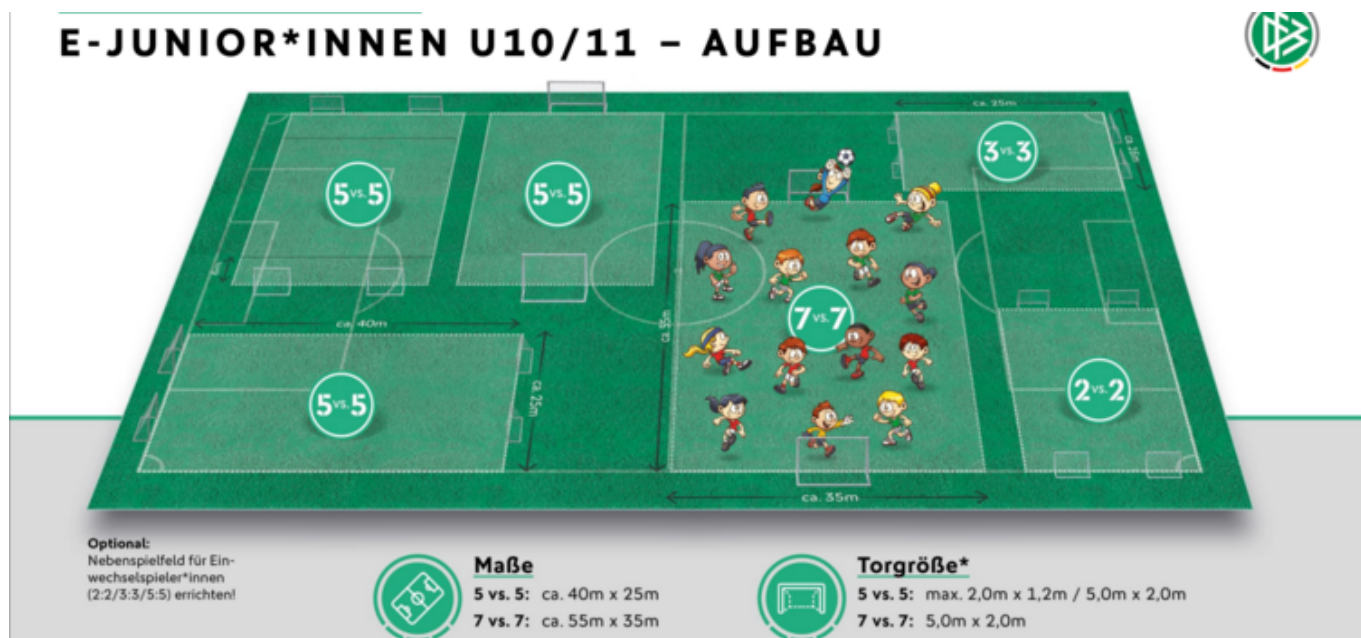


Germany Revolutionises Foundation Age Formats with Emphasis on Fun

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The new regulations are mandatory from the start of 2024/25

WRITTEN BY SIMON AUSTIN — MARCH 20, 2022

GERMANY has launched new regulations that will transform the way football is played by Under-11s in the country.

The emphasis will be on fun and a player-centred approach, with Ronny Zimmermann, DFB Vice President responsible for children's and youth football, saying: "We need to think like children, not like adults. Only children who develop fun and joy in the game will stay in football."

This is an antidote to the formats we can sometimes see, including in this country, where children are playing big-sided games at young ages, where the less physically or technically developed youngsters can have limited time on the ball and where adults (parents, coaches and referees) are driving the sessions, sometimes to the detriment of the players.

The key principles of the DFB's new regulations are:

- **small-sided games.**
- **short playing times.**
- **players regularly rotated, with everyone involved.**
- **NO referees**
- **Minimal involvement from coaches and parents.**
- 'Game afternoons' and Festivals, rather than formal matches and leagues.

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- heading practically eliminated.

The regulations have been introduced after a two-year pilot phase that involved all 21 regional associations, during which time there were "good experiences" and "very positive" feedback from children. The DFB Bundestag, the country's 'football Parliament', formally ratified the regulations on March 11th.

Districts and clubs can now implement the new formats, although they **MUST** be introduced from the start of the 2024/25 season.

