

Germany Decides to Put the Fun(ino) Back into Youth Soccer

By [Ian Plenderleith](#) [@PlenderleithIan](#), March 14, 2022



The German soccer federation (DFB) finally cleared out its old and very possibly corrupt leadership at the end of last week. It elected a new President, **Bernd Neuendorf**, who is promising cooperation instead of conflict with the Bundesliga. There are now five women representatives on its 15-member board, one of whom — former player **Celia Sasic** — will be responsible for diversity and equality.

Just as important for the future were the confirmed reforms to the playing structures of youth soccer.

Up until now, German amateur clubs have stuck to the form of 6- and 7-a-side games from age groups U-7 through to U-11. Although games at the U-9 and U-7 levels officially have "no results," the unofficial emphasis is still far too high on which side has scored how many against which rival club. Some coaches keep their own league standings in a spreadsheet. The pumped-up theater on Saturday morning is all too depressing and familiar — scenes I also saw played out for several years while coaching in the USA. Two goals with goalkeepers, four or so dancing, gesticulating coaches, and several dozen ululating parents way too invested in the sporting performances of their offspring. Fun and freedom for the young players trying to enjoy their hobby? Not so much.

Across Germany over the past few years, though, several regions have been trialing **FUNino**. You may have heard of its hardly revolutionary idea to give kids equal playing time, with the emphasis on enjoyment, plentiful ball contact for all players, and so many

goals that not even the most ambitious Dad will bother counting how many times his putative Messi has stuck the ball between the posts. **Games at U-7 and U-9 level will be two- or three-a-side, with four goals and no goalkeepers. At U-11, teams will be up to 5-a-side, transitioning to more organized 9-a-side play at U-13 level. All players will be guaranteed equal playing time. No one will be keeping score.**



The plan is to lose fewer young players because they are either excluded from the team roster on game day, or because they are marginalized during training and on game days by more combative and precocious teammates. The stress is on enjoying soccer, rather than being so discouraged that you give it up by the time you've reached your 8th birthday. Because of too much pressure caused by too many parents and coaches yelling instructions, when the only they words you should be hearing are, "Get out there and enjoy yourself!"

At the age of 10, I'd yet to play a proper organized game, and had never been the beneficiary of a coach's doubtless valuable guidance. Certainly, I became a better all-around player once I'd received tuition on soccer's basics and tactics during my formative years. But I'd learned to make my own decisions, and my own mistakes, long before that. Most important of all, I was besotted with soccer in a way that a few insane adults on the touchline were never going to spoil. In later years, while playing on my U-15 club team, we'd mimic the louder, more unhinged parents behind their backs and wonder what on earth was missing from their lives that they felt compelled to make such a spectacle of themselves every weekend.



It now only remains for a date to be set for the final implementation of FUNino across Germany. Some dissenters are darkly forecasting that coaches will set up unofficial leagues to counter the initiative. I wish them luck with that. In fact, it would be fascinating to see which setup ends up producing the better players and more developed young men and women in the long run. As I was forced to bellow — and not for the first time — at a clutch of disruptive parents at a U-13 game I was reffing last weekend: "This game's for the boys, not for you." Please just let them run and have fun, and keep your useless noise to yourself.

SMALL FIELD GAMES BRING ALL CHILDREN INTO ACTION!

Street football - without concrete and asphalt! Surely everyone still has in mind how we met back in the afternoon to kick. Cross-age: Small with big, young with old, good with bad - no matter, everyone played! FUNino is supposed to bring street football into the club. Ball contacts for everyone - that's the motto. But what is this FUNino actually?

FUNino is small field football in 3 against 3, which is played in a certain organizational form on 4 mini goals. Even the bare numbers speak clearly for the game format. A high dynamic in 3 against 3, every player is constantly involved in the game, and all are equally challenged on both the offensive and on the defensive.

FUNino teaches everything you need later in the football of the big ones in a playful way: ball and space feeling, technique, coordination, tactical understanding. In addition, there is exercise, fun and feelings of success. All this is actually self-evident that this type of small field football is regularly integrated into the training and game of the youngest footballers.

16 new mini goals for the FUNino tournament

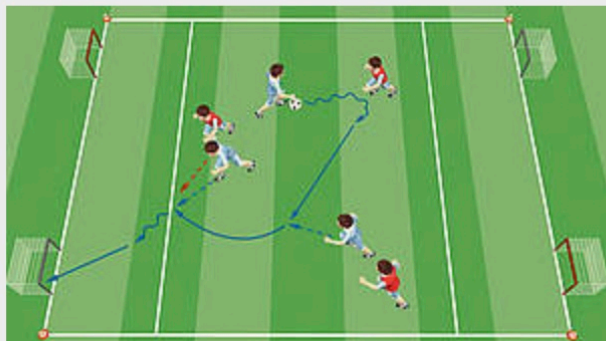
Among other things, the project of Borussia Münster can be cited here as an example: Since March 2017, the teams from U7 to U13 have always played an internal FUNino tournament on the last Wednesday of the month in their years. For this purpose, the club has purchased 16 mini goals, so that you can play on four seats at the same time.

Since the junior teams consist of about 20 to 25 players per year, those responsible have developed a tournament schedule for five teams: the game is played in the 'everyone against everyone' mode. Unique in the project are the team names with street footballer names such as 'Rabauken', 'Rowdys', 'Lausbuben', 'Rebels' or 'Snot Spoon'. The club has even purchased its own jerseys with these designations for its FUNino tournaments!

Of course, these are not a must - even without your own jerseys, small football can be organized profitably. It should also be an integral part of training. FUNino can also be varied excellently, be it on diagonal

Goals, on indented goals on the zone line or different varieties in outnumber and outnumbered. However, all formats pursue one goal: The children should constantly actively participate in the game, not hide, but try out, improve through feelings of success and above all one thing: have fun!

Below we present two possible variations of the classic **FUNino** game:

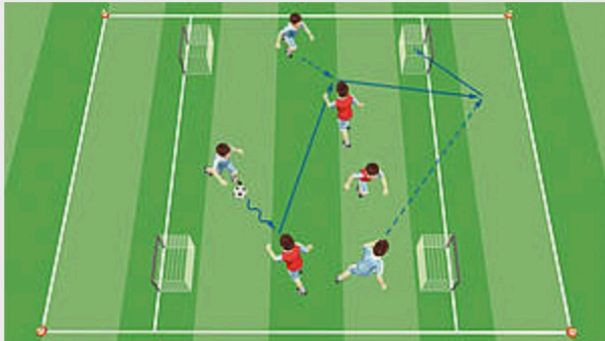


Organization

- Mark a 28 x 22 meter playing field with 4 mini goals and 6 meter deep goal shooting zones.
- Divide 2 teams of three.

Procedure

- The teams attack 2 diagonally spaced mini gates and defend the other two (mark mini gates with camisoles).
- If the players master the rules, the coach can constantly change the camisoles at the goals during the current game.



Organization

- Mark a 28 x 22 meter playing field with 4 mini goals and 6 meter deep goal shooting zones.
- Place the mini gates on the front lines of the goal shooting zones and build them with the backs to each other.
- Divide 2 teams of three.

Procedure

- The teams each attack 2 opposite mini gates.
- To do this, they must first play their way into the opponent's goal-shooting zone in order to turn back to the other side and score a goal.
- This game variant promotes, among other things, freewheeling behavior in depth.

In addition to the FUNino variations, of course, all other small field variants are also available in small teams to give the children numerous ball contacts during training. Under 'Topic related links' we have put together some suitable training sessions from the archive of DFB-Training online for you.