



NEXT GENERATION

Australian Football Match Policy

For the conduct of the game for players aged 5-18 years



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Australian Government



Australian Government

Australian Sports Commission

The AFL gratefully acknowledges the support of the
Australian Government for AFL Development Programs,
through the Australian Sports Commission.



NEXT GENERATION

Australian Football Match Policy

For the conduct of the game for players aged 5 -18 years

In partnership with AFL State and Territory affiliates



Contents

Background

Introduction: Andrew Demetriou, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Football League	7
Why do we need a Junior Policy?	8
AFL stages of development	9
Participation and talent pathways	11
Age policy	12
Female participation	13
Children with disabilities	13

The AFL Junior Policy (5-12 years)

Introduction	16
Underpinning principles of the AFL Junior Policy	17

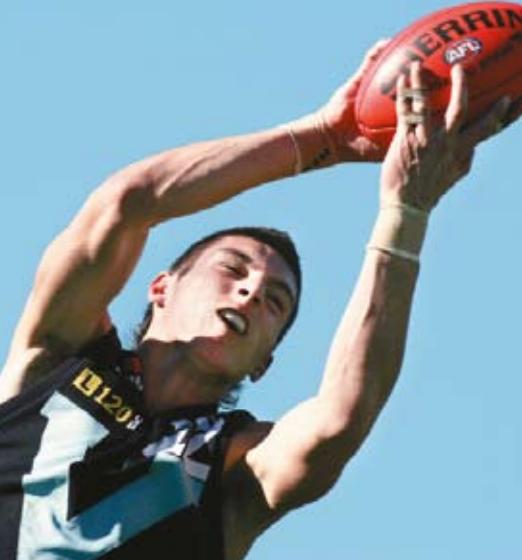
AFL Junior Match Program

5-8 years	20
9-10 years	24
11-12 years	28
Junior Girls (11-12 years)	31



The AFL Youth Policy (13-18 years)	34	Roles and responsibilities	56
Introduction	36	The umpire	58
Junior and Youth Match Program (Table)	38	AFL umpire development program	59
AFL Youth Match Programs		Coaching pathways	61
13-14 years	40	Codes of conduct	64
Youth Girls (13-15 years)	41	AFL Kids First	65
15-18 years	44		
Youth Girls (16-18 years)	45		
AFL Recreational Football	46	Keeping Junior Football Safe	66
NAB AFL Rising Stars Program	48	Legal considerations	68
		Safety considerations	70
		Environmental conditions	72
		Further information	
		Further resources and website references	73





Introduction

This policy is designed to promote measures that will maximise the enjoyment and development of young players. As Andrew Demetriou explains – they are the Next Generation ...

The Australian Football League (AFL) is the governing body of Australian Football. As the “keeper of the code” we aim to actively support all levels of Australian Football from NAB AFL Auskick to the elite level of the game and every point in between. The AFL’s investment in the development of the game exceeds more than \$40 million and is designed to introduce and retain the next generation of young players and their families.

We want to maximise the recruitment and retention of players and umpires. Our research tells us that retaining both groups in the game is a function of quality and, at its most basic level, the quality of the experience is assessed by how the game is conducted. For this reason, in collaboration with our state affiliates and expert consultants, we have developed a comprehensive junior policy to provide clear direction for the provision of appropriate pathways for all boys and girls in safe, enjoyable and accountable environments.

We do know participation in our great game, in safe and enjoyable NAB AFL Auskick and junior club environments can significantly contribute to the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of young people. We recognise the value this sport has in

communities across Australia but we also recognise two other factors determine choice of sport. Firstly, young people today have an unprecedented amount of choice in terms of sporting and leisure activity. Secondly, we understand family time has become more precious than ever before with the pressures on parents today. Both factors lead me to one conclusion – that Australian Football must be the best experience possible.

Given the experience is most often delivered by our army of volunteers, who are also under much pressure, we do hope this policy provides a practical, easy-to-follow guide that makes effective implementation as easy as possible.

It is vital that providers of junior football are familiar with, and adopt, the procedures contained in this policy to ensure participating boys and girls have a fun, safe and positive football experience.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Demetriou".

Andrew Demetriou
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Football League

Why do we need a junior policy?

The AFL and its state affiliates have a view that any person wishing to participate in our great game should be able to do so in a manner that is appropriate to his or her skills, needs and aspirations, and that takes into account the facilities available. With this in mind, it is appropriate young players are introduced to the game through a sequentially modified match program that consists of modifications to the Laws of Australian Football. In other words, young players have different needs to adults.

We want to maximise participation in the game. This is best achieved by providing non-discriminatory and inclusive practices when delivering junior football in an environment where all children – regardless of their capability, cultural background, social or geographic situation, gender or sexuality – can sequentially develop their skills through appropriate activities, games and match rules. This policy is designed to support such an environment by outlining what is recommended as appropriate conduct of the game at junior levels.

The overriding objective of this policy is:

To provide an environment where young players can play the game and inexperienced umpires can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions commensurate with their stage of learning and level of ability.

It should be noted:

- › the Laws of Australian Football as administered and controlled by the AFL apply to and guide this policy. This policy explains how variations to the Laws of Australian Football have been made to ensure the appropriate organisation and running of a junior match of football;
- › the procedures outlined in this document have been refined over a long period through experience, consultation and continual research;
- › the AFL recognises the need for various controlling bodies to determine their own arrangements within, but not outside, these guidelines;
- › young people grow and mature at different rates. This policy is considerate of this growth and maturation diversity and provides an appropriate and sequential range of programs and match rules to cater for the individual differences and needs of participating children; and
- › this policy is broadly divided into:
 1. AFL Junior Policy (5-12 years); and
 2. AFL Youth Policy (13-18 years).



AFL Stages of Development

The following descriptions have been developed to ensure a clear understanding of the objectives and focus of the policy at each stage of a young player's development. It begins with the Fundamental Stage (AFL Junior), which includes all participants in the game and culminates in the Maintenance Stage (senior players).

Stage descriptions

1. Fundamental Stage (5-11 years): AFL Junior

Objective: participation and learning fundamental movement and game skills.

The program is well-structured and fun. The emphasis is on the overall development of the participant's fundamental motor skills and physical capacities using game-related, skill-development activities. This is a critical period for motor skill development. Correct running and jumping, and basic game skills should be taught, and participation in a range of sports encouraged for all-round development. Simple rules and ethics are also introduced.

2. Sampling Stage (12-14 years): AFL Junior/Youth

Objective: learning all the fundamental skills of the game and developing basic physical capacities, while continuing to develop all-round sports skills.

Players learn how to train and consolidate the basic skills of the game. They are introduced to technical and tactical skills, including positional skills and basic performance-enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery, goal-setting, etc. This is a critical period for physical and skill development. The focus of training is on learning rather than competing, and a balance between training and playing is struck. Participants should continue to play a range of sports for their all-round development. This stage also includes initial identification for regional development squads.

3. Identification Stage (15-16 years): AFL Youth

Objective: developing higher-level skills of the game and physical capacities.

Optimise the development of fitness, individual, positional and team skills. Develop higher-level competition skills and provide appropriate competition to enhance learning and the opportunity to be identified for talent pathway programs.

At this age initial selection into state talent development programs including the AIS-AFL Academy are introduced.

4. Specialising Stage (17-18 years)

Objective: developing higher-level skills of the game and physical capacities.

Optimise the development of fitness capacities and individual, positional, team and competition skills.

For talented players, selection into state and national talent development programs, including the AIS-AFL Academy, continues. This includes the provision of an optimum competition program for player development that also provides opportunities to be drafted to the AFL. e.g. TAC Cup or state league competition.

5. Investment Stage (19-22 years)

Objective: complete development of all higher-level skills and capacities required for optimum performance.

This is the final stage of development, where the focus of the training is on completing a player's development and optimising performance.

For talented players, the refinement of physical, technical, tactical, mental and ancillary capacities is completed in the professional club environment.

6. Maintenance Stage (23-30+ years)

Objective: maintaining and maximising performance.

The players' physical, technical, tactical, mental and ancillary capacities are fully developed. The program is focused on competition and the training is aimed at optimising performance. Training is characterised by high intensity, relatively high volume and regular preventative breaks.

7. Retirement and transition stage (individual)

Objective: a successful transition from being a professional athlete to another productive role in life, including opportunities to remain in the sport.

This is the end of the high-performance competition stage, when players retire and move to other levels of competition or other roles, or out of football altogether. Continued physical activity is encouraged.





Participation and talent pathways

AFL player pathways

The AFL player participation pathway has been developed to ensure it contains the following principles:

- › Comprehensive (levels of participation that link);
- › Inclusive and equitable (accommodates all young people);
- › Coherent (prescribes links between levels);
- › Developmental (meets children's needs); and
- › Informed (by research and practice).

