

Article by Rob Baan, FFA Technical Director:

SSG and Goalkeepers

Goalkeepers are not required in the initial stages of Small Sided Games football.

This is an issue of contention for some parents and clubs who are being exposed to the future of grassroots football for the first time. Some believe that if there is no goalkeeper, it is not really football. This is not true as pointed out by Football Federation Australia's National Technical Director, Rob Baan.

“There are always some exceptions with physically stronger children, but at that age (U6s – U/7s) children are just dribbling the ball and do not have the ability to “shoot” on goal. Because of that there is not much for a goalkeeper to do and the occasions where she/he would be required to make a “save” are minimal, therefore not much of a learning factor. Also – children at this age like to be involved in the game and only when they are tired want to be acting as a “goalkeeper”.”

This theme is carried through when the children also moved to 7 v 7 football when they are 9 and 10 years old. Baan explains that even as the children progress, the need for a specialist goalkeeper is not there.

Baan says “Even at the older age group, most of the time we support the idea of rotating the goalkeepers and/or using them more as a “sweeper” than as a real goalkeeper who stays on his line to wait for a ball to come in their direction. The majority of the time it is the parent or coach who makes the choice and tells a child “you have to be our goalkeeper!!! If you look at professional players now, the best ‘keepers in the world started out as field players and later found they preferred to play in goals.”

“More importantly, the role of a goalkeeper in modern football has changed completely and the judgment of present goalkeepers is very much depending on the fact if they are capable to act in the game as "sweeper" who can kick a ball, control a ball and build up the game without using their hands.”