

Soccer Sevens: Issues for the Future
Research Report no. 74

*A research study for **sportscotland***

by

Kit Campbell Associates

Leisure Recreation and Tourism Consultants, Edinburgh

Published by:

© **sportscotland**
Caledonia House, South Gyle
Edinburgh, EH12 9DQ
Tel: 0131 317 7200
www.sportscotland.org.uk

ISBN 1 85060 379 0
Price £10
March 2001

***sportscotland** is the trading name of the Scottish Sports Council*

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| List of tables | v |
| Acknowledgements | vii |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Methodology | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2: SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES | 5 |
| Football development issues | 5 |
| Pitch provision issues | 5 |
| CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCCER SEVENS | 7 |
| Background | 7 |
| Scottish Football Association policy | 8 |
| Scottish Women's Football Association policy | 10 |
| Scottish Schools Football Association policy | 10 |
| Scottish Youth Football Association policy | 10 |
| CHAPTER 4: THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY | 12 |
| Participation in Soccer Sevens | 12 |
| The formation of Soccer Sevens teams | 12 |
| Local Soccer Sevens associations | 13 |
| The role of school sport co-ordinators | 14 |
| The role of local authorities | 14 |
| The playing season | 14 |
| Playing and ancillary facilities | 14 |
| Gaining access to pitches | 14 |
| The nature of pitches used for Soccer Sevens | 15 |
| Pitch maintenance | 15 |
| The impact on 11-a-side pitches | 15 |
| The use of central venues | 16 |
| The use of artificial surfaces | 16 |
| Ancillary facilities | 17 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| CHAPTER 5: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE – FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT | 18 |
| Pathways to 11-a-sides play | 18 |
| Further development of Soccer Sevens | 19 |
| Development of 9-a-side transition football | 19 |
| The impact of Soccer Sevens on youth and adult football | 20 |
| Expansion of 11-a-side play | 20 |
| Expansion of 5-a-side play | 20 |
| Local football development groups | 21 |
| Implications for other sports | 22 |
| Youth sport in Scotland | 22 |
| Soccer Sevens and schools | 24 |
| Integration of school and community structures | 24 |
| Local football clubs | 25 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 6: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE – PITCH PROVISION | 26 |
| The demand for pitches | 26 |
| Larger Soccer Sevens pitches | 26 |
| Pitches for 9-a-side transition football | 26 |
| 11-a-side pitches | 27 |
| More 5-a-side courts | 27 |
| The future use of artificial surfaces | 27 |
| The conversion of blaes pitches | 28 |
| The need for local pitch strategies | 28 |
| | |
| REFERENCES | 30 |
| | |
| APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONSULTEES | 31 |

TABLES

| | Page |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 Typical English small-sided football parameters | 9 |
| 2 Community-based Soccer Sevens associations in Scotland | 13 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

sportscotland

Kirsty Noble
Lee Cousins
David Ewart
Simon Farrelly

Football governing bodies

Jim Fleeting
Hugh Knapp
John Young
David Little

SFA development officers

Maureen McGonigle
Sergei Baltacha
Nicola Barbour
Walter Borthwick
John Brown
Jim Crawford
Angela Hind
Raymond Farrelly
Paul Freeman
Andy Gould
Ross Jack
Scott Kinross
Tommy McIntyre
Craig Mulholland
Barry Nicholson
David Provan
Stuart Rafferty
Neil Simpson

SFA community coaches

Richard Wilson
Graham Diamond
Tony Docherty
Jim Grant
John Holt
Matt Kerr
Danny MacDonald
Alison Mackie
Colin MacKinnon
Chic McLelland
Malcolm Thomson
Alan White

Local authorities

Eric Young
Brian Harris
Wendy Carrick

Others

Brian Devlin
David Berrie
Ronnie Ahlfeld
Gerry Bradshaw

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

We were commissioned by **sportscotland** (formerly the Scottish Sports Council) to undertake research relating to Soccer Sevens in order:

- to provide better information for making planning recommendations at the national, regional and local level
- to determine the need, and potential for, the development of Soccer Sevens pitches; and
- to explore the potential impact on pitch stock of such development.

As originally conceived, the study would have focused mainly on primary schools in order to assess the extent to which they have provided, or will be able to provide, Soccer Sevens pitches for their pupils. However, in the course of a series of initial interviews with football agencies, it became clear that the main growth of Soccer Sevens and related small-sided games to date has been through community-based rather than school-based structures. The apparent reduction in sport and physical recreation in primary schools is a source of concern to many, if not most, sports bodies. This said, in some areas, such as West Lothian, all primary school football is small-sided and in other areas, such as Edinburgh, schools are moving progressively to small-sided play.

As a result, in consultation with **sportscotland**, we decided to change the emphasis of the study away from schools and, instead, to review the development of community-based Soccer Sevens and other small-sided games for children of primary school age. Through this review, we have identified a range of issues that will be likely to impact on the development of Soccer Sevens and availability of public pitches over the next decade significantly more than if we had concentrated on schools. In addition **sportscotland** is about to commission research on standards of provision of sports facilities at primary and secondary schools, which will include pitches.

Over time, some of these issues are also likely to impact on the development of adult 5-a-side soccer. There are, therefore, a number of links between the conclusions of this study and a separate study of 5-a-side soccer that we have also undertaken for **sportscotland**. These links are summarised at appropriate points in the reports of both studies. The research was undertaken in late 1999/early 2000.

Methodology

The conclusions of this study are derived from the analysis of a mixture of face to face and telephone interviews with individuals and representatives of

agencies involved in promoting Soccer Sevens in all parts of Scotland. These individuals can be placed in one of five main groups:

- officials of the governing bodies involved in administering Soccer Sevens football, for example the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Women's Football Association and the Scottish Youth Football Association
- football development officers employed jointly by the Scottish Football Association or Scottish Women's Football Association and local authorities
- community coaches employed jointly by the Scottish Football Association and professional league clubs
- officials of Soccer Sevens Development Associations in various parts of Scotland; and
- other individuals involved in local Soccer Sevens associations.

The interviews with football development officers, community coaches and individuals involved in local Soccer Sevens associations were standardised around a series of key questions in order to obtain comparable information for all parts of Scotland:

The local organisation of Soccer Sevens

- Who is co-ordinating the development of small-sided football and Soccer Sevens, and how?
- What is the involvement of the local authority leisure service and the education service?
- What part do school sport co-ordinators play in promoting Soccer Sevens and small-sided football?
- How many teams are involved, and what are the ages of players?
- How are teams formed?
- What is the gender balance?
- Is the number of teams growing, the same or in decline?
- What are the pathways to 11-a-side play for older children?

Soccer Sevens/small-sided matches

- When are Soccer Sevens matches played?

The pitches used for Soccer Sevens/small-sided games

- Where are Soccer Sevens matches played (for example, at central venues, on local authority pitches or on school sites)?
- What sort of pitches are used (essentially, are they marked-out or coned-off; and grass, artificial turf or some other surface)?
- Is there an adequate number of these pitches?
- Have there been any difficulties in accessing pitches for Soccer Sevens and small-sided games?
- Do players require changing accommodation and, if so, is it available and adequate?
- How much are artificially surfaced pitches used for small-sided games and Soccer Sevens?
- Is there an adequate number of pitches in the area with adequate changing accommodation for (a) small-sided games, including Soccer Sevens and (b) 11-a-side play?
- What has been the impact so far of the growth of Soccer Sevens and small-sided football on the availability of 11-a-side pitches?
- Is there is a shortfall in pitch provision and, if so, how should this be resolved?

