

9v9 and 11v11 Large Roster Rotation Guidance

It is fully understood that most if not all coaches would prefer smaller sized rosters. Fewer players on a team means less players to manage, and more playing time for each player.

As a Recreational program, our goal is to organize team rosters to provide that format, but also to place enough players on a team in anticipation of absences and conflicts (so teams do not play short) and to place as many players as possible without compromising our minimum playing time policy.

Given that different grades play in varying formats, and that our registration is seasonal and by town of play, there may be seasons where a team is allocated a larger than desired roster.

These large rosters on game day can be difficult to manage – especially in older age groups where games are organized by halves and not quarters (as quarters make for easier opportunities to rotate players).

Coaches should sketch a lineup and rotational plan for each game to better prepare for this challenge.

When organizing your lineup and rotation, there are a few things you need to consider:

1. Minimum playing time. That means everyone plays at least half a game. However, that doesn't mean everyone plays the same amount.
2. Positional rotation – are players rotating through the same line on the field (e.g. Susie is going to play defense this game, Mary is going to play midfield, Allie is going to play forward) or will players rotate through different positions?
3. Substitution frequency – this is often dictated based on the fitness levels of the players and the weather/temps that day. If their capacity is only about 10-12 minutes, you might need to sub every 10-12 minutes. If the temperature is moderate and players are fit enough for the pace of the game, you might sub once at the midpoint of each half.
4. Substitution moments – at the referee's discretion and permission, substitutions can occur at specific moments of the game (e.g. your team's throw-in, any team's goal kick, etc.). Those moments may not occur when you want them to, so having your substitutes ready to rotate a few minutes before you plan on it will allow them to enter as close to that desired time as possible.

Here are a few strategies on how and when to rotate players:

Set Positions and Partners:

Each player is assigned a set position for that specific game, and may have a partner they rotate in and out with. One player starts, and another player rotates in (1-for-1).

That rotation continues at regular increments (e.g. every 10 minutes), so minimum playing time occurs. The rotation might not be the same frequency per position (e.g. midfielders run more than defenders, so you might sub midfielders every 10 minutes but defenders every 17 minutes).

This works best with 11v11 teams with very large rosters.

A word of caution: you will want to balance your lineup so all of your more developed players are not on the field at the same time. There will be a drop off in play when they're rotated out if all of your less developed players are on the field simultaneously.

Also: rotating all players at once (like a hockey line change) will result in fresh legs on the field, but a large group of players who are not yet in the rhythm of the match. Exercise caution when subbing all of your players at once.

Rotate Through a Line:

Similar to the previous strategy, but players might rotate into specific positions within the same line of the field (defenders, midfielders, strikers).

For example: assume you have a 9v9 team playing 1-3-4-1 formation (1 goalkeeper, 3 defenders, 4 midfielders, and 1 striker).

For those four midfielder positions, you might have three substitutes, which allows one player at each rotation to play a little extra.

For example: A, B, C, and D start with E, F, and G sitting out.

- E rotates in for A
- F subs in for B
- G rotates in for C.
- D stays on the field.

At the next rotation:

- A rotates in for D
- B for E
- C for F
- G plays longer.

Depending on your game day roster size, this may end up being a combination of Set Positions/Partners and Rotating Through a Line, where your defending line rotates with partners (X, Y, Z start, 1, 2, and 3 rotate in) and your midfielder line rotates with fewer players.

Rotate within Groups:

Similar to rotating through a line, but instead focus on positional groups and sides. Using the 9v9 example from above:

Organize a left sided block or group of players to rotate between the defender and midfielder position, a right sided block or group, and then a central block/group between center defenders, center midfielders and striker (or one central block for your defenders and a midfielder, and another central block for your playmaker and striker).

This too may end up as a hybrid, as you're rotating some players 1-for-1 and others – more likely your more developed players in central roles – as a block of players with fewer substitutes.

All three strategies are typically dictated by the number of players present on game day, and may adjust during the game too (e.g. a player is injured and unable to return to the match). Sketch your lineup, but be prepared to adjust as needed.

Good luck!