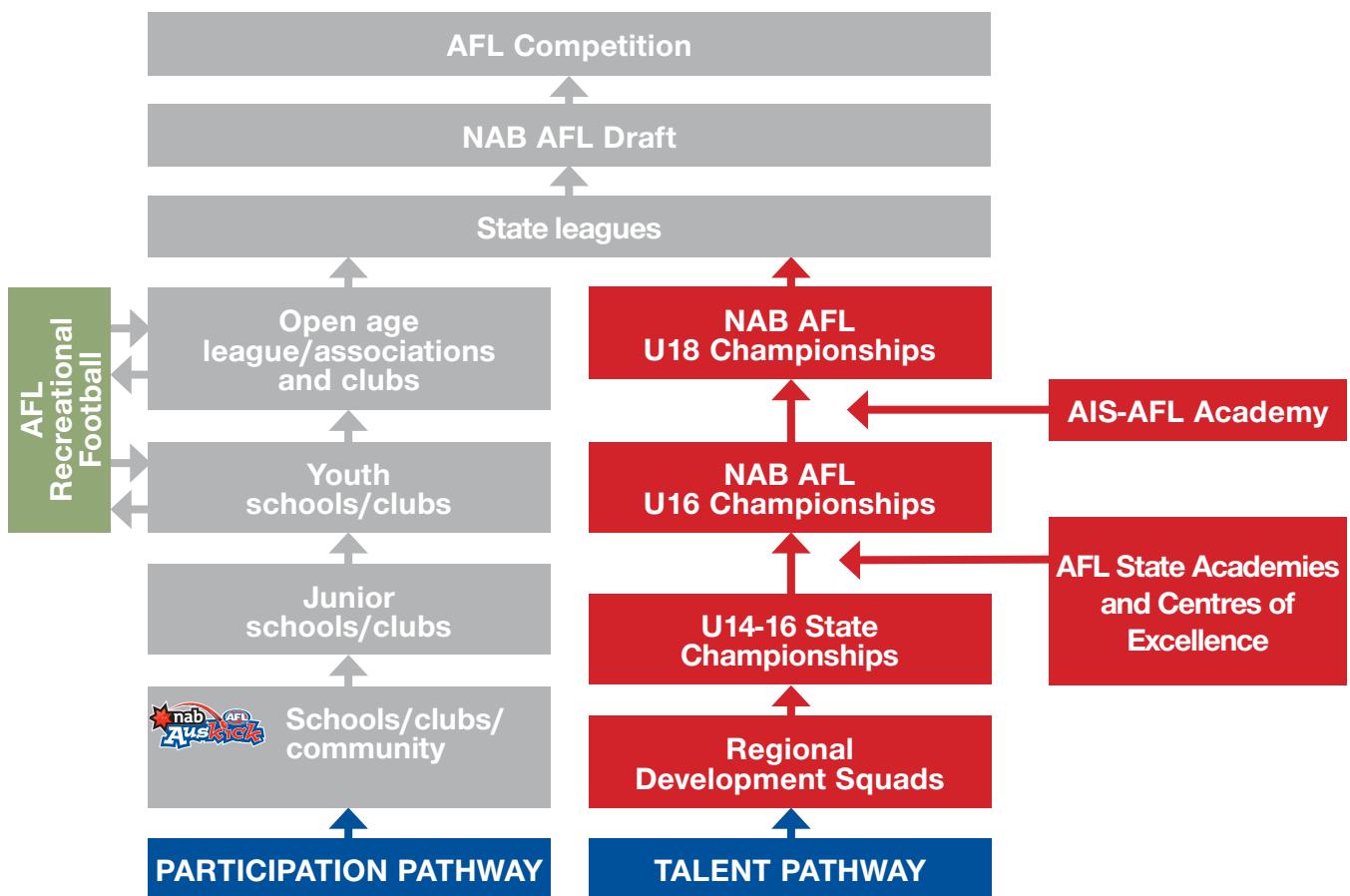
This pathway provides a quality environment where young players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of learning and ability.

At the youth level, the talent pathway to becoming an AFL player begins to emerge through regional development squads that

have the dual purpose of developing individual player's abilities and preparing teams to participate in state championships at under-14 level and above.

Australian Football coaches who are coaching at youth level should have a good understanding of the AFL participation and talent pathways. All players with whom they are working are part of those pathways and many will be dreaming of becoming AFL players. An understanding of the workings of the pathway and the processes used to identify and develop talented players are important tools for all youth coaches.

The AFL Rising Stars section of this policy includes elements of the evaluation process that are integral to the talent pathway and coaches may wish to use some of them, perhaps in modified forms, in their coaching programs.



Age policy

Minimum age – playing

NAB AFL Auskick Program – To participate in the AFL Auskick program children must turn 5 years of age in that calendar year.

AFL Junior – To participate in a fixtured AFL junior match children must turn 7 years of age in that calendar year.

Minimum age – umpiring

NAB AFL Auskick Program – Children should be provided with the opportunity to learn about and experience the role of the umpire. Developing a sense of fair play, respect for laws of the game and others is important and should be encouraged and practised by parents and AFL Auskick volunteers.

AFL Junior – In general the minimum age a child should umpire is 13. In addition, they should be supported where possible by a mentor who has completed the AFL's Umpire Mentor Program.

Competition age range

Where player numbers do not permit conducting a competition in every age group the AFL policy recommends that children participate in competitions with a two-year age span e.g. staggered age groups 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18. The AFL policy recognises in regional and rural areas the opportunity to conduct competitions with a two-year age span is not always possible. Where leagues and clubs have trouble fielding teams reducing player numbers is recommended (9-12 a side).

If a league has no alternative than to conduct competitions that involve players participating outside the recommended two-year age span they must firstly seek approval from their state football body. In these instances, coaches should endeavour to match players by age and ability level.

Playing down an age level

Junior leagues may at their discretion grant a player permission to play down an age level where a legitimate reason exists such as physical capacity or disability. Players seeking exemption need to provide relevant medical evidence for assessment by the controlling body. If no relevant medical evidence can be provided, the controlling body will determine the application for exemption as it sees fit, fully considering the circumstances presented.

Playing up an age level

The AFL policy acknowledges the principal role of the parent or guardian in determining if a player should play in a higher age competition than the one determined by the player's chronological age. Players should only be permitted to play up an age level when their physical capacity and social sense enable them to compete adequately at the higher age level. The decision whether a player should play up beyond the two-year age span should be based on the advantages to be gained by the player.

Prior to a player participating in a competition outside the recommended two-year age span, the player's parent or guardian must sign a consent form.



Female participation

The development of a participation pathway for female participants beyond AFL Auskick is critical to the long-term growth and development of the game. Junior leagues and clubs are encouraged to offer structured youth girls competitions for female participants graduating from AFL Auskick and mixed AFL junior competitions.

Note that the provisions of this aspect of the AFL's Junior Policy do not apply to umpiring and, accordingly, females will be appointed to officiate matches based on their ability and competency to do so.

This policy endorses the following participation pathway options for female participants aged 5-18 years.

5-12 years

- AFL Auskick program or mixed-gender junior fixtures using appropriate AFL junior rules.

13-14 years

- This policy strongly recommends that youth girls aged 13 and 14 years participate in a structured youth girls competition. However, if there is no youth girls competition available the following applies:
 - *In accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)¹, people aged under 12 years of age cannot be excluded on the basis of sex or gender identity from participating in a competitive sporting activity; and*
 - *Pursuant to section 42(1) of the Act, people of one gender aged 12 and over can be excluded from participating in competitive sporting activities in which the strength, stamina and physique of competitors is relevant.*

AFL members will exclude female participants who turn 14 years by January 1 in the year of play from playing in any competition that is not a 'female competition'.

Definition – A female competition is a competition conducted specifically for female participants.

If no youth or senior female football competition is available for a female player who turns 14 years by January 1 in the year of play, that female player may apply to play down an age level should she meet the criteria outlined with respect to such an exemption. If a senior female competition is available for a female player who turns 14 years by January 1 in the year of play, however that female player is not ready to progress to senior football, she may apply to play down an age level should she meet the criteria outlined for such an exemption.

The philosophy of this provision is to provide ongoing opportunities for female participants in a safe environment that is appropriate to the participant's skills and physical capacity. Junior leagues and clubs are encouraged to offer structured youth girls competitions for female participants graduating from AFL Auskick and mixed AFL junior competitions.

12-18 years

- AFL youth girls competitions at under-12, 15 and 18 levels, using appropriate AFL youth girls rules.

Senior women's

- Youth girls may graduate to senior women's competitions at 15 years old.

¹ The provisions of section 42 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) are essentially replicated in equivalent state legislation such as section 64-66 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic).