"Playing with the ball and scoring goals are the main reasons why so many children and young people enjoy football," the DFB said in a statement. "The new forms of play are intended to give all children on the pitch the opportunity as often as possible to have the ball at their feet themselves, to take an active part in the game, to score goals and thus to have a personal sense of achievement."

The changes are heavily influenced by the concept of '**Funino**' (a synthesis of the words 'fun' and 'nino', which is the Spanish for child), which was developed by the late coaching guru Horst Wein.

Here is some more detail on the new formats:

G-Youth (U6 & U7):

- 2 v 2 or 3 v 3.
- Pitch size = 16m x 20m to maximum of 28m x 22m.
- Each team has a maximum of two substitutes.
- The game is played on four mini-goals, so each team defends two goals.
- **Goals can only be scored from inside the centre line for 2 v 2 and from within a six-metre 'shooting zone' for 3 v 3.**
- **NO** goalkeeper.
- After each goal, both teams automatically change one player each.
- On **game afternoons**, up to seven rounds of matches for a maximum of 10 minutes each are recommended. After each round, the winning teams advance one pitch and the losing team retreats one pitch. "This results in largely balanced games with few extreme results, resulting in a more balanced level of performance and, as a result, less frustration for the children." Teams and players will also find their level.

F-Youth (U8 & U9):

- 3 v 3 game (field size to a maximum of 28m x 22m) or 5 v 5 (maximum 40m x 25m).
- 3 v 3 is as for the G Youth.
- 5 v 5 is played either to four mini-goals (without goalkeepers) or to two small field goals (four outfield players plus goalkeeper).
- Suggested playing time per round is 12 minutes. After each round, the winning teams advance one pitch and the losing teams advance one pitch.

E-Jugend (U10 & U11):

- 5 v 5 or 7 v 7.
- 5 v 5 is as for the F Youth. Game is always restarted by shooting in or dribbling in (as for the G Youth and F Youth).
- 7 v 7 (field size 55 x 35 m) is played on two small field goals, with six outfield players and one goalkeeper per team.

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- Tournament format with four teams and playing times of 2 x 12 minutes each is recommended. Game is continued with a throw-in.

“The new design makes football more child-friendly in the relevant age groups,” the DFB explained. “The smaller the groups then the more ball contacts the individual players have.

“Especially underperforming or physically inferior children have been lost in the classic competition formats and have lost the fun of the game and the chance for further development.

“The new forms of play are intended to offer children better opportunities to play football in such a way that they are often on the ball and have fun doing it. In children's football, tactics are often emphasised too early, which affects the development of the basics of football. Many studies have shown this. The changed game forms are intended to counteract this problem.

“What is football? Game, fun, goals - that's exactly what the new system promotes. Children can score goals in many ways, even the children who are not (yet) among the best performers.

“In addition, the children dribble more often and have more ball actions, which promotes technique and improves each individual child's sport. Defending is also trained more intensively and individually through 1:1 situations.

[READ MORE: Germany lays out plan to return 'to the top of the world'](#)

“Traditional referees are not used. The trainers and supervisors act as joint game masters and only intervene when necessary. The decisions during the games should be made by the children themselves as far as possible.

“With the previous forms of play in the lower age groups (7 v 7) it is much more the case that the slower and less talented players hardly get to the ball and often play in positions that keep them away from the actual game.

“The new forms of competition ensure that headers are almost impossible, because the size of the playing field is significantly smaller, throw-in and goal-kick are replaced by dribbling in and the goalkeeper hardly ever takes a kick-off. In this way, the DFB and its state associations deal with heading at a young age in an age-appropriate manner, without having to impose bans or regulations, as some other national associations practice.”

The DFB suggested that the new regulations could impact more half a million children in 35,000 teams in more than 10,000 clubs.

As TGG has previously reported, these changes have been in the pipeline for several years.

In February 2019, Oliver Bierhoff, Director of National Teams for the DFB, [led an event](#) titled 'Zurück an die Weltspitze' ('Back to the Top of the World'), with the backdrop of Germany's humiliating exit in the first round of the 2018 World Cup and the Under-17s finishing bottom of the Torneio Internacional in Portugal.