The development of Soccer Sevens/small-sided games

- What will be the impact of the development of Soccer Sevens over the next few years on the availability of local football pitches?
- What will be the impact of the development of Soccer Sevens over the next few years on youth and adult football?
- What evidence is there of these impacts so far?
- What are the emerging policy issues?

A list of the consultees is given in Appendix 1. Through the interview programme, we were able to identify a range of general issues that are fairly common throughout Scotland. These issues can conveniently be grouped into two broad categories:

- **Football development** issues, which will primarily be a matter for the football governing bodies, although they will also be of interest to generic sports development agencies such as **sportscotland** and local authorities. Many of these issues will also be of interest to primary and possibly some secondary schools.

- **Pitch planning and provision** issues, which will be the concern primarily of **sportscotland**, local planning authorities and pitch providers (particularly the education and leisure services departments of local authorities) but also of interest to the football governing bodies.

CHAPTER 2: SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

The key conclusions from this study can be considered under two broad heads, relating first to the future development of football generally, and second to the development of Soccer Sevens facilities; these latter issues may have implications for other football facilities as well.

Football development issues

- A smooth and effective transition from Soccer Sevens to 11-a-side play is the key issue for the future.
- While the current emphasis in Soccer Sevens is on under-12 (U12) play, some players are likely to wish to continue playing small-sided games into at least their early teens.
- The relatively recent development of participation in Soccer Sevens should lead to a long term increase in participation in both 11-a-side and 5-a-side play, although this is unlikely to be dramatic.
- There is a case for the creation of football development groups, led by Scottish Football Association (SFA) community coaches or development officers, to plan and co-ordinate the development of football at the local level.
- In some areas, there is a need for primary schools to embrace the ethos of Soccer Sevens more than they have done so far, and for greater integration between school-based and community-based structures for small-sided football.
- In the longer term, the clubs that are likely to be most successful in competitive 11-a-side football are probably those able to develop and maintain an effective football development programme that starts with Soccer Sevens.

Pitch provision issues

- In many areas, there is likely to be a developing need for Soccer Sevens pitches for youth teams at U13 and U14 level. The impact on the amount of land required for pitches may not be significant, especially in those areas where there are opportunities to convert a limited number of 11-a-side pitches.
- Those secondary schools that cannot afford a full size artificial turf pitch should consider an artificially surfaced Soccer Sevens pitch as a cheaper alternative.
- Local authorities should ensure that there is sufficient land in their areas allocated for football use to allow for changes in the demand for pitches of different sizes from both schools and community-based structures.

- The growth of Soccer Sevens may lead to demand for more 11-a-side pitches in many areas. It is also likely to lead to a demand for more 5-a-side courts.
- The football authorities should develop Soccer Sevens goals that will be suitable for use on artificial surfaces.
- Local authorities with a number of blaes (mineral) pitches should consider formulating a strategy for their conversion to either grass or a suitable artificial surface.
- All local authorities should consider preparing a local pitch strategy, possibly as part of a wider open space strategy that links to their development plan.
- It is clear that Scotland will not require *less* land for pitches in the future.
- Schools and local authorities should resist the temptation to dispose of or develop 'surplus' pitches. Moreover, most planning authorities should not grant planning permission for the development of existing pitches unless suitable alternative provision can be made.

CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCCER SEVENS

Background

The need for the development of small-sided football for children in Scotland was identified approximately 15 years ago by Andy Roxburgh, a former primary school teacher, at that time the Technical Director of the SFA and currently the Technical Director of the European Football Association (UEFA). He perceived 11-a-side play as providing a poor introduction to and grounding in the game of football for children. The main reasons for this were:

- The large size of the pitch. While the laws of football allow a certain latitude in the size of pitches for different standards of play, even the smallest 11-a-side pitch is too large for children who are unable to kick the ball from one side of the pitch to the other. This results in children's football traditionally being a game in which a group of players move around the pitch together, rather than one that depends on the essential 11-a-side football skills of passing and teamwork.
- The limited number of times most players touch the ball. This results in children tending not to develop their skills, and even becoming disenchanted with the game; ultimately this results in fairly low skill levels throughout much youth football.
- The emphasis on winning rather than skill development and enjoyment, driven by parents and team coaches. This results in teams and coaches being interested only in those players who show talent, with potential late developers being lost to the game at a young age.

These considerations resulted, logically, in a need that

- children should play on a smaller than standard pitch with special small-sized goals so as to give small goalkeepers a chance to be effective.
- teams should have fewer players, so that each player has more opportunities to develop his or her skills; in addition, players should use a smaller and lighter ball
- children's football should be trophy free, with the emphasis on skill development and enjoyment, so as to maximise the number of children made to feel welcome and valued in the game.

Some coaches, primary school teachers and parents of child players have resisted the move to small-sided games on the grounds that it is not 'proper' football. So too have some of the community-based bodies promoting children's football at the local level, such as the Boys Brigade, which allow teams to involve players of greatly different ages. It is therefore ironic that 5-a-side

should be so popular amongst adults. However, football governing bodies have increasingly come to accept that small-sided football has much to offer and will be a far more effective way of developing the stars of the future than 11-a-side play. It is also a far more child-centred approach than 'win at all costs' philosophies, and hopefully will help to heal the traditional rift between schools and the football authorities. UEFA, the European governing body, issued a 'binding recommendation' that all under-12s football should be small-sided with effect from the start of the 2000/01 season. However, what the Prime Minister calls 'the forces of conservatism' prevented this from becoming a reality, and the intention now is that it should be implemented by the start of the 2002–03 season.

Soccer Sevens has been in formal existence for 3–4 years and in that time there has been significant growth in small-sided football for children in Scotland. Apart from a limited amount of 'Fun Fours', involving children of five and six in 4-a-side play, the main emphasis is 7-a-side. The Scottish Football Association (SFA) has created a 'Soccer Sevens Development Association' to promote this form of the game, backed up by football development officers based in local authorities, community coaches linked to league clubs, and new coach education programmes. It has also made funds available to clubs wishing to promote Soccer Sevens to purchase portable goals suitable for the game.

This initiative has been remarkably successful and it is fair to say that the SFA has created a new mass participation sport for both boys and girls. At the moment small-sided play is developing in parallel with U12 11-a-side play; but in the next couple of years all 11-a-side play by U12 teams should cease. This should give a further impetus to the growth of the small-sided game.

Scottish Football Association policy

The SFA supports the UEFA policy that all football for primary school age children should be small-sided, and all of its community-based development officers are involved in promoting this form of the game. In parallel with this, community coaches linked to league clubs are introducing children to the game and providing coaching at a number of soccer participation centres.

The SFA's primary concern is that children should play on good quality pitches, primarily because poor pitches will make developing good ball skills more difficult and the game less attractive. It would welcome the provision of dedicated Soccer Sevens areas. Looking to the future, it seems likely that U12s, U13s and U14s will also be playing Soccer Sevens and this will therefore create a need for a range of pitch sizes and sufficient demand for them to be marked out permanently. In the past, the SFA has suggested that small-sided games should last for 30 minutes (that is, 2 x 15 minutes) and the appropriate size for Soccer Sevens pitches for all players up to and including U12 teams is:

- minimum 55 x 36 m
- maximum 64 x 45 m.

