competition junior football (U12 and above), teams are permitted to bring a scheduled fixture forward, provided the following conditions are met: Mutual Agreement: Both teams must agree to the new date and time. This agreement must be confirmed in writing by email, by both club secretaries or their nominated deputy.



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		- League Notification: The league secretary must be notified of the rescheduled fixture at least 72 hours in advance, with confirmation from both teams' club secretaries or their nominated deputy. - Referee Availability: It is the responsibility of the teams to ensure a qualified referee is available for the new date in accordance with League rules. The league will assist where possible but cannot guarantee referee availability. - Fairness and Integrity: No fixture may be moved to give an unfair advantage or to avoid playing with a weakened team
SSF (U6-U11)	SSF - 15	Power-Play Regulation Development football is designed to create the best learning and fun experiences for young players. To ensure an imbalance in ability does not affect the overall playing experience, the FAW has approved the 'optional use' for coaches to use the 'Power-Play' regulation for Small-Sided Football age groups (Under 6 – Under 11). How the Power-Play rule works: - If a team is losing by a four-goal margin, the coach has the option to implement the Power-Play by adding an additional player, for example a 5v5 becomes a 5v6. - If the score reduces the less than four goals, the team with an extra player is required to remove one player and return to equal numbers. <i>This does not have to be the same player!</i> - If the goal difference reaches six, the losing team may field another additional player (taking the total up to two additional players). When the goal difference reduces to five, one of the additional players is removed. The main objective of the 'Power-Play' rule is to: - Ensure that all players are being appropriately challenged. - Improve the overall playing experience through reducing high scorelines. - To be available through all Small-Sided Football festival age groups (U6-U11)
Both SSF & Competition football	SSF – 2.5.3 JF 2.1.8	Prohibit participation across multiple teams on same day A player may only participate in one team per match day. For example, a player representing an U11 team within a club cannot also play for the U12's on the same day. This is to protect player welfare by not overloading the participant and ensuring players do not exceed the maximum game duration in a 24 hour period.
Both SSF & Competition football	SSF – 16.20.7 JF - 5.3.7	Registered players participating that are not on a team roster Any registered player that participates in a match and does not appear on a team roster would be deemed as ineligible.

