

## How to Handle Lopsided Games

There is a difference between lopsided games and lopsided scores. One may not necessarily be the result of the other. Sometimes games with lopsided possession but balanced scores, as well as occasional lopsided scores in otherwise balanced games. Any action by coaches or others to re-balancing the games should be considerate of the difference.

The proper response to lopsided games/scores will be different from division to division, from team to team, and from game to game. There is no “one size fits all” solution. Finding the right solution may require some trial and error and may not be the same for every game. Accordingly, the below suggestions could be considered a toolbox for coaches and others to use rather than an overly prescriptive requirement. The right answer may be one or a combination of the following measures, but coaches and others should not be limited by these suggestions. However, do note that lopsided games offer coaches of the dominant team to get some in-game practice of their teams’ weakest skills which can often make the game more enjoyable for all the players.

<b>Idea: Pre-game discussion among coaches and referees as to key missing players, loaned players, etc.</b>		
When: Pre-game Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaches would voluntarily discuss with the referee before the game whether any key players are missing, strong players borrowed, or strategies they have used recently if they know they have a dominate team, and when they call their lopsided strategies into action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enables coaches to think early about potential measures to counter lopsided games/scores if needed, and before it actually happens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Borrowed players should not be on the field of play if rostered players are sitting on the sideline; exception on hot days when players may need more rest and hydration.</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Coach of weaker team to “stop the floodgates”</b>		
When: To implement when down by 3 or more goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider if re-positioning of players (e.g., moving stronger players from attack/attacking midfield into defense) can help prevent further scoring by dominant team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps stop lopsided scores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May limit weaker team’s ability to score</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Coach of dominating team to establish certain passing requirements for his team</b>		
When: To implement when strongly up by 4 or 5 goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum number of consecutive passes before players may attempt to score (i.e., 6 passes before trying for goal)</li> <li>• Maximum number of touches before a player is required to pass (no more than 4 touches consecutively; to avoid extensive dribbling)</li> <li>• Requiring dominant team to include a certain number of different players in the game, including weaker ones or players who haven't historically had the opportunity to have many touches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing makes it more of an opportunity for dominant team to grow their skills, specifically; control ball, controlled passes, and string together passing sequences.</li> <li>• Reduces impact of most dominant players but lifts supporting players into more play by forcing more involvement of the dominant team's weaker players</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is not meant to become a game of "keep-away", but to encourage highly skilled players to engage a passing strategy to incorporate more of their teammates. If the two strongest players on the dominant team don't pass out to the rest of the team, this strategy could miss the opportunity for the rest of the team to build skills in a game situation.</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Reducing the number of players on dominant team, or increasing number of players on weaker team</b>		
When: To implement when strongly up by 5 or 6 goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The coaches and referees need to agree to the strategy on this one. If the game is highly heated, it might not work, but if the game is still friendly, this has worked well in the past.</li> <li>• Both coaches and the center referee can agree to off-balanced sides. However, it is the referee's call as to if they feel they have the skills to add one more player to the pitch. If they think that will be too challenging, then removing a player is a better strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allows for the team that was missing defense to up their defensive presence as well as more offense.</li> <li>• This allows for greater play among players</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a clear signal to both teams that the game is lopsided. Both teams should be encouraged to enjoy the game/play and not start becoming overly aggressive to reverse a scoring deficit.</li> </ul>

**Idea: Playing players out of position**

<p>When: To implement when strongly up by 4 or 5 goals</p> <p>Examples: How this could be implemented</p>	<p>Expected benefits</p>	<p>Risks &amp; potential drawbacks</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Player-specific: asking player to play a position that they are either unfamiliar with, or where the coach knows they have deficits. Key is for a coach to know their players' strengths and weaknesses to reposition them accordingly if needed.</li> <li>● Asking right (left) footed players to take a position on the left (right) side</li> <li>● Asking attackers with poor defensive skills to play defense</li> <li>● Asking strong defenders with poor shooting skills to play up</li> <li>● Asking top keepers to play field positions</li> <li>● Ask the dominating team to rotate players' positions such that defenders get the opportunity to play offense and strikers try defense.</li> <li>● Ask the dominate team to have a designated striker, a player who is not normally a striker and who hasn't had a goal yet in the season, all scoring opportunities are passed to this player.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Playing unfamiliar positions may reduce impact of dominant players</li> <li>● Likely more ball losses/turnovers by dominant team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Needs careful monitoring by coaches as such position changes could result in even more dominance</li> <li>● The dominate team's weaker players may not enjoy the spot light, although it is a skill building opportunity.</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Stop exploiting opponent's weaknesses</b>		
When: To implement when strongly up by 4 or 5 goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At times, lopsided scores result less from one team completely dominating, but rather from them exploiting a certain weakness of the opponent, even though the game may otherwise be balanced</li> <li>• An example is a team having a very poor keeper due to keeper rotation</li> <li>• If a full back is the problem, coaches could instruct their team to attack over the other wing.</li> <li>• If the opponent has particularly slow defenders, coaches could ask their team to not play long passes to their fast attackers but rather make them overcome the opponent's (perceived stronger) midfield.</li> <li>• If the keeper is weak catching high balls, ask the team to focus on tap-ins from within the 6 yard box, requiring them to outplay the entire defense rather than just taking shots on goal from anywhere in expectation that some will slip through.</li> <li>• This is very situational and may require some creative thinking by the coach, but could add to a more balanced score in combination with other measures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop lopsided scoring in otherwise balanced game</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Asking dominate team to play a different style</b>		
When: To implement when strongly up by 4 or 5 goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask possession/passing-oriented team to play riskier such as including their goalkeeper in their passing sequence, or playing off-ground passes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely more ball losses/turnovers by dominant team</li> <li>• Strengthen well rounded skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If players are highly skilled, a possession/passing-oriented team could become even more dominating or it could give the appearance of trying to ridicule their opponent, playing "keep-away".</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Scoring requirements</b>		
When: To implement when strongly up by 4 or 5 goals Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have dominant team “score” into imaginary goals over to the side of the opponent’s goal. This keeps the ball moving forward, instead of playing keep away which feels unnatural.</li> <li>• Only from tap-ins within the 6-yard box</li> <li>• Only from direct (one-touch) shots</li> <li>• Kick to goalie</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing frequency of scoring opportunities</li> <li>• Makes scoring harder by limiting the time available to control the ball before scoring attempt</li> <li>• Goalie gains more in-game practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sloppy goals, or unexpected goals, sometimes hurt the most emotionally.</li> </ul>

<b>Idea: Balancing playing time over course of season</b>		
When: Pre-game and over the course of the season Examples: How this could be implemented	Expected benefits	Risks & potential drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving stronger players more playing time against stronger teams, and weaker players more playing time against weaker teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution to more balanced games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires coaches to track playing time over the course of season</li> <li>• Risks uneven playing time if players don’t show up regularly</li> <li>• Coaches could be tempted to give stronger players more playing time every game</li> </ul>