Training Ground Guru

#3: Youth Development Conference

<https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-mhksb-b4c003>

Bierhoff said: “We need room for individualists, we need more football-pitch mentality. It needs more feeling again. Through freer training, street football should be brought into the clubs. We need to create more space for creativity and enjoyment for our players.”

Panagiotis Chatzialexiou, the Sport Director for National Teams, added: “If possible, it should go without a referee. The players should just learn to work it out. We're already letting our youngest play seven v seven in games, which is not age-appropriate because they have too little ball action and too few decisions to make.

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"There's 2 v 2 at Bambini (four to six-years-old) and 9 v 9 from D-juniors (11 to 13), but we do not train age-friendly. 7 v 7 is played in the F-Youth which is not conducive to development.

"Our little ones have too little ball action and they rarely have to make decisions. Our analysis has shown that at least a third of our talents are not optimally developed."

The Belgian FA - and particularly their Director of Coach Education, Kris Van Der Haegen - have influenced Germany's recent thinking about these younger age groups.

Van Der Haegen, who has appeared on the TGG Podcast and spoken at our 2019 Youth Development Conference, said: "One of the main principles is that the main actor is the player; not the coach, not the team. Then it's very easy to understand that in children's football we have to do what they like.

"We call it the tailor-made approach. Who is in front of me? Look at the characteristics of the player and then adapt the environment to fit them. Kids want to play football in their own way, not the way adults want to play. If you put a child on an adult's bicycle, they'll say, "are you crazy?" But this is what happens in football, we ask them to play 11 v 11 or 8 v 8 at a very young age. They are not able to do it."

Former England Rugby coach Brian Ashton has also been influential in this regards.

"I was brought up in the era of street games," he told TGG. "No adults, no coaches, no-one to interfere and no-one to inhibit what you were doing. We looked after ourselves and self-learned techniques to adapt to ever-changing situations."

In May 2020, German giants Bayern Munich announced they would not be taking youngsters until the U11s, meaning that grassroots clubs will take care of development before this.

Germany Focus on 'Fun and Joy' to Reverse Decline

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Bierhoff led a 'Back to the Top of the World' event

WRITTEN BY SIMON AUSTIN — FEBRUARY 17, 2019

GERMANY will emphasise small-sided games and the spirit of the streets as they attempt to reverse the recent decline of their national teams.

Oliver Bierhoff, the Director of National Teams and the Academy, led a two-hour DFB event titled 'Back to the Top of the World' (Zurück an die Weltspitze) last week. The backdrop was the humiliation of the senior men's team at the 2018 World Cup, which they entered as champions and exited in the first round.

However, much of the focus was on youth development. Just a few days earlier, Germany's Under-17s had finished bottom of the Torneio Internacional in Portugal, losing all their games - to Holland, Spain and Portugal.

Bierhoff accepted that Germany's youngsters were no longer the best in Europe, as evidenced by the fact that so many foreign youngsters - not least from England - have been signed by Bundesliga clubs.

"If clubs prefer to bring in young Englishmen, Frenchmen and Belgians, there is only one solution - the young Germans need to get better," Bierhoff said. "We need to get back to the full potential of our talent pool; we need to develop our junior teams in the best possible way.

"We have a lot of talent in Germany, but turning these talents into exceptional players who can be the best in the world is the big challenge."

Joti Chatzialexiou, General Manager for the national teams, added: "'Made in Germany' must once again become a seal of approval," while adding "we are talking not about revolution, but about evolution."

STREET FOOTBALL

Bierhoff said Germany was not producing enough flair players because training had become too formalised.

"We need room for individualists, we need more football pitch mentality," he said. "It needs more feeling again. Through freer training, street football should be brought into the clubs. We need to create more space for creativity and enjoyment for our players."

Chatzialexiou said this meant youngsters sometimes organising their own games and sessions.

"If possible, it should go without a referee," he said. "The players should just learn to work it out."

Maybe they had Bundesliga sensation Jadon Sancho in mind, because the Borussia Dortmund winger learnt to play on a park behind his estate in Kennington, south London, and describes himself as a street footballer.

Germany legend Michael Ballack welcomed the shift to 'freer' sessions, although he added that it represented an admission by the DFB that they had been taking the wrong path.

"It has always been the case that a certain individuality and freedom was necessary to mature into a top player," the former Chelsea and Bayern Munich midfielder said.