Providing for children with disabilities

The AFL has an inclusive approach to participation including a Disability Action Plan and supports the notion that every child has the right to be involved in sport, especially a sport like Australian Football. Including children with disabilities is not hard; it just requires enthusiasm and understanding.

Below are a few suggestions when working with children with disabilities:

- Check the needs and abilities of the children;
- Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the children;
- Every child is unique and should be provided with the same opportunities to participate;
- Work with what the child **can** do and if you are not sure ask them or their parents/carer;
- Children with disabilities, like all children, will improve considerably with continual exposure to skills. If the activity is the child's first exposure to a skill, have patience and give them time to improve;
- Introduce the child to a group;
- A youngster with a disability must be seen as a person first – the similarities to peers should be noted, not the differences;
- Activities can be modified to cater for all abilities. Children with a disability, like all children, may or may not require activities to be modified depending on their level of ability. Remember when modifying activities the integrity of the activity should be maintained;
- Any changes should be viewed as temporary, working towards, where possible, the original activity. If one change does not work, try another;
- Wherever possible have the child participate in all aspects of the day's activities; and
- Provide activities where children can succeed and develop self-esteem.

Remember all children must be encouraged to participate in all activities – People First Disability Second (*Acknowledgment: Australian Sports Commission's Disability Program*).

**S
A
F
E**

**T
E
N**

MADE IN INDIA
SYNTHETIC
RUBBER
SOLE





AFL JUNIOR POLICY

5-12 years

Introduction	16
Underpinning principles of the AFL Junior Policy	17
AFL Youth Match Program	
5-8 years	20
9-10 years	24
11-12 years	28
Junior Girls (11-12 years)	31

Introduction

The AFL Junior Policy refers to the philosophy, guidelines and requirements of conducting football for children aged 5-12 years with the aim of recruiting parents and children to Australian Football through the delivery of quality programs. The AFL Junior Policy is broadly underpinned by 2 components:

1. The NAB AFL Auskick program

The key introductory program for boys, girls and parents consisting of 8-12 weekly sessions conducted for 60-75 minutes. The AFL Auskick program has been segmented to include appropriate activities for children aged 5-8 years (AFL Auskick Rookie) and 9-12 years (AFL Auskick Pro). Children progress through a sequential program of warm-up games, skill activities, skill games and matches utilising appropriate modified rules. Small-sided matches between groups within the centre are a vital part of NAB AFL Auskick, occasional social matches (gala days) against other centres are appropriate and where possible should be played at half-time of senior matches.



2. AFL Junior

The rules and procedures for conducting modified matches at varying developmental levels, particularly for boys and girls aged 8-12, are designed specifically to maximise participation, skill acquisition and development. The AFL Junior rules are a feature of the NAB AFL Auskick program but importantly are also recommended for adoption by primary schools, community leagues and clubs that are responsible for delivering football to this age group.

The core philosophy of the NAB AFL Auskick and AFL Junior program is consistent to ensure Australian Football for children aged 5-12 has the following qualities:

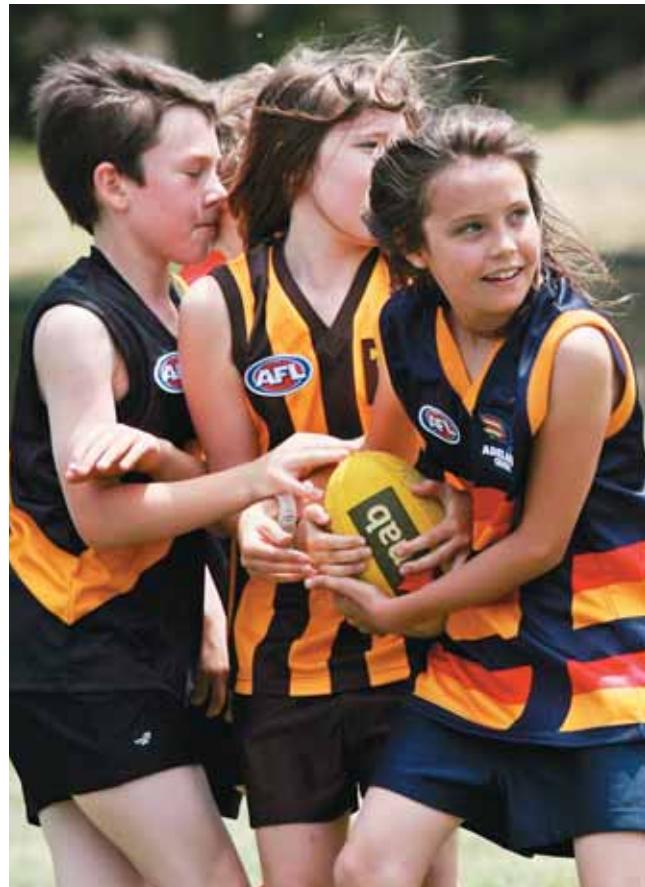
- › **Fun and safety:** football needs to be fun for all, but especially for this age group. Research has established that a sequential developmental program for children is extremely safe, particularly when involving appropriately accredited coaches. The activity for this age group must emphasise skill development as a priority and provide challenging match programs and a logical transition from introductory level through to competitions at clubs and schools.
- › **For children and parents:** to further ensure the progression from one level of involvement to the next is smooth and based on rules and procedures appropriate to the children involved. The rules and procedures are simple to follow and supported by resources and coach education. The importance of community ownership and management must not be underestimated.
- › **Managed by the community:** the environments at centres, clubs and schools are managed and controlled by the community, utilising AFL developed procedures as outlined in this policy.

In line with this philosophy, programs and competitions must be planned around what children look for to make it a positive football experience. In their words:

- › to have fun with their friends;
- › to experience excitement and enjoyment;
- › to experience challenge, achievement, and personal responsibility; and
- › to use and improve their skills.

Taking this into account, organisations aiming to provide football for this age group need to offer:

- › a program that enables all individuals to experience personal achievement, building competence, enhanced self-esteem, social cooperation, maximum participation and skill development in a FUN environment;
- › appropriate warm-up activities;
- › appropriate skill teaching in a sequential program;
- › appropriate skill drills and games;
- › appropriate AFL Junior (modified-rules) matches;
- › appropriately trained and accredited coaches, umpires and officials; and
- › support for learning and inexperienced umpires.



Underpinning principles of the AFL Junior Policy

Introduction

The coach plays a key role in the major focus of matches for AFL juniors. His/her primary role, given safety, legal and ethical responsibilities apply to coaches at all levels, is to arrange the best possible teaching and learning conditions in matches for the children participating.

Playing ground, time and equipment

The AFL Junior Policy is committed to a reduced playing area, playing time and suitably modified equipment to take the emphasis away from endurance and allow for greater skill development. With smaller grounds, the players are encouraged to concentrate because the ball is never far away.

Team composition

The AFL Junior Policy also endorses reduced numbers in teams as this allows individual players to have more frequent and longer contact with the ball, and enables the coach to see more clearly problems in basic skill development among the players. It also allows appropriate matching of opponents and teams.

With fewer players, play is more open, even when played on a smaller oval. Because of the openness of the game,

and the fact only 2 to 4 youngsters of similar size and ability usually contest the ball at once, marking and skills can be better developed.

The elimination of rucks and rovers reduces congestion and gives more players the opportunity to learn the basics of defence and attack, high-ball work and gathering skills.

Rotation of players

Adherence to the AFL Junior Policy will mean children experience playing in a variety of positions. The practice of rotating players through different positions and the interchange enables the development of a solid foundation before specialisation at a later time, and adds variety and interest to the matches.

Out of bounds

If the ball is kicked out of bounds, a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked it. If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary. The elimination of boundary throw-ins means the number of opportunities to kick the ball is increased, congestion is reduced and the ball is kept in motion.

No tackling rule (optional at 11-12 years)

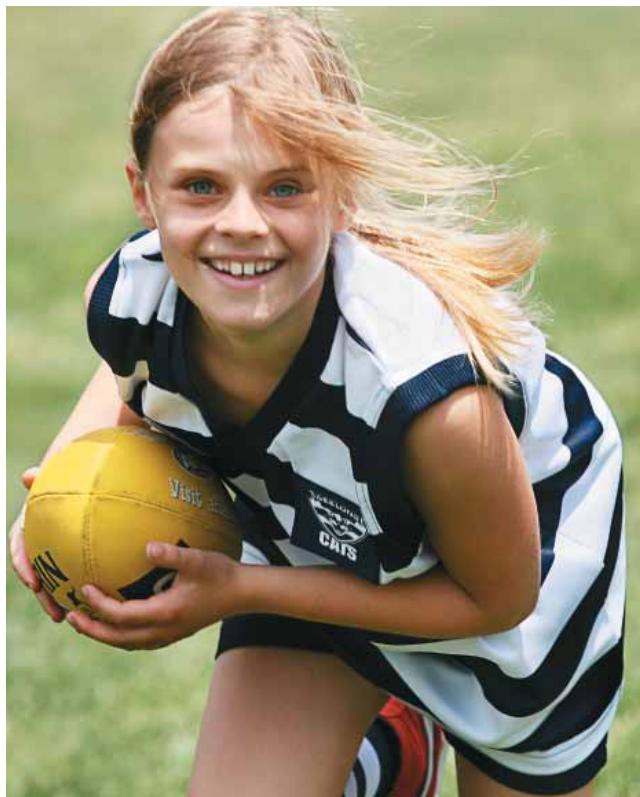
The AFL Junior Policy of deferring the introduction of tackling is based upon the need to provide players with the best possible conditions to learn, develop and improve their disposal skills (kicking and handballing) by reducing congestion and pressure on the player in possession. All skills are eventually taught and learned, but this policy sets out an appropriate sequence for doing so.