The SFA's current view is that 5–7 year olds should be playing on an area of about 45 x 25/30 metres and 8–12 year olds 64 x 36 metres.

In England, playing periods and pitch sizes tend to be more closely related to the abilities of children of different ages. For example, the Peter Houseman Youth League in Basingstoke and Deane in Hampshire (which accords with Football Association rules) does not allow children to play more than two matches in a single day, and sets the following standards for small-side games:

Table 1: Typical English small-sided football parameters

| Age of players | Match length | Pitch size (m) |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| U7s (4-a-sides) | 2 x 10 minutes | 27.5–36.6 x 18.3–27.5 m |
| U8s (5-a-sides) | 2 x 10 minutes | 27.5–36.6 x 18.3–27.5 m |
| U9s (6-a-sides) | 2 x 15 minutes | 45.0–55.0 x 27.5–36.6 m |
| U10s (7-a-sides) | 2 x 15 minutes | 45.0–55.0 x 27.5–36.6 m |

Source: Peter Houseman Youth League, Hampshire

The SFA believes artificial surfaces are in principle desirable but is concerned that there is evidence that they can create significant wear and tear on young joints and bones if children play too much. As a result, therefore, it prefers matches to be played on grass surfaces. However it is recognised that the new generation of artificial pitches is more child friendly.

In general, Scottish primary schools have been slower to pick up the Soccer Sevens initiative than boys' clubs. Accordingly there is significantly more Soccer Sevens played in community-based structures than through the Scottish Schools' Football Association (SSFA). Accordingly this report concentrates mainly on community-based Soccer Sevens but the issue of Soccer Sevens in schools is highlighted under Football Development.

At present, those children who play small-sided football usually switch to 11-a-side either at the age of 12 or when they enter secondary school. This may change in future as the SFA is keen to make the move to 11-a-side discretionary and promote Soccer Sevens for older children up to the age of about 14. This may be resisted by many schools, at least initially, but will be promoted by SFA community coaches and development officers. The SFA hopes that Soccer Sevens for U12s, U13s and U14s will also be promoted by local authorities through their youth sport programmes.

Scottish Women's Football Association policy

Because U12 football is (or can be) a mixed gender game, the Scottish Women's Football Association (SWFA) follows SFA policy in respect of Soccer Sevens and other small-sided games for children in this age group. As for youth football, at present the SWFA promotes 7-a-side at U13 level as well, largely as a consequence of the smaller number of girls than boys currently playing the game.

Scottish Schools Football Association policy

Scottish Schools Football Association (SSFA) policy is to promote small-sided games for all primary age children: 4-a-side in Primary 4 and 5, and 7-a-side in Primary 6 and 7. It arranges an annual national inter-school 4-a-side competition to raise funds for charity (all children pay 50p to charity to enter), which is run almost as a festival; although teams progress by scoring goals, the emphasis is on taking part and enjoyment.

The SSFA believes that there is no particular need for specifically small-sided pitches; instead, schools can keep their 11-a-side pitches if they wish (many schools still want to play 11-a-sides) and play small-sided games across them, using a minimum of markings or cones. For 4-a-side, the only markings required are a penalty area and this can be done with four flat dome cones. There is no reason why small-sided pitches cannot be marked out in a different colour if required. The goals can be two poles, jackets or road cones because there is no cross-bar; if a shot is above the goalkeeper's reach, it is disallowed. The SFA, on the other hand, believes in principle that two sets of differently coloured markings on a single pitch are undesirable.

The main constraint on the development of small-sided games can be summed up as being along the lines of 'small-sided games aren't proper football'. However, the SSFA believes that this attitude is being overcome in many areas, but especially those where younger people are organising children's games. Most opposition comes from individuals who have been involved in 11-a-side football for many years.

In general, small-sided games for primary age groups are mixed, but there is a growing move to develop single sex games as well, especially amongst older primary children and the first two years of secondary schools. As the SSFA describes itself largely as a reactive body, it is happy to go along with the wishes of its member schools. Apparently the main pressure for separate sex games comes from female teachers.

Scottish Youth Football Association policy

The Scottish Youth Football Association (SYFA) has been formed from three existing associations concerned with non-professional youth football: the Youth Section of the Scottish Amateur Football Association, the Association of Scottish Youth Football Clubs, and the Scottish Juvenile Football Association. However, it has not yet really begun to get involved in Soccer Sevens, although

this will be a key part of its remit, and it is involved in negotiations with the SFA relating to where the Soccer Sevens Development Association (formed by the SFA to promote Soccer Sevens) will 'sit' in the future structure of Scottish football.

The SFA and SYFA are about to embark on the preparation of a strategy for transition football whose main thrust will be the promotion of 'developmental' Soccer Sevens amongst boys' or girls' U12, U13 and U14 teams. If this is successful it should significantly reduce the number of teams in these age groups playing the 11-a-side form of the game and substitute 7-a-side play.

The SYFA transition football strategy is likely also to include a schools component as schools are perceived by the SFA as relatively marginalised in football terms at present. This perception is confirmed by the findings of research in youth sport in Scotland undertaken for **sportscotland** (see below).

CHAPTER 4: THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Participation in Soccer Sevens

As there is no form of registration system, the SFA does not know exactly the number of children involved in playing small-sided football throughout Scotland. Tommy Wilson, the SFA's Children's Programme Director, believes there are about 20,000 Under-12 players supported by around 3,000 adult volunteers.

The formation of Soccer Sevens teams

To date, the creation of community-based Soccer Sevens teams has been driven by four main agencies:

- **Boys' clubs:** These are clearly the main source of Soccer Sevens teams to date. Many such clubs have an established structure of teams in older age groups and have been able to create additional Soccer Sevens teams for their younger members. This has the advantage of providing a ready-made pathway for children into 11-a-side teams as they grow older.
- **Coaches:** A number of adults with a coaching qualification have taken the initiative to create Soccer Sevens teams; in some areas they advertise for players.
- **Parents:** Having a child who shows interest or promise in football encourages some parents to get involved in creating a team in which their child can play.
- **Schools:** In some areas, for example Aberdeen, primary schools have entered teams into community-based structures.

For obvious reasons, teams formed by boys' clubs tend to be boys, but many other teams are mixed. Primary schools, in particular, seem to ignore gender when creating teams.

In most areas the number of teams is still growing, although some football development officers believe that this growth is beginning to level off. This does not seem to be related to the availability of pitches, although in a number of areas a growing constraint is the need for more adult volunteers to undertake the necessary administration. Several football development officers have commented on the difficulty of keeping adults involved once their children are no longer playing.

Over the next couple of years there is likely to be an increase in participation in Soccer Sevens as existing 11-a-side teams involving children aged under 12 are persuaded to convert to Soccer Sevens – assuming of course that the UEFA's 'binding recommendation' to this effect is in fact implemented. This will increase the need for Soccer Sevens pitches, but remove the present 11-a-side demand from these teams. Accordingly it seems unlikely that there will be a

serious shortfall of Soccer Sevens pitches over the next few years – assuming there is no major breakaway of teams or clubs wishing to continue playing 11-a-sides.

Local Soccer Sevens associations

There is an active voluntary and community-based Soccer Sevens association in most areas of Scotland to co-ordinate small-sided matches. Table 2 sets out the approximate number of teams playing in matches organised by these associations.

