



# GUIDE TO JOINING A LEAGUE

Essential reading before  
joining any new league.

# A GUIDE TO JOINING A LEAGUE

The things you need to know.

*5-a-side.com*



There are so many options around these days when it comes to 5 and 6-a-side leagues. And no wonder, with the rise in good quality facilities over the past decade, people are starting to cotton-on that **small sided football gives you more bang for your buck than any other team-sport around**, including regular 11-a-side football.

Making the decision to join a league is a good one, so congratulations for thinking about doing it. But you don't want to just join any old league, and you certainly don't want to do it before you've checked a few things out first. Choose a good league, and you've got weeks, months, even years of brilliant footballing action ahead. Join a bad league and you're signing up for sheer footballing misery.

Of course, we want you to pick the right league to join, so here's our checklist of

what to consider before joining a 5-a-side (or indeed any sort of small-sided football) league.



*Start practicing your celebrations - you're going to join a league*

## 1. Check that you have got enough committed players

By 'committed players' we mean people who can be relied on to turn up every week. Lots of people say that they're interested in joining your foray into a league, but when it comes to crunch time you might find that they preferred the idea over the reality. Having a shortage of players every week gets very old very fast, no to mention being financially draining if the match fee is getting shared between an ever-shrinking pool of players.

To join a 5-a-side league you ideally need a squad of eight players. This should enable you to get the core of five players and between one and three subs each week (although 2 is really the ideal number of subs). Eight players will give you enough of a pool to call on so that if someone gets injured or is away on holiday you should still have cover.

If you're joining a 6-a-side league then you should add an extra one to that target, so you'll need a pool of nine players. Again, the chances are that some weeks there will be a reason why one or two of your nine can't make it, but you'll still be left with enough cover.

So, before you go signing yourself and your mates up, it's worth double checking that they're really committed to this venture. Everyone will tell you they like the idea of joining a league in theory, but when it comes to asking them to show up every Wednesday night, come rain or shine, even when there's football on the TV, it can be a very different story.

You might also want to think about whether your squad is up to standard and you definitely want to make sure that you've got a keeper – in fact, go to the ends of the earth to get a good keeper, as it's the single most important position in your squad. If you can't find a good keeper, find someone enthusiastic and train them up with the [ultimate 5-a-side goalkeeping guide](#).

*Bonus tip: Sometimes people put off the idea of joining a league because they don't have quite enough players. This needn't be the case - there are loads of people looking to play football - you just need to find them. If you want to see exactly how to do that, based on our own tried and tested strategies, read our [guide to finding local football players](#)*

## 2. Check out the detail for the leagues you're thinking of joining

You want to look for good local facilities rather than just going for the big providers you've heard of, even though it might turn out that the big providers are your best local venue. Search for your nearest and best facilities first and then look at what kind of league action is on offer. When you call up or go to see the venue you should find it easy to get details of the leagues they've got on offer. Almost every 3G pitch will have small-sided football leagues running.

If you're able to, go and check out the facilities in advance, which might also give you chance to see the league in action. It's worth knowing the format the games are played in - e.g. in cages or on open pitches - so you can see if you think it will suit you. You can also check out the surface they're playing on – it's definitely more pleasant playing on 3G or 'rubber crumb' pitches than the inferior sand-based alternatives that are still knocking around.

**Never, ever, join a league without speaking to the organizer**, so if you haven't

got chance to meet them in person, it's worth giving them a call to suss out what sort of operation they're running. These are the main things you should be looking to find out:

1. **Does the organizer appear organised and professional?** If they're friendly, can give you good responses to your questions then you know that they've got a genuine interest in their leagues and organizes them well. If on the other hand he seems sketchy on details, is short with you, seems disinterested or you detect undertones of chaos then think carefully before signing up and subjecting yourself to weeks of torture inflicted by his shoddy operation. Anyone can organize a league these days but the good ones are run by well organised, approachable people.
2. **Where and when is the league?** Make sure it's a time that realistically suits all of your group. Check with your squad before committing to a time that's just going to prove too difficult for most of your players to make.
3. **How long are the games, how many teams are there and how long is the season?** Remember, when committing to a league you're committing to play out the whole season. Nobody likes a drop out.
4. **What's the cost per week?** The upper rate you should be paying for a league depends on where you are looking to play, in the UK (if you're outside London) then you shouldn't be paying too much more than about £30-35 per team per hour (or at least per 40 minutes). We're not saying you shouldn't pay more than this, just ask yourself if it's value for money.
5. **Is a deposit required?** Standard practice is for organizers to require a deposit which should be no more than one weeks' match fees. You might be lucky enough to find an operator who waives this fee, but a lot of leagues will insist on this as it discourages teams dropping out and leaving the league in a mess.
6. **Are there any freebies on offer?** Some leagues never seem to offer freebies, but others will run promotions from time to time, especially where they're looking to start new leagues. Things on offer might include a free game, reduced fees for a period of time, or even free kits. A word of caution, though: a free kit or other extra is nice to have, but don't get giddy over it and be suckered into joining a crappy league.
7. **How many spaces are available for teams in the league?** You don't want to be joining a league that's struggling to get enough teams – make sure that you're not joining an unpopular league. If there are lots of spaces it's worth checking why. If it's because lots of teams have dropped out, that's a red flag. Having multiple teams dropping out can indicate that the league isn't well run.
8. **When could you start playing?**

A good conversation with the organiser, covering the above points, can be very insightful. As a minimum, all leagues should have decent qualified referees, and post fixtures and results online (worth going online for a quick check to see) as well as trophies for winners at the end of the season (yes, go on, dream of glory).

Ask as much as you need to from the organiser and then tell them you need to check with the rest of the team before calling back. Not only does this stop you making any rash decisions but it also allows him the chance to entice you in with other things – “hey how about coming along for a trial game” / “did I mention you get a free match-ball to keep” / “I’m sure that I can waive your deposit”. Even after they lure you in with these comments, don’t commit right then – you honestly do need to speak to the rest of your team.



*Always speak to the league organizer to check he's not a shifty character...*

### 3. Speak to the rest of the players and make a decision

Clearly, before you make a commitment you need to check with the rest of the team that the arrangements / price / location is OK. This is probably a good time to re-confirm that everyone’s committed (see step 1) and, if not, rope in extra players.

If you’re struggling to get a squad of 8 then you can always call your new friend, the league organizer, and explain your dilemma. They often have contacts of others who might be looking for a team to join.

### 4. Enjoy

Joining a league is going to be a fantastic fun and is going to give you some great camaraderie with your mates over the coming weeks. Before you decide, however, remember that not all leagues are created equal, so do go through the steps we suggest above to make sure that it's right for you and your team.

Happy playing!

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