Players will also better develop skills of turning, twisting and dodging, be free to concentrate on the ball rather than the opposing player, and be less likely to incur injury. Most importantly, children will be more confident to try to gain possession than in a high-pressure environment where tackling is allowed.

The physiological and emotional readiness of children's bodies to resist the pressures of tackling also needs to be recognised in assessing when to introduce tackling. The appropriate age will vary from child to child, but generally is recognised as being about 11 or 12.

Gaining possession

At the appropriate time, the AFL Junior Policy allows the introduction of the skills of knocking and stealing the ball from an opponent. At all stages, there is considerable





vigour in the game, and contesting the ball on the ground requires determined play as possession of the ball must be gained – it is not to be kicked off the ground.

Marking

The AFL Junior Policy of marks being awarded regardless of how far a kick travels is designed to reduce congestion and to encourage players to attempt to mark the ball. It also recognises many youngsters cannot kick the ball more than 15 metres.

Bouncing

The AFL Junior Policy stipulates players aged 5-10 may take one bounce, and players aged 11-12 two bounces when in possession of the ball. This prevents players

running excessive distances with the ball, encourages disposal skills and enhances team play. Playing to position, especially within zones in matches with small team numbers, is also made easier.

Kicking off the ground

Although it might be argued this is a skill in itself, the AFL Junior Policy does not allow it in AFL Junior rules. This enhances development of possession and disposal skills by making players gain control of the ball. Having done so, they then might take a bounce, but then they must kick or handball to a teammate while under limited or no pressure. Such possession and disposal skills are vital to the development of all players.

Use of zones

The AFL Junior Policy embraces zones for the younger children as an excellent teaching practice. Firstly, the use of zones restrict pairs of players to an area and, thereby, prevents ball-chasing and subsequent congestion where all players congregate around the ball. Secondly, it enables groups of players of similar size and ability to play within a zone. That is, talls can play on talls in one zone, smalls on smalls in another. When the zones rotate, the groupings stay together but play in different positions.

The coach on the ground

The absence of stringent competition conditions should enable the coach to provide praise when warranted or explain errors immediately after they occur.

Although the intent of the AFL Junior Policy is to enable teaching and feedback as the match continues, it might be preferable for coaches in the older age groups to remain on the sidelines and to use a runner to deliver a teaching point or message.

Barging

The AFL Junior Policy endorses the prevention of barging to stop players (particularly the stronger ones) from running through and over players rather than disposing of the ball.

In the younger age groups, NO contact is to be made, so the barging rule is automatically applied.

Premiership points competitions

The AFL Junior Policy is based upon a belief the football program to be offered to players 12 years old might:

- need to be the modified program presented in this document; or
- in a well-conducted league with appropriate development structures, it might be the alternative premiership program (as in the 13-14 year level) in this document.



Such a decision should be made by the relevant controlling body and endorsed by the state football bodies.

Where (b) is the preferred option, it must be implemented as part of a skill development program used to teach the youngsters how to play the game in a positive, rewarding environment for all players. Accredited coaches should be engaged and implement skill development and varied training programs, avoiding the narrow focus of winning ahead of development and participation.

Where playing for premiership points leads to leaving lesser players sitting on the bench or left out of the side completely, the spirit of the AFL Junior Policy is broken. AFL Junior matches are intended to be a means of enhancing the individual's performance by encouraging all players to participate, while developing their self-esteem and sense of achievement. Where winning overrides such aims, and encouragement is replaced by a fear of failure, the program for children is inappropriate.

Information meetings with parents

In establishing support for and understanding of the AFL Junior Policy and, in particular, the rules and procedures for conducting AFL Junior matches, it is vital:

- › coaches, support staff and, where possible, umpires should meet with players and parents to outline such rules and procedures, particularly as they apply to the rotation of players and the use of interchange.

Awards

Awards should not replace or detract from the fun and enjoyment gained by participation in the program and the learning that is an integral part of it.



AFL Junior Match Program

5-8 years

6-a-side to 9-a-side: As part of the NAB AFL Auskick program or in club and school competitions (under-8 only)

Purpose

To provide the children in this age group with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the maturity level of their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The emphasis is on the development of FUNdamental movement skills (the ABCs of athleticism – Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed) and basic game skills (kicking, handballing, marking, and gathering). The match program for this age group provides an introduction of basic roles (forward, centre and back) and tactical principles of gaining possession, moving forward, passing to a teammate.

Spirit of the game

Before the start of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure that players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the game.

The spirit of the game is **to give all available players a game of football**. Therefore:

- › where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers;
- › excess players on one team should be given to the opposition team if they are unable to field the required numbers;
- › coaches should consider modifying side numbers to ensure all players participate. For instance, if planning 9-a-side but only 12 players in total are available, play 6-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play 2 games of 6-a-side, or one 9-a-side game with one 6-a-side game.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the game while awarding kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit of AFL Junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and to give **the player in possession of the ball every opportunity to kick or handball**. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to **Contact/tackling**);
- › attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which player is to receive a free kick after the ball has been kicked out of bounds and by

ensuring the effective rotation of players through the 3 zones of play; and

- › enforce the **full possession rule** at all ball-ups (see below).

In relation to all ball-ups, the full possession rule applies as follows:

- › a player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on;
- › the player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player or hit the ground.

The game – premiership points competitions

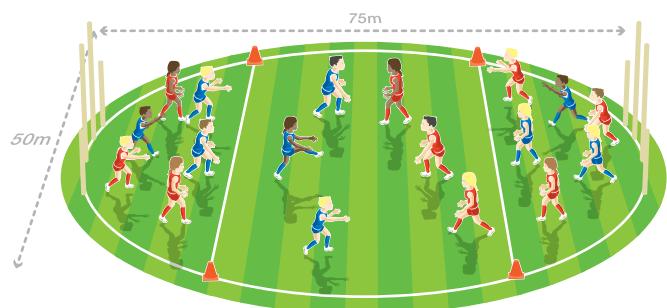
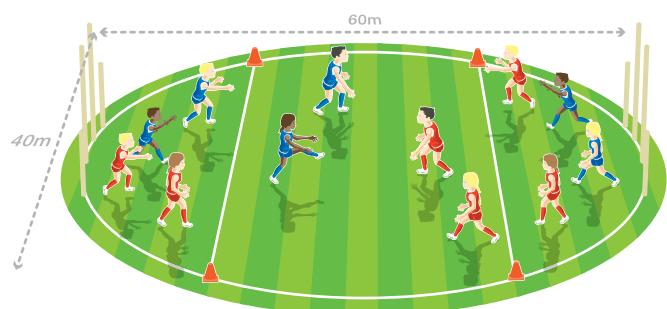
The football match program to be offered to players 5-8 years of age must comply with the modified match program presented in this document with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (scores) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams should be selected.

Playing ground and officials

The size of the playing field is reduced to:

- › 60m x 40m for 6-a-side matches; and
- › 75m x 50m for 9-a-side matches.

The field is divided into 3 equal zones (thirds) which should be identified by markers or lines on the ground.





These field sizes are the optimum size and flexibility is often needed, in particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players in a team, age and ability level.

A field umpire and 2 goal umpires are required, but there are no boundary throw-ins so no boundary umpires are needed.

The ball

A synthetic size one football should be used.

The team

6-a-side means: 2 forwards, 2 centres, 2 backs. Reserves: 2 recommended: rotate one zone off each quarter.

9-a-side means: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs. Reserves: 3 recommended: rotate one zone off each quarter.

Interchanges may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three-quarters of the match.

Rotate players every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone to another –

interchange to backs, backs to centres, centres to forwards, forwards to interchange – at the end of each period, after each goal or when instructed to do so by their coach.

Ensure the teams and opponents are as equal as possible (match sizes, abilities).

Zones

Backs are restricted to the back zone. Centres are restricted to the centre zone. Forwards are restricted to the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions (as above).