[READ MORE: Coaching revolution that took Belgium to the top](#)

"The players who make the difference in the end represent just that: they are enfants terribles who do not swim with the mainstream, who go their own way. Sometimes they think and act independently, sometimes they have their own mind."

The DFB said there would now be three main tenets to coaching: individuality, flexibility and digitisation.

"Our society has changed," Tobias Haupt, Head of the DFB Academy, said, "11 years ago, 2% of the world's population had a smartphone, today it's 66%."

Bierhoff added: "We must find intelligent answers to the unstoppable digitisation. Those who play FIFA usually like to play football themselves. Why shouldn't they play together at the console in the clubhouse and then train on the pitch?"

Sancho has talked about the importance of digital media in his own development. "Ronaldinho was a big influence on me, watching him on YouTube," he has said, "he used to do things that other people didn't really used to do."

SMALL-SIDED GAMES

Chatzialexiou said Germany had to "bring back more fun and joy" to youth development and that small-sided games were a key part of this.

In this regard, Germany have taken particular inspiration from near neighbours Belgium, with whom they are in regular contact. TGG carried an [in-depth interview with Belgium's Director of Coach Education Kris Van der Haegen](#) on the subject of youth development last year in which he emphasised the importance of small-sided games.

"Kids want to play football in their own way, not the way adults want to play," he said. "If you put a child on an adult's bicycle, they'll say, 'are you crazy?' But this is what happens in football, we ask them to play 11 v 11 or 8 v 8 at a very young age. They are not able to do it."

Chatzialexiou admitted: "We're already letting our youngest play seven v seven in games, which is not age-appropriate because they have too little ball action and too few decisions to make."

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"There's two v two at Bambini (ages of four to six) and nine v nine from D-juniors (11 to 13), but we do not train age-friendly. Seven v seven is played in the F-youth (seven to eight years old) which is not conducive to development.

"Our little ones have too little ball action and they rarely have to make decisions.

"Our analysis has shown that at least a third of our talents are not optimally developed."

COACHING

Haupt said he wants to significantly reduce the amount of time that coaches have to spend away from their clubs at the DFB's Hennes Weisweiler Academy in order to get their badges.

He said a mixture of on-site and virtual study had been shown to increase productivity and that coaches should be able to do more work towards their badges at their clubs. This is a feature of the Football Association's coaching courses.

Ballack, who won 98 caps for Germany, suggested the country had also moved too far towards young 'concept coaches' (widely known as 'laptop coaches') at the expense of ex pros like himself.

"I have nothing against the young concept coaches," he said, "these are super-hungry and motivated people who work from morning to night. But that's just the basis.

"In the absolute top range, when it comes to leading the players to the top level, it also requires coaches with experience that cannot be taught in the training."

Coaching Revolution that took Belgium to Top of World

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WRITTEN BY SIMON AUSTIN — MARCH 14, 2018

At Euro 2000, Belgium suffered the ignominy of crashing out in the first round of a tournament they were co-hosting.

What followed was a complete overhaul of the way that the country coached its youngsters, leading to a change in fortunes that saw the team rise from 66th in the FIFA World Rankings to the very top in 2015.

As Director of Coach Education, **Kris Van der Haegen** has been at the heart of this transformation. He told the [Way of Champions Podcast](#) how it had been done:

INTRO

Van der Haegen (below): We organised the European Championships along with the Netherlands in 2000 and couldn't even make it to the second round. When things are going very well, people don't want to listen. That was the perfect moment to get everyone around the table and ask what we were doing wrong. The key for change was coach education.

1. PLAYER-CENTRED APPROACH

One of the main principles is that the main actor is the player; not the coach, not the team. Then it's very easy to understand that in children's football we have to do what *they* like. We call it the tailor-made approach. Who is in front of me? Look at the characteristics of the player and then adapt the environment to fit them.

2. SMALL-SIDED GAMES

Kids want to play football in their own way, not the way adults want to play. If you put a child on an adult's bicycle, they'll say, "are you crazy?" But this is what happens in football, we ask them to play 11 v 11 or 8 v 8 at a very young age. They are not able to do it.

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As a child, how did you start playing? In my case, it was with my brother, playing 1 v 1 at home, in the garden, in the garage, dribbling and scoring.