Table 2: Community-based Soccer Sevens associations in Scotland

| Local authority area | Approximate number of community-based teams (March 2000) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| City of Aberdeen – girls | 22 |
| City of Aberdeen – mixed | 30 |
| Aberdeenshire | 58 |
| City of Glasgow | 44 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | 70 |
| City of Dundee | 108 |
| East Dunbartonshire | 60 |
| East Lothian | 40 |
| East of Scotland | 150 |
| East Renfrewshire | 103 |
| Fife – Dunfermline area | 40 |
| Forth Valley – girls | 28 |
| Forth Valley – mixed | 60 |
| Highland | 100 |
| Inverclyde | 112 |
| Moray | 75 |
| North Ayrshire | 61 |
| North and South Lanarkshire | 55 |
| Perth and Kinross | no teams – only players |
| South Ayrshire | 100 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 50 |
| West Lothian | approximately 50 |
| Total | approximately 1,420 teams |

Source: interview programme (late 1999/early 2000)

Note: East of Scotland includes Edinburgh plus some teams from West Lothian, Midlothian, East Lothian, the Borders and Fife, drawn almost completely from Boys Clubs; Forth Valley includes Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling

The role of school sport co-ordinators

In those areas where school sport co-ordinators have been appointed, most have not so far been actively involved in community-based Soccer Sevens. In a few areas, co-ordinators have played a minor role, for example, by helping to arrange travel (City of Glasgow) or encouraging teams from their (secondary) schools to become involved in local Soccer Sevens structures (East Renfrewshire). As Soccer Sevens develops amongst children of secondary school age this may of course change.

The role of local authorities

Local authorities have been very supportive of the development of Soccer Sevens in two main ways. First, a number employ a football development officer in partnership with the Scottish Football Association (the City of Glasgow Council employs several); and second they provide and mark out pitches. In some areas, local authorities are also involved in promoting Soccer Sevens through their leisure or education services.

The playing season

Soccer Sevens is rarely played all winter by children's teams in the way that adult football continues throughout the winter months, apart from a short break at Christmas/New Year. Instead, most local associations arrange a split winter season, with play from about August to October and from March to June. Alternatively, some concentrate instead on summer play, from about April to September. Both of these arrangements have the practical effect of reducing the pressure on pitches in the main part of the winter when they are most susceptible to damage from usage and most difficult to repair.

Playing and ancillary facilities

Gaining access to pitches

At first a number of Soccer Sevens associations found it difficult to access pitches. The main reason for this seems to have been an initial reluctance on the part of local authorities to make pitches (or, more accurately in many areas, flat grassland) available. However, they have been quickly won round to Soccer Sevens as a worthwhile development and have been quite creative in the way they have provided access to grass areas that can be used for the game. In addition, some have found ways of minimising the cost of formal pitch hire for Soccer Sevens, for example charging by the session rather than by the match.

Grass areas, however, do not necessarily provide good playing conditions and, even if they do, are not necessarily suitable for high levels of use. They may not have adequate drainage, be kept free from litter or mown to a suitable grass length. As a result the SFA would like to see greater use of formal pitches and, if possible, the creation of dedicated small-sided grass pitches – especially in urban areas. This is likely to have implications for the demand for land in some areas. The use of dedicated small-sided grass pitches will be particularly important as participation in Soccer Sevens by older children expands – see

below. It believes that these pitches should be equipped with portable goals, except where pitches are enclosed, so as to minimise the amount of goalmouth wear from groups of youngsters kicking a ball about on a casual basis.

The nature of pitches used for Soccer Sevens

The vast majority of community-based Soccer Sevens matches are played on grass areas, some of which may not have been used for organised football before. Coned off areas are used where clubs or teams have been unable to persuade pitch owners to provide permanent markings and on the handful of 11-a-side pitches on which Soccer Sevens is played across the width. In a few areas, coned off areas of artificial turf pitches are used but grass is clearly the preferred surface at present. In many areas, boys' clubs are probably the teams most likely to have access to marked-out pitches.

Only a very few school pitches are used regularly for community-based Soccer Sevens. Most schools apparently prefer to keep any pitches they may have primarily for their own use.

There is a particular problem in Glasgow and, to a lesser extent, the West of Scotland generally: the large number of blaes pitches. The SFA's portable goals cannot be properly anchored on these pitches and so cannot be used; in addition, blaes is not a suitable surface for young children (arguably this is also the case for adults). Many of these pitches are poorly used and there is a good case to be made for converting them either to artificial surfaces (where they are or could be floodlit) or to grass. However, local authority sport and recreation capital budgets are generally seriously constrained and so little change may be possible without external funding.

Pitch maintenance

The vast majority of pitches used for Soccer Sevens are owned and maintained by local authorities. Most local authorities have made adequate arrangements for the maintenance and marking out of Soccer Sevens pitches, but some associations believe their local authority gives priority to maintaining 11-a-side pitches. This may in fact be because contract specifications have not been adequately adjusted to reflect the development of small-sided pitches or grass areas used for small-sided games. There is also a growing problem of the maintenance of the portable goals used for Soccer Sevens. The need to move them every time they are used maximises wear and tear.

The impact on 11-a-side pitches

So far, the impact of creating pitches for Soccer Sevens on the supply of 11-a-side pitches has been negligible, with only a very few established pitches converted to 7-a-side use to date. Between them, the various interviewees were able to identify only seven or eight pitches that had been converted to Soccer Sevens (two in Aberdeen, one in Glasgow, one – possibly two – in Dundee, two in Motherwell and two in Stirling). Even where this has happened, it has sometimes been accompanied by a reduction in the local demand for 11-a-side games. By and large, however, the relatively small grass Soccer Sevens

pitches have been created on spare areas of land that were previously unused – not necessarily on public playing field sites – or by adjusting the layout of 11-a-side pitches on a site without reducing their number.

Most Soccer Sevens to date has involved players aged 11 and under. However, the SFA sees a clear need to expand participation in the game into older age groups so that many players will not play 11-a-sides until they are 13 or 14. This could result in a massive increase in the number of Soccer Sevens teams in urban areas; at present, for example, there are around two hundred U12 11-a-side teams in Glasgow. The need to provide slightly larger Soccer Sevens for this age group could turn out to have a significant impact on the availability of full size pitches if they are converted to Soccer Sevens. However, any such conversion will also be accompanied by a roughly comparable reduction in the number of 11-a-side teams, although the wear and tear on pitches may actually increase. At present 22 players use an 11-a-side pitch at once, but any pitch converted to two Soccer Sevens pitches could instead be used by 28 players simultaneously.

The use of central venues

Traditionally, football has been organised almost completely on the basis of teams in a league playing ‘home’ and ‘away’ fixtures. In a number of areas, however, Soccer Sevens has broken this mould by promoting the use of central venues. These consist of a number of pitches at a single location at which a number of teams gather to play matches or festivals, usually on Saturday or Sunday mornings, ideally with changing accommodation. The areas in which central venues of this kind are used include Aberdeen, East and West Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Central Fife, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling, City of Glasgow, Gourock, North and South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire.

This said, and for obvious reasons, central venues are most appropriate in relatively compact local authority areas with a reasonably high population density. It would clearly not be possible to promote their use in areas such as the Highlands. In sparsely populated areas like this, teams tend to play on a home and away basis with the local Soccer Sevens association co-ordinating fixture lists. The SFA believes that the choice between a ‘fixture list’ and ‘central venue’ approach should be taken at the local level in the light of local circumstances.