Transition of the ball

When the ball is in transition from the back zone to the forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the mid zone. Failing this, a free kick will be awarded to the opposition team at the point where the ball entered the end zone.

Scoring

Only players who are positioned as forward-zone players may score.

AFL JUNIOR POLICY

The possession rule

The ball is possessed by controlling it, catching it, grabbing it, or laying 2 hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, all other players **must back off to the side** of the player in possession, so that he or she can kick or handball uncontested (no blocking or standing in the path of the player in possession is permitted). Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.

Playing time

AFL Auskick program – recommended total playing time of 12 minutes.

AFL Junior fixture – maximum of 4 x 10-minute quarters with no time-on.

Start of play and restarting after a goal

When all players are inside their own zones, a ball-up is conducted between 2 centre-zone players of similar height nominated by the umpire. The umpire should nominate different pairs of players for subsequent ball-ups after goals are scored (full possession rule applies).

Scrimmage and field ball-ups

Where a scrimmage develops, if a free kick is not possible under the spirit of the game:

- › the umpire shall stop play, send players back to their zones and nominate 2 opponents of about equal size to contest a ball-up;
- › the nominated players need not be the tallest nor the nearest;
- › ‘full possession’ at the ball-up is not permitted (full possession rule applies); and
- › players should be encouraged to pick the ball-up and will be penalised for diving on it.

Out of bounds

From a kick: a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary. ‘Full possession’ at the ball-up is not permitted (full possession rule applies).

Contact/tackling

No contact or spoiling is permitted unless it is accidental and light shoulder-to-shoulder contact made while running to and at the ball. Players cannot:

- › hold an opponent with their hands;
- › knock the ball out of an opponent’s hands;
- › push an opponent in the side;
- › steal the ball from another player;
- › deliberately bump another player (only incidental contact is permitted); and
- › smother an opponent’s kick.

Shepherding

A player is not permitted to push, shoulder or block an opponent not in possession of the ball.

Barging

No barging, fending off or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick shall be awarded to the nearest opponent.

Mark and playing on

A mark is awarded – regardless of the distance the ball has travelled – to any player who catches the ball, or makes a reasonable attempt to catch the ball, from a kick. Endeavour should be encouraged (e.g. getting hands to the ball can be paid a mark). Set the mark after the mark is awarded. No playing on is allowed.

Bouncing the ball

Bouncing is optional, but no more than one bounce is permitted. The player must then dispose of it by hand or foot and may not touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player.

Distance run

While a player in possession of the ball is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 5 metres, irrespective of whether he or she is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above, only one bounce is allowed then the player must dispose of the ball.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Distance penalty

Not applicable to this age group. Umpiring and coaching processes to be used.

Acts such as overstepping the mark, wasting time, using abusive language or behaviour are matters that should be addressed by the coach or umpire on the ground.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire’s discretion, or by the competition’s controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Coaches

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players; he or she must not pressure, instruct or make comment to or about officiating umpires or decisions that they make. The coach must not pressure, instruct or make comment to the opposition team.

At the end of the game all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.



AFL Junior Match Program

9-10 years

9-a-side, 12-a-side or 15-a-side: NAB AFL Auskick program or in club and school competitions

Purpose

To provide children in this age group with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the maturity level of their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The emphasis at this age level is the further development of basic game skills (kicking, handballing, marking, gathering, evasion and checking) and learning technical and tactical concepts. The match program for this age group provides further opportunities to develop game skills and the tactical principles of gaining possession, applying pressure, utilising space and positional play.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the commencement of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should gather together on the ground and shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.



The spirit of the game is **to give all available players a game of football**. Therefore:

- › where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers;
- › excess players should be given to the opposition team if they are unable to field the required numbers;
- › coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate. For instance, if planning 9-a-side but only 12 players in total are available, play 6-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play 2 games of 6-a-side or one 15-a-side game.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the games while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit of AFL Junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and to give **the player in possession of the ball every opportunity to kick or handball**. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to **Contact/tackling**);
- › attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which player is to receive a free kick after the ball has been kicked out of bounds, and by ensuring the effective rotation of players so they can experience playing as a forward, midfielder or backline player; and
- › enforce the **full possession rule** at all ball-ups (see below).

In relation to all **ball-ups**, the **full possession rule** applies as follows:

- › a player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on; and
- › the player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player or hit the ground.

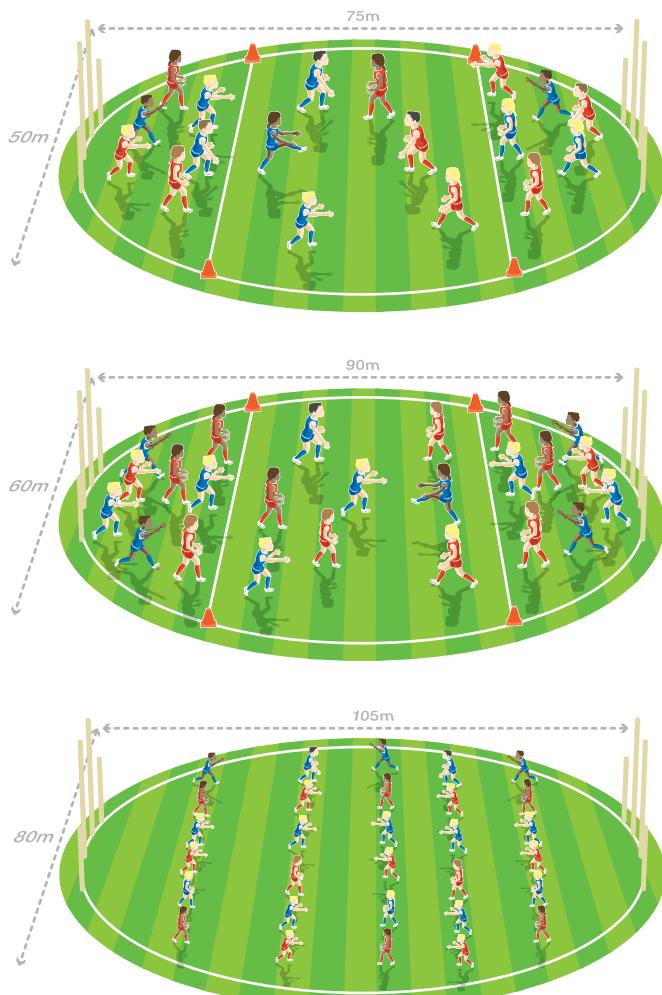
The game – premiership points competitions

The football match program offered to players aged 9-10 must comply with the modified match program presented in this document with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (no score) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams should be selected.

Playing ground and officials

The size of the playing field is reduced to:

75m x 50m for 9-a-side matches;
90m x 60m for 12-a-side matches; and
105m x 80m for 15-a-side matches.



The field is divided into 3 equal zones (thirds).
The zones are identified by markers or lines are used,
e.g. 9-a-side: 3 x 25m.

These field sizes are the optimum sizes and flexibility is often needed. In particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players per team, age and ability level.

A field umpire and 2 goal umpires are needed.

There are no boundary throw-ins, so no boundary umpires are required.

The ball

A synthetic size 2 or leather football should be used.

The team

9-a-side means: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs. Reserves: 3 recommended. Rotate one zone off each quarter.

12-a-side means: 4 backs, 4 centres, 4 forwards. Reserves: 4 recommended. Rotate one zone off each quarter.

15 players (5 lines of 3 players) participate.
There are no rucks or rovers. Reserves unlimited.

Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three-quarters of a match.

Rotate players at least every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone or position on the ground to another – interchange to backs, backs to centres, centres to forwards, forwards to interchange – at the end of each period, after each goal or when instructed to do so by their coach.

Equalise the teams and opponents as much as possible (match sizes, abilities).

Zones

Restricting players to zones is optional in this age group. The use of zones is highly recommended as they provide an excellent teaching tool; they prevent ball-chasing and subsequent congestion around the ball.

Leagues will require approval from their state football body before determining not to use zones for this age level.

Staying in position

To stop congestion, the umpire will instruct players to stay in their correct positions. Coaches should also instruct their players to stay in position and enable all players to play in the different positions through effective, regular rotations (see **The team** above).

Transition of the ball

When the ball is in transition from the back zone to the forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the mid zone. Failing this, a free kick will be awarded to the opposition team at the point where the ball entered the end zone.



AFL JUNIOR POLICY

Scoring

In 9 and 12-a-side matches with zones, only forward-zone players can score.

The possession rule

The ball is possessed by controlling it, catching it, grabbing it, or laying 2 hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the player with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.

Playing time

AFL Auskick program – recommended total playing time of 20 minutes.

AFL Junior fixture – maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time-on.

Start of play and restarting after a goal

When all players are in position, a ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height nominated by the umpire. Alternate players for subsequent bounces (full possession rule applies).

