

Inside Small-Sided: Latin America

From Mexico City to Rio de Janeiro, via Buenos Aires and Santiago – this Nike News series looks at how the small-sided game continues to influence the development of football in Latin America ahead of the 2015 Copa América.

Football in Latin America is much more than a sport or hobby. It is a passion that has built national identities. Football helps people learn how to express themselves, forge friendships and bond with their community.

Over the last century, the region has molded some of the most awe-inspiring players and technically gifted teams that football has ever seen — and with unparalleled consistency. The reason behind this phenomenon is clear: In Latin America, football begins with small-sided. Friends (and foes) are made by it. Communities are catalyzed by it.

In this four-part story series, professional players, aspiring talent, leading coaches and cultural figures all provide insights into the rich small-sided heritage in Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile.

TALENT AND IMPROVISATION

The best players from Latin America established their roots in small-sided. Playing on crowded, confined pitches equips players with the ability to control and move the ball at speed, boosts confidence in possession and instills a sense for ruthless finishing.

Informal games, free of expectation and authority, help players refine techniques. The games force players to be evermore inventive with the ball and in contact with it more often during a game. With unpredictable surfaces and split-second switches from defense to attack, players develop greater all-around talents.

“The popularity of football exceeds the amount of space available to play it,” says Max Blau, VP of Nike Football Footwear. “With space being a factor, confined brilliance happens where players improvise, dribble and fake an opponent to make their mark on the pitch.”

The unique characteristics of the small-sided game, including specific insights from across Latin America, provided the inspiration for the recently launched [NikeFootballX](#) collection, which features remixed versions of Nike’s groundbreaking football boots, Magista and Mercurial.

The MagistaX and MercurialX both include recycled Nike Grind rubber on high abrasion and drag areas for enhanced durability. The MagistaX features a responsive Lunarlon midsole while MercurialX has low-profile Phylon cushioning. Both boots are available in indoor court (IC) and turf (TF) versions with outsoles that cater not only to the relevant surface, but the underfoot play prevalent in

small-sided.

“My neighborhood is well-known for football and I’m proud to represent it together with my friends – when we play, we play with honor. Being part of the same team for so long means we have a lot of confidence in one another and in ourselves,” says Zurdo, forward and captain, Tepito Futsal in Mexico City.

COMMUNITY

Among futsal clubs and 5-a-side crews, understanding and alliances go well beyond the pitch; teams nearly always comprise life-long friends or even family members. Pitches and clubs serve as hubs where locals stay connected with one another and nurture talent collectively.

In small-sided culture, the relationships before and after the game are just as important as the competition itself. Today, [social media](#) increasingly connects players and teams with one another – building cross-city and cross-country bonds.

“Small-sided is where young players are finding and defining their style of play. As they evolve, mature and emerge as the next wave of footballers, those styles will influence and inspire the next generation, and the cycle continues,” says Blau. “Nike will continue to lead innovations specific to the demand of these young players.”

Small-sided football is the incubator where reality is escaped and dreams are born. The next generation of Latin American footballing talent will create and define the beautiful game – by way of small-sided.

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