The use of artificial surfaces

The central venue used by the West Dunbartonshire Soccer Sevens Association is an interesting special case: matches are played at the commercial Goals Soccer Centre on sand-filled artificial turf 5-a-side courts. For the organisers, Goals has two key advantages over natural grass pitches: first the artificially surfaced courts can be played in most weather conditions; and second there are good social facilities in which parents can gather while their children are playing. This brings parents together and increases their level of interest and support for their children.

In principle the SFA is not opposed to the use of artificial surfaces for small-sided play, unlike the Football Association in England, which has a clear preference for natural grass. Those coaches or development officers with experience of the more recent, longer pile artificial turf pitches (for example, at McDiarmid Park in Perth or Guthrie Park in Dundee) rate them highly as a suitable surface for both small-sided and adult play. Clearly the latest artificial surfaces are very much closer to traditional grass pitches than earlier artificial turf surfaces.

This perhaps highlights the need for a new form of provision consisting of artificially surfaced 7-a-side courts. These will be suitable both for Soccer Sevens and adult training and practice. Where there are several such courts, they can function as a central venue for Soccer Sevens, broadly comparable with specialist 5-a-side centres. Alternatively they might be provided on secondary school sites as a cheaper alternative to a full size artificial turf pitch.

Provided Soccer Sevens courts of this kind are floodlit – and there is not much sense in providing artificially surfaced areas which are not – they will provide much better adult training and practice facilities than a partial booking of a full size artificial turf pitch. This may then impact on the income that local authorities are able to generate from these major facilities or reduce the football demand, allowing more use for hockey.

Ancillary facilities

The poor condition of many football changing pavilions in Scotland is well known and having to use them could conceivably deter some children from playing football; there are also issues relating to child protection when children are required to change before and after playing. At some venues used by Soccer Sevens associations, however, there is no changing provision. A number of associations therefore avoid the problem by encouraging children to arrive changed. As most matches take place in spring/early summer and autumn this does not generally create any problem, except in poor weather when it is obviously desirable that both children and any parents accompanying them should have the opportunity to shelter under cover if necessary. The key ancillary accommodation needs at Soccer Sevens sites are male and female toilets and storage for portable goals; changing accommodation is less important.

In general, however, the lack of changing pavilions has not generally prevented associations from using particular pitches, although given a choice they would rather use a site with a suitable pavilion. However, this may also increase the charge for using a particular site and some associations prefer not to book changing pavilions because of the cost involved.

Where pavilions exist they have nearly always been designed for 11-a-side use by a limited number of teams simultaneously and may not, therefore, be ideal to serve a central venue attracting as many as several hundred children at once; for example, many local pavilions lack any social accommodation, which can be used as a muster area or for shelter in poor weather.

CHAPTER 5: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE – FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

While the main thrust of this research has been to identify issues surrounding the future provision of pitches and related facilities, they cannot be separated from wider issues relating to the future development of football. This will obviously be critical to the number and type of pitches required. Accordingly, this first section of the 'issues' part of the report considers the future development of the game; the next section then goes on to discuss those issues related to pitch provision.

Pathways to 11-a-side play

From a football perspective, the transition from Soccer Sevens to 11-a-side play is probably *the* key issue for the future. At present, there are inadequate transitional arrangements in most areas. As most 11-a-side play is fiercely competitive, even at age 12, this comes as something of a culture shock to children who have been used to a trophy-free environment. The emphasis on trophies is of course fuelled where 11-a-side games are sponsored if sponsors view them as important. Moreover, many coaches and managers of 11-a-side teams are interested primarily in their best players while Soccer Sevens organisers take great care to ensure that all players, irrespective of ability, are equally encouraged and valued.

As squads from which Soccer Sevens teams are formed include anything up to about 20 children, many adopt a policy of 'rolling substitution' to ensure that all squad members play for the same length of time. A team determined to win would try to have its best players on the pitch most if not all of the time. In addition, new 11-a-side players have to learn to cope with a very much larger pitch, more players, a heavier ball, a large number of new rules and, very often, vociferous adults on the touchline – something that Soccer Sevens associations actively discourage. One association even has a rule awarding a free kick to the opposing team when supporters become over-enthusiastic.

Most Soccer Sevens associations are beginning to tackle this issue by means of either:

- the extension of an U12 Soccer Sevens league into a season of friendly 11-a-side matches at U13 level before players join competitive 11-a-side teams; or
- the development of transition, 9-a-side football (and possibly yet another subordinate governing body under the SFA umbrella), although this is not recommended by the SFA, which believes instead that it will be preferable to promote Soccer Sevens for older children, so avoiding another set of rules.

Further development of Soccer Sevens

Some local Soccer Sevens associations are already beginning to think of ways of providing Soccer Sevens participation opportunities for older children, especially those who may not be selected by competitive 11-a-side teams. Much of the effort involved in promoting Soccer Sevens will be wasted if a significant proportion of players drop out around the age of 12. There are already signs of Soccer Sevens attracting teams from the first years of some secondary schools (especially amongst girls, at least partly because there are fewer girls than boys playing the game at present) and some Soccer Sevens associations moving into U13 and U14 play. In addition, South Lanarkshire Council has provided some specifically 7-a-side pitches at the Hamilton Palace Sports Grounds, which are proving popular with younger teenagers.

The expansion of Soccer Sevens into at least the first year or so of secondary schooling has an attractive logic. Classes of around 30 pupils, of whom roughly half are boys and half girls, can split easily into a boys' Soccer Sevens and a girls' Soccer Sevens. Teenage Soccer Sevens, if it develops, may therefore be based largely in schools and on school pitches. It is very unlikely that an adult form of Soccer Sevens will develop, as adults will tend to play either 11-a-side or 5-a-side football.

Development of 9-a-side transition football

Some Soccer Sevens associations are beginning to tackle the transition issue by promoting 9-a-side football for children in the U13 or U14 age groups. They argue that those moving from the trophy-free ethos of U12 Soccer Sevens straight into the often highly competitive 11-a-side form of the game at U13 level can rapidly become disenchanted and may drop out and be lost to the game. Accordingly, they see a need to allow children to learn the tactics and rules of 11-a-side play relatively slowly by playing 9-a-side for a season or more. The SFA, on the other hand, has no plans to introduce or promote 9-a-side play and recommends a gentle introduction to 11-a-side play over the course of a season. It argues that the problems arise when former Soccer Sevens players in newly formed 11-a-side teams are expected suddenly to start playing against other teams who have been accustomed to playing 11-a-side games for some time. As all U12 11-a-side play converts to Soccer Sevens over the next year or so, this particular problem should disappear as there should be few, if any, children at U12 level with experience of 11-a-side play. If all children convert to 11-a-side play at the same time there is an opportunity for them to make the transition to the 11-a-side game relatively gently, for example by a season of trophy-free play where the emphasis remains on skill development within the context of the rules of the game.

The impact of Soccer Sevens on participation in youth and adult football

Something will be seriously wrong if the development of Soccer Sevens does not have a noticeable impact on levels and patterns of participation in youth and adult football. But what might this impact be? Essentially there are two possible scenarios, which can easily co-exist:

- expansion of 11-a-side play
- expansion of 5-a-side play.

