



29 September 2008

FFA Statement on Optus Small-Sided Football

In 2008, in partnership with our Member Federations, clubs, associations and zones, FFA commenced the staged rollout of a consistent format of Optus Small-Sided Football throughout the country. Pleasingly, over 70,000 children, primarily in the under six, seven and eight age groups, are already enjoying the benefits of Optus Small-Sided Football. This is 74% of the 101,000 children in this age group.

Optus Small-Sided Football is football for kids, played on smaller fields, with less players on a team and in an environment where the emphasis is on enjoyment rather than winning. It maximises participation for all players, leading to more touches on the ball, repeated decision-making, more goals and importantly less perceived pressure on young players.

Pitch size, players numbers and goal dimensions all gradually increase as children move through the age groups, with under six playing 4 v 4 and progressing through to 11 v 11 when they reach under 13. The laws of the game also gradually change throughout this progression to reflect the changes in understanding, awareness as well as the physical development of players.

As outlined in the National Football Development Plan, FFA is committed to the rollout of Optus Small-Sided Football for the under six to under 12 age groups inclusive. Building on the fantastic response in 2008, the requirement for 2009 will be that all under six, seven and eight age groups will be playing Optus Small-Sided Football in accordance with FFA playing formats and conditions. It is then expected that in each subsequent year a further age group will begin playing Optus Small-Sided Football, for example, under nine's in 2010, under tens in 2011, under 11s in 2012 and under 12s in 2013, so that the rollout should be completed over a 4-5 year period.

FFA understands that many zones and associations are progressing with the roll out more quickly than the above schedule. This approach is certainly encouraged by FFA and our Member Federations.

The reason for the roll out taking this length of time is so that players can grow up with Optus Small-Sided Football from age 6 upwards, rather than bringing players back from 11-a-side to Optus Small-Sided Football at older ages. It is important to emphasize that clubs and associations are not on their own – FFA will continue to support the rollout through:

- the provision of educational resources and equipment, such as:
 - Optus Small-Sided Football handbooks
 - Optus Small-Sided Football “how to” DVDs and coaching DVDs
 - Optus Small-Sided Football Parent Information Guides
 - Optus Small-Sided Football Posters
 - Optus Small-Sided Football Game Leader & Instructing Referee Guide
- free Grassroots Coaching Certificate resources;
- the availability of high profile Ambassadors to visit associations and demonstrate the benefits of Optus Small-Sided Football;
- dedicated human resources out in the States to support the roll-out of Optus Small-Sided Football; and
- comprehensive research and evaluation of all aspects of the implementation.

The FFA Game Development Staff, under the leadership of National Technical Director, Robert Baan and from January Han Berger, continue to work hard on implementing this important initiative. Specifically Matt Bulkeley, the Head of Game Development, John Boulous, National Participation Manager, FFA and Member Federation Regional Participation and Game Development staff are available to assist with any aspect of implementing Optus Small-Sided Football at any time, and we would encourage you to talk to them whenever you need to.

The FFA Board and Management, with the benefit of independent technical expert advice, absolutely believe that young children need to be introduced to adult 11-a-side football through Optus Small-Sided Football. This conviction is substantiated by considerable domestic and international research conducted over many years that overwhelmingly demonstrates the holistic and football specific benefits to children.

On behalf of FFA we thank you in anticipation for your support of this significant undertaking and like you, we look forward to witnessing the many benefits that our young players will experience over the coming years.