We created a format that is tailor made for this. We put one player in the goal and one on the pitch and at five, six years old, they play 1 v 1 with the goalkeeper and they adore it. They have a lot of touches, a lot of scoring opportunities. It's all about that fun environment and fun means scoring goals.

They play two halves of three minutes, then they go to the next pitch. The winner goes to the left and the loser to the right. After one or two games they'll be playing against a similar level of opponent and everyone scores goals, everyone wins games, which makes it fun.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE: [See Kris Van Der Haegen speak in Manchester on June 5th](#)

I remember at my home club, some of the parents said: "Kris, you're crazy. What are you doing? Football is a collective game and you're making them play 1 v 1 and a goalkeeper."

I said: "Yes, football is a collective game – but only when they are teenagers and adults." When they are five years old, they don't want to pass the ball, they just want to dribble and score.

We used to play 5 v 5 at six years old and had a big problem, because there was only one ball and some players never had a touch of it. After a few weeks, they'd say, "I don't like it, it's not fun."

Under-14 is when they will first play 11 v 11 with us.

3. MULTIMOVE

This is an amazing project funded by the Flemish government. It is about basic motor skills - teaching them to move and preparing them for choosing a sport when they are older. That is an approach we wanted to focus on more and more - making children active in several sports and at a later age they can decide if they prefer basketball or football or whatever. That is very important.

Parents tend to look with the glasses of adults. They say: "I want my child to play football. Now I'm seeing him catching balloons." But you have to start with the basics. If they are not able to master these, then they cannot go into complex situations. Then they will stop loving football.

4. GIVING PLAYERS FREEDOM

When I started playing football, 45 years ago, it was on the streets. Often I'll ask coaches "who played street soccer?" There was no referee, so you could try anything, and there was no coach, so there was freedom.

If you want creative players, you must create an environment of freedom. That means a coach who observes, who is there as a guide, who will help them reach their destination, but not a PlayStation coach, who says, "do this, do that," who makes the decisions instead of them.

Create the environment, free them and help only if it's necessary. Let the kids discover – they are more intelligent than you think they are.

5. GAME-BASED PRACTICE

Football is complex and it is a decision-making process. Young players must be in an environment of making decisions by themselves. Once the game starts, the coach is out. The player has to read the game, makes the decisions.

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In training, this is what you have to simulate – real game-based situations where they can make decisions, read the game and learn from it. This is very, very important.

They have to learn to be aware of space and time. In football you have opponents. You might want to do a passing and shooting drill as a warm-up, but then you have to go into situations where the players are aware of the opponent and are thinking "how can I create space for myself?"

All these things you can only learn in game situations. When I was a young boy and we had to pass from one cone to another in training. It was so boring. We used to say: "Coach, when are we going to play a game?"

He'd say: "If you do well, we'll play a game at the end of the session."

READ MORE: Meulensteen - how to develop a gem like Rashford

We have changed this completely. One of my slogans to coaches is "make your players love the game." After that, you can help them learn the game. They love the game through maximising game situations.

6. WINNING DOESN'T MATTER

We don't have league tables until the Under-14 level. That was one of the big battles for us. Coaches shouldn't be concerned about tables and trying to win trophies before this age - they should be thinking about developing players.

Coaches are inclined to focus on winning the game. That makes them play the big, strong players who give them the best chance of winning, so the late developers end up on the bench 75% of the time.

The second thing we did was play four quarters. At the end of the first and third quarters all the subs had to come off the bench. That was the only time the coach could make substitutions. Otherwise, they don't develop, because they're on the bench watching the game instead of participating in it.

Remember that slogan again – love the game, then the learning can start.

7. LOOK AFTER THE LATE DEVELOPERS

Late developers will go one year lower if they need to. Then they can play in an equal battle and show their skills. If you don't do this, you can lose some big talents who are late maturers. Nacer Chadli, Dries Mertens, Kevin De Bruyne – they were all late maturers.

In fact, Kevin did not appear for the national team until the Under-19s - now he is considered the best player in the Premier League!

In Spain, Real Madrid and Barcelona are really focussing on late developers, because they are aware of what they can do. If you give them the time to grow, they can develop into a Messi or an Iniesta!

These are the players who have really developed their brain, the intelligence and this is what modern football is – reading the game and making quick decisions, being able to execute what you have in your mind.