Expansion of 11-a-side play

It is reasonable to assume that the rapid development of Soccer Sevens will feed through into an expansion of interest in 11-a-side play, first by teenagers and later by adults. Whether this will in fact be the case, however, remains to be seen; it will depend to a considerable extent on the way in which youth and adult football develops. During the interviews undertaken as part of this study, several football development officers expressed the view that at present there is probably too much match play and not enough practice and training in Scottish football generally.

Any expansion of the competitive 11-a-side game may not be as great as might at first be thought, however. Football development officers generally see it as likely, although none is absolutely convinced that it will inevitably be the case. If there are indeed 20,000 Soccer Sevens players in Scotland at present, this is a relatively small number compared with the number of adults already playing the game. **sportscotland** participation surveys have found that around 6 per cent of adult males and 0.2 per cent of adult females had played 11-a-side football in the month before interview – a total of around 125,000 people. The proportions who had played football in the year before interview were significantly higher and give a total of around 200,000 adult footballers. Given that there has always been a movement of players from youth to adult football, and that some adults retire from the game every year, the expansion of 11-a-side play arising from the development of Soccer Sevens is unlikely to be massive. What development officers do see as pretty certain – and indeed want to see – is that skill levels amongst players will rise as a result of the greater potential for children playing Soccer Sevens to develop ball skills than those who play only 11-a-side.

Expansion of 5-a-side play

The other possible long term impact of Soccer Sevens is significant growth in 5-a-side play, especially amongst young adults. This expansion is likely to arise in three main ways:

- First, the better ex-Soccer Sevens players may wish to continue playing small-sided games, in parallel with the 11-a-side game, as a means of honing

their skills. Work on the demand for 5-a-side soccer in Scotland (Kit Campbell Associates and System Three, 2000) has identified that around a quarter of 5-a-side players regard themselves as regular 11-a-side players. Accordingly, if the number of 11-a-side players goes up, so should the number of 5-a-side players.

- Second, those ex-Soccer Sevens players who do not enjoy the competitive atmosphere of 11-a-side play, or whose skill levels make them less attractive to competitive 11-a-side teams, may wish to continue playing and find small-sided games an attractive way of doing so. Many may find 5-a-side attractive and easier to arrange than 7-a-side play.
- Third, small-sided play is obviously more time flexible and may appeal to those individuals who do not wish to give the best part of half a day at the weekend and therefore prefer to play on midweek evenings. This expansion of small-sided play will probably be concentrated on purpose-designed facilities and therefore likely to be fuelled particularly by the further growth of commercial 5-a-side soccer centres. Those centres that make their facilities available to primary age group Soccer Sevens teams may benefit particularly from this in the longer term.

Local football development groups

The administration of football tends to be fairly political in that there are many individuals with strong views in positions of authority in the many associations affiliated to the SFA. The Ernie Walker report a few years ago sought to make more sense of the structure of football administration but has perhaps not been as successful as was hoped by many. There is a view amongst some Soccer Sevens administrators that the SFA's voting structure ensures that policy is driven primarily by the perceived needs of the professional game and the big clubs, sometimes against what may be the best interests of the amateur game. Some even argue that Soccer Sevens is designed, ultimately, to benefit the professional game by raising skill levels and give the big clubs a chance to 'spot' talented youngsters earlier than at present. A more charitable view is that any such benefits are a fortuitous spin-off of good practice in child-centred sports development.

One way of promoting the interests of the game at the local level may be the creation of local football development groups, led by SFA community coaches or development officers. These are not intended as yet another governing body to administer football, but a way of bringing together the various interest groups and key individuals. These might include, for example, local Soccer Sevens associations, schools' football associations, school sport co-ordinators, youth football associations, local amateur leagues, local football development officers, community coaches, the local authority (ideally both leisure services and education departments or sections), commercial 5-a-side centre operators and others, to plan and co-ordinate the development of football at the local level. At the moment there is perhaps a tendency for the various agencies involved in football not to co-operate as much as would be desirable for the good of the

game and its players. In particular there is a lack of adequate school–community co-ordination in many areas.

Local football development groups could take the lead in organising local coach education courses, representing the interests of football to local authorities and other pitch owners, and promoting easily negotiated pathways between the various types of football. A relatively small levy on all local clubs, or an increase in the hire cost of pitches, perhaps with some additional funding from the SFA, could generate a useful sum that groups could then use for local football development initiatives.

Implications for other sports

The growth of Soccer Sevens may have some potentially significant implications for the development of other sports. At any time, the number of primary age school children is finite. If Soccer Sevens increases football's share of the 'primary age sport market', and overall levels of participation by primary age children remain the same, other sports must decline in popularity. For this reason, **sportscotland's** approach is to try to boost overall levels of participation, in particular by encouraging primary age children to take part in more than one sport.

Youth sport in Scotland

It is worth setting these issues in the more general context of the development of youth sport. In March 1997, the Scottish Sports Council commissioned the Centre for Leisure Research to undertake a study of provision for youth sport in Scotland. The results of this have been published in a summary report (**sportscotland** Research Report 63) and individual reports covering:

- local authority education departments (**sportscotland** Research Report 64)
- local authority recreation departments (**sportscotland** Research Report 65)
- governing bodies (**sportscotland** Research Report 66)
- secondary schools (**sportscotland** Research Report 67)
- primary schools (**sportscotland** Research Report 68)
- voluntary youth organisations (**sportscotland** Research Report 69)
- young people and sport (**sportscotland** Research Report 70)
- local sports councils (**sportscotland** Research Report 71).

Some of the key findings most relevant to Soccer Sevens include:

- **Young people's participation:** Swimming and football are the most popular sports amongst young people (defined as under 18), with more than 50 per

cent of young people participating in both of them. Over the period from 1988–1997 football participation grew by approximately 37 per cent. However, much of this football is pretty casual, with 83 per cent of the boys and 53 per cent of the girls who play the game playing at least once a week either at home, in the street, in a park or on waste ground (Research Report 63, page 9).

- **Clubs and competition:** Fewer than half the boys and only a third of girls are members of a sports club; amongst boys, football clubs were by far the most popular. However, only about a quarter of boys and fewer than a fifth of girls had taken part in organised competition in the four weeks before interview. For boys, football is the sport most likely to provide competition opportunities (Research Report 63, pages 9–10).
- **Frequency of participation:** Two thirds of young people want to take part in sport more often. The key constraints preventing them doing so are lack of time, lack of local facilities and lack of friends with whom to play (Research Report 63, page 10).
- **School participation:** Eighty-seven per cent of primary schools and 83 per cent of secondary schools offer football as part of the extended curriculum (Research Report 63, page 11).
- **Focus sports:** Seventy per cent of the local authority recreation departments responding to the survey regarded football as a focus sport for young people (Research Report 63, page 12).
- **Constraints on the development of youth sport:** Fifty-seven per cent of recreation departments and 46 per cent of education departments identified lack of finance as the main constraint on the development of youth sport in local authorities. Thirteen per cent of education departments also identified the cost of transport as a key constraint. Fifty-seven per cent of governing bodies identified a shortage of trained coaches as an obstacle to development. The other main constraint is the difficulty of accessing school facilities after 1600 hours and the limited number of coaches available at this time (Research Report 63, page 13).
- **Education and Physical Education:** Some teachers and education department officials believe that school sport programmes are educationally sound only when they are delivered by educationalists, and some are sceptical, or even dismissive, of ideas imported from sports development (Research Report 64, page 7).
- **Facility provision:** Around 82 per cent of secondary schools have at least one football pitch (Research Report 67, page 5).
- **Inter-school football matches:** Ninety-two per cent of primary schools had boys' teams participating in inter-school football and 73 per cent had girls' teams doing so (Research Report 68, page 12).