Scrimmage and field ball-ups

Conducted between 2 players of equal size selected by the umpire. Before the throw up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions or zones (full possession rule applies).

Out of bounds

From a kick: a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball.

If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary. 'Full possession' at the ball-up is not permitted.

Gaining possession

A player's prime objective should be to gain possession of the ball (eyes on the ball). Shoulder-to-shoulder contact is permitted when players are contesting a loose ball, provided the ball is within 5 metres. Running with the player, rather than running at them must be the intention. Front-on contact and contact from behind are strictly prohibited.

Hold and release (restraint)

Players can hold and release an opposition player in possession of the ball by grabbing the jumper with one or 2 hands. There is strictly no bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing the player in possession of the ball to the ground. Grabbing the arms or applying a wrap-around tackle is also not permitted.

If a player in possession of the ball is held and released without a prior opportunity to dispose of the ball, they have 3 seconds to dispose of it by handballing or kicking. If a player in possession of the ball has had prior opportunity before being held and released, a free kick is awarded against him or her.

When the player is held and released the umpire acknowledges the hold has been applied and instructs the player in possession to dispose of the ball within 3, 2, 1 seconds (counting backwards). A player in possession cannot be held and released again within that 3 seconds.

Players cannot:

- › knock the ball out of an opponent's hands;
- › push the player in the side;
- › steal the ball from another player; or
- › smother an opponent's kick.

Shepherding

A player is not permitted to push, shoulder or block an opponent not in possession of the ball.

Barging

No barging, fending off or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick shall be awarded to the nearest opponent.

Mark

A mark is awarded, no matter how far the ball has travelled, to any player who catches the ball directly from the kick of another player.

Bouncing the ball

Bouncing is optional but no more than one bounce is permitted.

Distance run

While a player in possession of the ball is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 10 metres, irrespective of whether that player is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above, only one bounce is allowed then the player must dispose of the ball.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Distance penalty

A player can be awarded a 10-metre advancement towards their goals if after a mark or free kick the umpire is of the opinion an opposing player hinders that player. This could include such acts as overstepping the mark, wasting time, and using abusive language and behaviour.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or the competition's controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Coaches

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players; he or she must not pressure, instruct or make comment to or about officiating umpires or decisions that they make. The coach must not pressure, instruct or make comment to the opposition team.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.



AFL Junior Match Program

11-12 years

15-a-side or 18-a-side: NAB AFL Auskick program or in club and school competitions

Purpose

To provide children in this age group with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the level of maturity in their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The consolidation of basic game skills is still the focus at this age level rather than competition and winning, while further developing technical and tactical concepts. These concepts include positional skills and basic performance-enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery and goal setting.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the commencement of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.

The spirit of the game is to give all available players a game of football. Therefore:

- › where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers;



- › excess players should be given to an opposition team unable to field the required numbers;
- › coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate. For instance, if planning a 15-a-side game but only 24 players are available, play 12-a-side.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the games while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit of the AFL Junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and to give **the player in possession of the ball every opportunity to kick or handball**. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to **Contact/tackling**);
- › attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which player is to receive a free kick after the ball has been kicked out of bounds and by ensuring the effective rotation of players through all positions; and
- › enforce the **full possession rule** at all ball-ups (see below).

In relation to all **ball-ups**, the **full possession rule** applies as follows:

- › a player contesting a **ball-up** may not grab the ball and play-on; and
- › the player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player or hit the ground.

The game – premiership points competitions

11-years

The football match program to be offered to players 11 years old must comply with the modified match program presented in this document with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (scores) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams shall be selected.

12-years

The football program to be offered to players 12 years of age might:

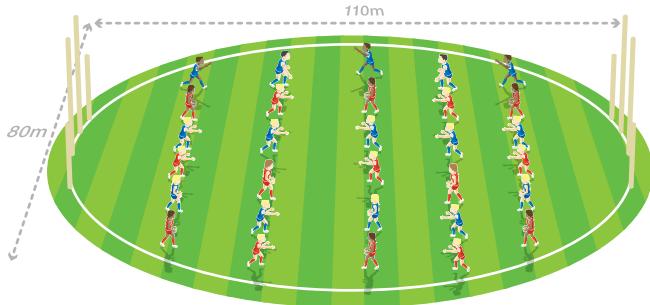
- (a) need to be the modified program presented in this document with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (no score) and names of players published. Skill clinics and carnival days may be held. No representative teams are to be selected;
- or

- (b)** be delivered in a well-conducted league with appropriate development structures based on the alternative premiership program outlined in this document for 13-14 years youth competitions.

Such a decision should be made by the relevant controlling bodies and must be endorsed by the state football body.
No representative teams should be selected.

Playing ground and officials

The playing field is approximately 110m x 80m.



This field size is the optimum size and flexibility is often needed, in particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players per team, age and ability level.

A field umpire and 2 goal umpires are needed.
There are no boundary throw-ins, so no boundary umpires are required.

The ball

A synthetic or leather size 3 football made specifically for this age group should be used.

The team

15 players (5 lines of 3 players) participate. There are no rucks or rovers. Reserves: maximum of 5 recommended. To ensure maximum participation, if player numbers are such that 2 teams can participate in a game of 12-a-side, this should be considered. Where this is impracticable, players should be shared with other sides.

Interchanges may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three-quarters of a match.

Ensure the teams and opponents are as equal as possible (match sizes, abilities).

Rotate players every quarter to give them opportunities in several positions.

Playing time

AFL Auskick program – recommended total playing time of 30 minutes.

AFL Junior fixture – maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.



Start of play and restarting after a goal

When all players are in their positions, a ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height, nominated by the umpire, in the centre of the ground.

Only centre-line players are permitted at the centre bounce. No more than 3 players from each team shall be closer to the ball-up than approximately 20 metres (full possession rule applies).

Note: there is no requirement to have a centre square marked on the ground.

Scrimmage and field ball-ups

Conducted between 2 players of equal size nominated by the umpire. Before the throw-up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions. No more than 3 players from each team should be closer to the ball-up than approximately 20 metres (full possession rule applies).

Out of bounds

A free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball.

If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary.

'Full possession' at the ball-up is not permitted (full possession rule applies).

Bumping

As per the Laws of Australian Football.

Tackling

The wrap-around tackle

A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent wrapping both arms around the area below the top of the shoulders and on/above the knees. The tackle may be from either side or from behind, providing the tackle from behind does not thrust the player with the ball forward (i.e. push him or her in the back).

- A player in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent applying the wrap-around tackle, should be given a reasonable chance to dispose of the ball by kick or by handball, or by attempting to kick or handball. If he or she fails to do so, a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.
- The field umpire shall conduct a ball-up when the player with the ball has it held to the body by an opponent, unless the player has had a reasonable time to dispose of it prior to being tackled. In that case, a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.
- The field umpire shall allow play to continue if the ball is knocked out of a player's hands by an opponent.
- A player, who is held by an opponent when not in possession of the ball, shall be awarded a free kick.
- No player shall be deliberately dumped or thrown to the ground by a tackle.

Barging

No barging or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick is awarded. Fending off with an open hand to the body, provided it is not above the shoulders or in the back, is allowed.

Mark

Any player catching a ball directly from the kick of another player shall be awarded a mark provided the ball has travelled at least 10 metres.

Bouncing the ball

Bouncing is optional, but no more than 2 bounces are permitted.

Distance run

While a player in possession of the ball is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 15 metres, irrespective of whether that player is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above, only 2 bounces are permitted before a player must dispose of the ball.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Distance penalty

A player can be awarded a 25m advancement towards his or her goals if after a mark or free kick the umpire is of the opinion an opposing player hinders that player.

This could include acts such as overstepping the mark, wasting time, and using abusive language and behaviour.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Coaches

The coach is not allowed on the ground. Messages may be delivered by a runner. However, the runner must follow the procedure of going directly to the player involved, delivering the message and returning directly to the coaching bench.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.



Junior Girls 11-12 years

9-a-side, 12-a-side or 15-a-side: community club and school competitions

Purpose

To provide young girls in this age group with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the level of maturity of their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The emphasis at this age level is on the further development of basic game skills (kicking, handballing, marking, gathering, evasion and checking) and learning technical and tactical concepts. The match program for this age group provides further opportunities to develop game skills and the tactical principles of gaining possession, applying pressure, utilising space and positional play.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the start of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should gather together on the ground and shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the game.

The spirit of the game is to give all available players a game of football. Therefore:

- › where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers;
- › excess players should be given to the opposition team if it is unable to field the required numbers; and
- › coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate. For instance, if planning a 9-a-side game but only 12 players are available, play 6-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play 2 games of 6-a-side or one 15-a-side game.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the game while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit of AFL Junior match rules for this age group is **to enable all players to gather possession and give the player in possession of the ball every opportunity to kick or handball**. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to **Contact/tackling**);
- › attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which player is to receive

a free kick after the ball has been kicked out of bounds and by ensuring the effective rotation of players so they experience playing as a forward, midfielder or backline player; and

- › enforce the **full possession rule** at all ball-ups (see below).