- **Supervising and coaching football in the extended curriculum:** Primary school staff supervise or coach football in 68 per cent of primary schools. In addition, about half of primary schools involve relatives and just under 20 per cent coaches in supervising or coaching football (Research Report 68, pages 17–19).

Soccer Sevens and schools

There is therefore something of a dichotomy at the heart of football for primary age children. On the one hand, the Youth Sport in Scotland research identified a scepticism or dismissive attitude to sport and sports development amongst staff in the local authority education service, coupled with a concern that sports coaches have a performance rather than educational focus. However, and in direct contradiction, it also identified that 92 per cent of primary schools take part in competitive inter-school football matches where winning is important. On the other hand, Soccer Sevens is determinedly 'trophy-free', inclusive and emphasises skill development, participation and enjoyment. Clearly there is a need for a much more open-minded approach to Soccer Sevens in at least some parts of the education sector. If this is not forthcoming, the Soccer Sevens to 11-a-side transition problem will remain as a key football development issue in those areas where some schools continue to play the 11-a-side form of the game.

Integration of school and community structures

The other key issue for the future of Soccer Sevens relates directly to this dichotomy: whether primary schools' football will become integrated more closely with community-based small-sided football. On the one hand, the Scottish Schools' Football Association is committed to a policy that all primary level football should be small-sided in future. On the other, it is clear that football, along with other sports, is in danger of being squeezed out of the primary curriculum as government demands that state schools deliver higher standards of academic achievement by their pupils. There is also evidence from the interviews undertaken as part of this study that school teachers and janitors may not be as willing as many were in the past to give time to promoting extra-curricular sport outside school hours.

In these circumstances, there is much to be said for the effective promotion of community-based Soccer Sevens, especially as the ethos of the game can be considered as educational and child-centred rather than competitive. Ultimately it may be the only way in which some children are able to play the game other, perhaps, than in a handful of local authority areas – for example Edinburgh – where the education department organises Saturday morning Soccer Sevens for school teams. However, as community-based Soccer Sevens expands, and provided it is seen by the education sector to be child-centred and responsibly administered (but see below), it is also possible that these school teams will be absorbed. This will obviously lead to an expansion of Soccer Sevens leagues, but may also make it easier for these expanded leagues to access what are now exclusively education sites.

Local football clubs

Finally, the development of Soccer Sevens could have significant long term implications for the future of many of Scotland's amateur football clubs, especially those in the central belt. Those clubs that are able to maintain an effective football development structure from youth to adult level, or form effective links with Soccer Sevens associations and boys' clubs or schools, and promote an effective transition to 11-a-side football, are probably most likely to be successful on the pitch, as they will have access to a pool of skilled young players. Many of the smaller, often single team clubs will not meet this criterion. In the longer term, the future must be larger clubs, offering a range of opportunities to players of all ages and abilities and both genders. The foundation on which these larger, 'development-minded' clubs can be built is Soccer Sevens.

CHAPTER 6: ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE – PITCH PROVISION

The demand for pitches

If the development of Soccer Sevens and other small-sided football for U12 children feeds through into higher levels of participation by teenagers and adults, this will clearly have significant implications for the demand for pitches.

Each of the four possible scenarios identified above (the development of Soccer Sevens at U13 and U14 level, the development of 9-a-side transition football, the expansion of competitive 11-a-side play, and the expansion of 5-a-sides participation) will have different implications for pitch planning and provision. Respectively, they are: a need for further Soccer Sevens pitches, but larger than those presently available; a need for pitches suitable for 9-a-side transition football; a need for more 11-a-side pitches; and a need for more 5-a-side courts.

Larger Soccer Sevens pitches

Given the SFA policy on the transition from U12 Soccer Sevens to 11-a-side play, it seems very likely that there will be a future need for additional Soccer Sevens pitches for youth teams at U13 and U14 level. Clearly they will have to be larger than the Soccer Sevens pitches currently used by primary age children. If there is a need for such pitches, however, it will be unlikely to have a major impact in terms of pitch planning or land use, as the majority of players will probably either move on to 11-a-side or play 5-a-side fairly quickly, for example after one season. Moreover, if the demand for 11-a-side pitches from this age group reduces as a result of their continued involvement in Soccer Sevens, it should be possible to convert some 11-a-side pitches.

There is obviously much to be said for secondary schools getting involved in the development of Soccer Sevens at U13 and U14 level. Football is a key activity in most state secondary schools and most have sizeable playing fields so should be able to meet their needs for pitches for either or both 7 and 11-a-side play. Artificially surfaced areas for Soccer Sevens will also be smaller and therefore cheaper than full size artificial turf pitches. The relatively few centralised school pitch sites owned and maintained by education authorities should also be able to accommodate both 7 and 11-a-side pitches. The first key conclusion, therefore, is that there is a clear need to maintain enough land to allow for changes over time in the demand for pitches of different sizes from both schools and school-age children playing through community-based structures. In some areas there may even be a need for more land to be allocated for pitches in local plans and open space strategies.

Pitches for 9-a-side transition football

The growing trend to 9-a-side transition football seems less likely to develop much further. Indeed, in those areas where it is already under way, it may well

turn out to be only a short term trend until those promoting 9-a-sides decide instead to follow SFA policy and stick to either Soccer Sevens or 11-a-side play. The Scottish Football Association has not specified a suitable pitch size for 9-a-side play and is unlikely to do so. The creation of 9-a-side transition pitches may impact on the present level of provision of 11-a-side pitches in some areas, simply because it is unlikely that they can be accommodated on existing grass areas in the way that many Soccer Sevens pitches have been. On the other hand, the majority of teenage players will move fairly quickly through this form of the game to 11-a-side play and therefore the development of a comprehensive system of leagues, and a consequential need for 9-a-side pitches, is probably unlikely.

The key issue is perhaps whether 9-a-side transition football, if it develops further, is played through school or community-based football development structures – or both. If the former, the main impact will be on school pitch sites; if the latter, it will tend to be on other pitch sites owned by local authorities.

11-a-side pitches

It seems likely that the development of Soccer Sevens should result in a long term need for more 11-a-side pitches. As such pitches are major land users, this implies a need for greater areas of land to be allocated for 11-a-side pitches unless significantly greater use can be obtained from individual pitches through the use of artificial surfaces – assuming that they are acceptable to players and the football governing bodies – and floodlighting.

More 5-a-side courts

Three main types of facility are used for 5-a-sides: sports halls, in either local authority sports and leisure centres, or on school sites; sub-divisions of full size artificial turf pitches; and multi-courts or purpose-designed 5-a-side courts. The evidence from the related study of 5-a-side football (Kit Campbell Associates and System Three, 2000) is that the most important factors involved in players' choice of facility are the playing surface, the lighting and the size of court, and that satisfaction with facilities, at least among those players aged under 45, is highest when they use purpose-designed outdoor courts. Accordingly it seems likely that the provision of purpose-designed 5-a-side courts should be a priority in many areas. Where there is sufficient population and demand to justify it, one or more specialist 5-a-side soccer centres will normally be the most appropriate form of provision as this will allow the effective development of leagues and back-up social accommodation. Given that Soccer Sevens pitches are approximately twice the size of adult 5-a-side courts, there may be scope to develop artificially surfaced Soccer Sevens pitches which can be subdivided for evening and weekend adult 5-a-side use using a portable rebound surface.

The future use of artificial surfaces

The reaction of some of the coaches and development officers consulted in the course of this study to new forms of artificial pitch suggests that football may be

starting to reappraise its attitude to artificial surfaces. Certainly, those community coaches and development officers with experience of the newer, longer pile forms of artificial turf speak highly of it as very similar to natural turf as a playing surface. For Soccer Sevens use, however, it will be necessary to develop a new form of purpose built goal as the present type has to be anchored down and is therefore designed for use on grass only.

The growing acceptability of artificial surfaces may turn out to have two potentially highly significant implications. First, a growing number of artificial pitches will be suitable only for football and not both football and hockey. Second, if floodlit artificial pitches can be created that provide playing conditions very similar to natural turf, there should be a growth of mid-week evening training and possibly matches.

The logical end result is that artificial pitches may then be used for recreational matches on mid-week evenings and grass pitches for more serious matches at the weekend. In many areas already, Saturday leagues are perceived as being for more serious play than Sunday ones. This could change the pattern of participation in football and ease the peak demand for pitches on Sunday mornings. As suggested above, it could also help to keep many players in the game who might otherwise drop out. Perhaps more significant in land use terms, it could reduce the need for more 11-a-side grass pitches, providing sites can be found on which floodlighting will be acceptable. This links to the next issue.

The conversion of blaes pitches

Several interviewees highlighted the number of blaes pitches in Glasgow and the West of Scotland as a constraint on the development of Soccer Sevens – and an obvious opportunity to provide more grass or artificial pitches. **sportscotland** is encouraging local authorities with significant numbers of blaes pitches to review the pattern of provision and use of these pitches, with a view to formulating a strategy for their future conversion to grass or artificial pitches. For obvious reasons, priority should be given to those sites that already have, or could have, changing accommodation and floodlights as this will make them suitable for artificial surfaces. **sportscotland** has estimated the cost of converting a blaes pitch to grass as approximately £80,000 and to an artificial surface around £350,000, with floodlighting extra.

The need for local pitch strategies

Pitches underpin all of the potential development of football and it seems that the game in Scotland is currently at what may turn out to be a key moment in its development. There is little evidence from this study that local authorities, as the main providers of pitches in most areas, have sought to develop effective pitch strategies. On the other hand, there is considerable evidence of cutbacks in the maintenance of many local authority pitches. Inadequate pitch maintenance can affect the enjoyment of the game for players and ultimately participation levels. There is therefore a clear need for local authorities to review the pattern and quality of pitch provision in their area on a regular basis. The

most obvious way for this to be done is through playing pitch strategies that are reviewed every 4–5 years and take into account the views of the football development groups suggested on page 20 above.

There is a general view in sports facility planning that demand and supply should be roughly in balance. If there is an inadequate stock of facilities in an area, some demand cannot be converted into participation, with detrimental impacts in terms of individuals' health and welfare; and if there is over-supply, money has probably been wasted. This thinking is inappropriate when planning pitches because there is a clear need always to maintain a surplus of pitch space. The reasons for this include:

- Uncertainty over the required future number of pitches of different types. We do not yet know the long term impact that Soccer Sevens – and other team sport participation initiatives such as mini-rugby and Kwik Cricket (not to mention the implementation of *Sport 21*, the national strategy for sport in Scotland) – will have on future patterns of participation.
- The need to be able to alter the configuration of pitch sites to provide varying numbers of small-sided pitches for Fun Fours and Soccer Sevens for primary age children; transition pitches for younger teenagers; 11-a-side pitches for older teenagers and adults; and (possibly, although not necessarily on pitch sport sites) 5-a-side courts.
- The need to rest heavily used grass pitches to allow them to recover, for example over the summer period when most Soccer Sevens play takes place.
- Uncertainty over the extent to which artificially surfaced pitches can meet demand. This will depend mainly on the attitudes of both players and the football governing bodies to new artificial surfaces; the way in which leagues are organised; the availability of planning permission for floodlighting; and the development of new surfaces.
- The future of school sport: increased pressures on schools to deliver higher standards of achievement by their pupils in the 'three Rs' are having a serious impact on physical education. In the future, there may be a need for further development of community-based structures to enhance children's 'physical literacy', which could impact on the pattern of pitch provision.

The one thing that seems certain is that Scotland will not require *less* land for pitches in the future. It follows that schools and local authorities should resist the temptation to dispose of or develop 'surplus' pitches where there is only a limited surplus and take a long term view of probable local needs. Moreover, planning authorities should not grant planning permission to other agencies wishing to do so unless there is a large local surplus of provision or alternative provision can be made in accordance with National Planning Policy Guideline NPPG 11, *Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space* (Scottish Office Development Department, June 1996).

REFERENCES

Scottish Sports Council (now **sportscotland**), *Sport 21: Nothing Left to Chance*, April 1998

Kit Campbell Associates and System Three, *5-a-side Soccer*, **sportscotland** Research Report 76, 2001

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONSULTEES

Football governing bodies

Jim Fleeting
SFA Director of Development

Hugh Knapp
Secretary, Scottish Amateur
Football Association

John Young
Secretary, Scottish Schools Football
Association

David Little
Scottish Youth Football Association

Maureen McGonigle
Secretary, Scottish Women's
Football Association

SFA football development officers

Aberdeenshire
Jim Crawford

Edinburgh
Stuart Rafferty

Glasgow
Craig Mulholland and Angela Hind

Clackmannanshire
Barry Nicholson

Dumfries and Galloway
Sergei Baltacha

East Dunbartonshire
Nicola Barbour

East Lothian
Walter Borthwick

East Renfrewshire
John Brown

Fife
Paul Freeman

Inverclyde
David Provan

Midlothian
Scott Kinross

Highland
Ross Jack

North Ayrshire
Richard Wilson

Moray
Neil Simpson

North Lanarkshire
Tommy McIntyre

South Ayrshire
Raymond Farrelly

Stirling
Andy Gould

West Dunbartonshire
Graham Diamond

West Lothian
Jim Grant

SWFA football development officers

Forth Valley
Alison Mackie

SFA community coaches

Aberdeen FC
Chic McLelland

Dundee United FC
John Holt

Falkirk FC
Tony Docherty

Heart of Midlothian FC

Alan White

Hibernian FC

Malcolm Thomson

Kilmarnock FC

Eric Young

Motherwell FC

Colin MacKinnon

Ross County FC

Danny MacDonald

St Johnstone FC

Atholl Henderson

St Mirren FC

Matt Kerr

Local authorities**Aberdeen**

Wendy Carrick

Womens/girls Football Development
Officer

City of Edinburgh Council

Brian Harris

Principal Officer, Sport/Outdoor
Education

Others

Simon Farrelly

sportscotland

Youth Football Coordinator

Brian Devlin

East of Scotland Soccer Sevens
Development Association

David Berrie

West Lothian Soccer Sevens
Development Association

Ronnie Ahlfeld

Gourock Athletic Club

Gerry Bradshaw

Lanarkshire Soccer Sevens
Development Association