In relation to all **ball-ups**, the full possession rule applies as follows:

- › a player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on; and
- › The player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player or hit the ground.

The game – premiership points competitions

The football match program to be offered to youth girls 11-12 years of age must comply with the modified match program presented in this document, with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (no scores) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams should be selected.

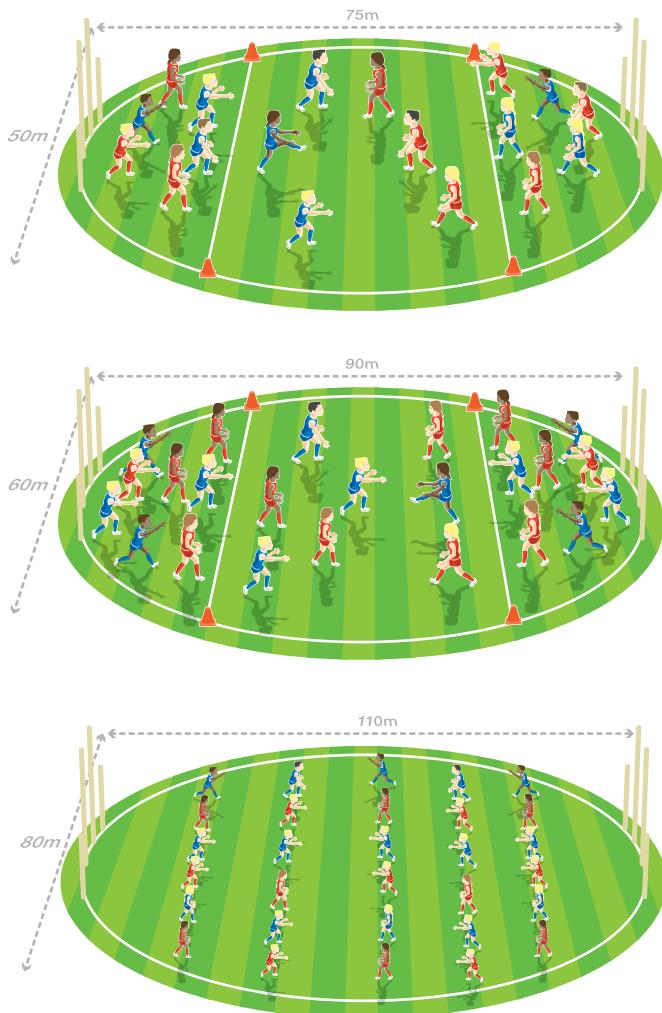


Playing ground and officials

The size of the playing field is reduced to:

75m x 50m for 9-a-side matches;
90m x 60m for 12-a-side matches; and
110m x 80m for 15-a-side matches.

The field is divided into 3 equal zones (thirds).
The zones are identified by markers or lines,
e.g. 9-a-side: 3 x 25m.



These field sizes are the optimum sizes and flexibility is often needed; in particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players in a team, age and ability level.

A field umpire and 2 goal umpires are needed.

There are no boundary throw-ins so no boundary umpires are required.

The ball

A synthetic size 3 or leather football should be used.

The team

9-a-side means: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs.

Reserves: 3 recommended: rotate one zone off each quarter.

12-a-side means: 4 backs, 4 centres, 4 forwards.

Reserves: 4 recommended: rotate one zone off each quarter.

15 players (5 lines of 3 players) participate.
There are no rucks or rovers. Reserves are unlimited.

Interchanges may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three-quarters of the match.

Rotate players at least every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone or position on the ground to another – interchange to backs, backs to centres, centres to forwards, forwards to interchange – at the end of each period, after each goal or when instructed by their coach. Ensure the teams and opponents are as equal as possible (match sizes and abilities).

Staying in position

To stop congestion, players will be instructed by the umpire to stay in their correct positions. Coaches should also instruct their players to stay in position and ensure all players experience playing in the different positions through effective, regular rotations (see **The team** above).

The possession rule

The ball is possessed by controlling it, catching it, grabbing it, or laying 2 hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the player with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.

Playing time

AFL Auskick program – recommended total playing time of 20 minutes.

AFL Junior fixture – maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time-on.

Start of play and restarting after a goal

When all players are in position, a ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height nominated by the umpire. Alternate players for subsequent bounces (full possession rule applies).

Scrimmage and field ball-ups

Conducted between 2 players of equal size nominated by the umpire. Before the throw-up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions or zones (full possession rule applies).

Out of bounds

From a kick: a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball.

If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary. ‘Full possession’ at the ball-up is not permitted.

Gaining possession

A player’s prime objective should be to gain possession of the ball (eyes on the ball). Shoulder-to-shoulder contact is

permitted when players are contesting a loose ball, provided the ball is within 5 metres. Running with the player, rather than running at the player, must be the intention. Front-on contact or contact from behind is strictly prohibited.

Hold and release (restraint)

Players can hold and release an opposition player in possession of the ball by grabbing the jumper with one or 2 hands. There is strictly no bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing the player in possession of the ball to the ground. Grabbing the arms or applying a wrap-around tackle is not permitted.

If a player in possession of the ball is held and released without a prior opportunity to dispose of the ball, they have 3 seconds to dispose of the ball by handballing or kicking. If a player in possession of the ball has had prior opportunity before being held and released, a free kick is awarded against her.

When the player is held and released the umpire acknowledges the hold has been applied and instructs the player in possession to dispose of the ball within 3, 2, 1 seconds (counting backwards). A player in possession cannot be held and released again within that 3 seconds.

Players cannot:

- knock the ball out of an opponent's hands;
- push the player in the side;
- steal the ball from another player; nor
- smother an opponent's kick.

Shepherding

A player is not permitted to push, shoulder or block an opponent not in possession of the ball.

Barging

No barging, fending off or chopping past opponents is allowed. Such actions will result in a free kick being awarded to the nearest opponent.

Mark

A mark is awarded to any player who catches the ball directly from the kick of another player, regardless of how far the ball has travelled.

Bouncing the ball

Bouncing is optional, but no more than one bounce is permitted.

Distance run

When a player in possession of the ball is moving, she must bounce the ball within 10 metres, regardless of whether she is running in a straight line. As above, only one bounce is permitted before a player must dispose of the ball.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Distance penalty

A player can be awarded a 10m advancement towards

her goals if, after a mark or free kick, the umpire believes an opposing player hinders that player. This includes such acts as overstepping the mark, wasting time, abusive language and behaviour.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the competition's controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Coaches

The coach is not allowed on the ground. Messages may be delivered by a runner. However, the runner must abide by the procedure of going directly to the player involved, delivering the message and returning directly to the coaching bench.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.



AFL YOUTH POLICY

13-18 years

Introduction	36
Junior and Youth Program (Table)	38
AFL Youth Match Program	
The AFL Youth Match Program (13-14 years)	40
Youth Girls (13-15 years)	41
The AFL Youth Match Program (15-18 years)	44
Youth Girls (16-18 years)	45





youth

AFL PARTICIPATION PATHWAY



Introduction

The AFL Youth Policy refers to the philosophy, guidelines and requirements for leagues, community clubs and schools responsible for delivering football to the 13-18 age groups. The AFL Youth Policy aims to maximise the recruitment and retention of youth players (male and female) as they progress through the pathway to senior football.

Young people older than 12 identify the essence of sport as being centred around:

- › self-discovery and self-improvement;
- › open access and fair play;
- › providing skill acquisition; and
- › the discipline of commitment.

Young people want a safe and supportive environment, which encourages them to do their best. They do not enjoy sport when:

- › there is an over-emphasis on winning applied by parents, coaches and others;
- › they don't get enough playing time;
- › they don't have enough fun;
- › they cannot play with their friends because of imposed grading systems;
- › they are made to feel uncomfortable;
- › they are frightened of being hurt;
- › they are not as good as they want to be;
- › the coach is overly authoritarian; and
- › there is high praise for the best performers and little acknowledgment of others.

The AFL Youth Policy is based on positioning Australian Football for youth players in terms of the following qualities:

- › **Fun, fast and skilful** – the social interaction, fast pace of the game and the opportunity to play skilfully make the game fun for players. When players are able to execute their skills successfully on the field, they experience a sense of fun and mastery. The pace of the game engages their attention, adrenalin is stimulated in close competition, and success is experienced through skilful play, fulfilling team goals and coaches' instructions – all of which are shared with their peers;
- › **Team and social interaction** – participants are drawn to the opportunity to socialise, develop and maintain friendships, and to operate as a team, at an age when their peer group is of the utmost importance. Football must provide an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance;
- › **Competition** – although players agree winning is fun, research reveals they are more concerned with the quality of the competition. The challenge for leagues, clubs and schools here is clearly to provide well-graded competitions that match the skill level of opposing teams.

General

All organisations aiming to provide football for youth players need to offer:

- › well-graded competitions;
- › skill teaching;
- › skill drills and games;
- › relevant team rules, team play and tactics;
- › specific match rules;
- › appropriately trained and accredited coaches, trainers, umpires and officials; and
- › ethical behavioural standards conforming to the AFL Code of Conduct for all participants.

Factors effecting youth drop out

Over the past decade, growth in sporting participation has been in recreational, non-traditional forms of sport. These sports appeal to people with busy lifestyles and a desire to keep fit without the risk of injury. Research reveals many young people won't commit to a team sport every Saturday and 2 nights a week for 6-9 months of the year. For teens, study, social and part-time work pressures are increasing, together with competing entertainment opportunities such as movies, music and online games.

Community leagues and clubs responsible for youth football competitions need to be mindful of these social issues and consider strategies to reduce the youth drop-out rate. It is impossible for leagues and clubs to cater for the entire array of a young person's needs and attitudes. However, some responses, like changing the traditional timing of games, modifying the rules and team numbers, altering the focus of coaching and offering broader life experiences are well worth trying.

Youth competition formats

The AFL Youth Policy, taking into account the abovementioned social issues and local circumstances, recommends the following options for junior club and school youth football competitions:

13-14 years

Fixture club or school-based matches with minor modifications to the Laws of Australian Football should be played at this age group, supported by coaching that emphasises the consolidation of the basic skills and introduces technical and tactical skills, including positional skills and basic performance-enhancement techniques; or

A fixture of club or school-based matches complying with the AFL Youth Girls rules for this age group, supported by coaching that emphasises skill development, maximum participation and fun; or

Club or school-based matches complying with the rules of AFL Recreational Football, with an emphasis on a fun, safe and social environment where everyone can participate.

15-18 years

A fixture of club or school-based matches complying with the Laws of Australian Football, supported by coaching that emphasises the development of higher-level game skills, fitness, and individual, positional and team skills; or

A fixture of club or school-based matches complying with the AFL Youth Girls rules for this age group, supported by coaching that emphasises skill development, maximum participation and fun; or

Club or school-based matches complying with the rules of AFL Recreational Football with an emphasis on a fun, safe and social environment where everyone can participate.

Player rotation policy

Once children reach youth age levels the emphasis shifts from players rotating through all positions on the ground to them gaining a level of competency in different positions. The difference is youth players should be left in a position on the field until they have acquired that position's basic strategies and skills. Only then should they move to a new position.

To ensure all players feel an essential part of the team, regardless of their age, size, sex, ability or the competition they are playing in, it is critical they have an equal amount of time-on the field during the season. This will keep players in the game and reduce the likelihood of them leaving to pursue other sports. It also satisfies parents' expectations that their child will be given a fair go. It is recommended coaches keep records of the weekly game time of each player to ensure each has equal playing time.

Grading

Research reveals while youth players agree winning is fun, they are more concerned with the quality of the competition. The challenge for leagues, clubs and schools is to provide well-graded competitions that match the skill levels of opposing teams.

› **Junior leagues**

The AFL Youth Policy recommends junior leagues implement divisional competitions where teams are graded provided team numbers permit. Leagues may choose to conduct a grading round. This will ensure all teams and players participate in a competition that matches their skills and ability.

› **Clubs**

In the event a club enters more than one team in the same age group competition (no divisions), the AFL Youth Policy recommends players be allocated to each team so they are evenly matched.

In the event a club enters more than one team in an age group with a number of competition divisions, it is recommended players be allocated to a team in the division that best suits their skills and ability.

Although a player's peer group and the opportunity to develop and maintain friendships are of the utmost importance, this should not override the needs of the team and club when allocating players to appropriate teams. But youth players should be engaged in the decision-making process.

Fair-go rule

In the spirit of providing competitive games of football where all participants can experience a sense of achievement and to ensure the focus remains on skill development and maximum participation, it is recommended junior leagues consider applying a fair-go rule in all youth competitions.

Visit afl.com.au/policies for examples.





JUNIOR AND YOUTH MATCH PROGRAM

	5-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years	13-14 years	15-18 years
Purpose	To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that develops their movement and basic football skills.	To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that further develops their basic football skills and introduces technical and tactical concepts.	To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that focuses on consolidating their basic football skills and knowledge of technical and tactical concepts, rather than competition.	To provide young people with a safe and supportive environment where they can develop their fitness capabilities, and individual, positional and team skills. Appropriate competitions and talent pathway programs are also provided.	To provide young people with a safe and supportive environment where they can learn how to train and consolidate their basic football skills. Advanced technical and tactical skills are also introduced.
Spirit of the game	To give all available players a game of football in which they have every opportunity to gain possession of the ball and safely dispose of it by a kick or handball.	A modified match program with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (scores), no player names published and no representative teams.	To ensure all games are played in a competitive, fair and safe environment that permits players to contest the ball. The use of negative defensive tactics is strongly discouraged.	A fixture of junior club or school youth football competitions complying with: (a) the Laws of Australian Football; (b) AFL Youth Girls' rules; or (c) AFL Recreational Football rules.	A fixture of junior club or school youth football competitions complying with: (a) the Laws of Australian Football with minor modifications; (b) AFL Youth Girls' Rules; or (c) AFL Recreational Football rules.
The game	6-a-side matches: 60m x 40m. 9-a-side matches: 75m x 50m. The field is divided into 3 equal zones.	9-a-side matches: 75m x 50m. 12-a-side matches: 90m x 60m. 15-a-side matches: 105m x 80m. The field is divided into 3 equal zones.	About 110m x 80m.	Between 135-185m x 110-155m.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Playing ground	One field umpire, 2 goal umpires.	Synthetic size one football.	Synthetic or leather size 3 football.	Leather or synthetic size 4 football.	Leather size 5 football.
Officials	6-a-side: 2 forwards, 2 centres, 2 backs, 2 reserves. 9-a-side: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs, 3 reserves. Interchanges can be made at any time but all players must play at least 3 quarters of the match.	9-a-side: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs, 3 reserves. 12-a-side: 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs, 4 reserves. 15-a-side: 5 lines of 3 players, with no rucks or rovers but unlimited reserves. Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play 3 quarters of the match.	15 players a side with 3 lines of 5 players, 5 reserves but no rucks or rovers. Interchanges may take place at any time but all players must play at least half of the match. Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play 3 quarters of the match.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
The ball	Backs are restricted to the back zone. Centres are restricted to the centre zone. Forwards are restricted to the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions.	Players will be instructed by the umpire to stay in their correct positions.	N/A	N/A	N/A
The team	When a team moves the ball from the back zone to the forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the centre zone, or a free kick will be paid to the opposition team.	When the ball is in transition from the back zone to the forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the mid zone. Failing this, a free kick will be awarded to the opposition team at the point where the ball entered the end zone.	In 9 and 12-a-side matches with zones, only forward-zone players can score.	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	Once a player gains possession, all other players must back off to the side of the player in possession, so that the player may kick or handball uncontested (there is to be no blocking or standing in the pathway of the player in possession). Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.
Zones/positions	Only forward-zone players can score.	Once a player gains possession, all other players must back off to the side of the player in possession, so that the player may kick or handball uncontested (there is to be no blocking or standing in the pathway of the player in possession).	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	AFL Auskick program: 20 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time-on.	AFL Auskick program: 30 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.
Transition of the ball	Once a player gains possession, all other players must back off to the side of the player in possession, so that the player may kick or handball uncontested (there is to be no blocking or standing in the pathway of the player in possession).	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	AFL Auskick program: 30 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Scoring	Once a player gains possession, all other players must back off to the side of the player in possession, so that the player may kick or handball uncontested (there is to be no blocking or standing in the pathway of the player in possession).	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	Once the ball is possessed, other players may apply a hold and release (restraint) or block by standing in the path of the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	AFL Auskick program: 20 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time-on.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Possession rule	AFL Auskick program: 12 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 10-minute quarters with no time-on.	AFL Auskick program: 20 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.	AFL Auskick program: 30 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.	AFL Auskick program: 30 minutes. AFL Junior fixture: maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Playing time					

Age groups					
Starting and restarting play	A ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire. The umpire should nominate different pairs of players for subsequent ball-ups after goals are scored.	A ball-up is contested between 2 centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire in the centre of the ground. Only centreline players attend centre bounces (20 metres clearance from all other players). The umpire is to enforce a similar 20-metre area for field bounces.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Scrimmage and field ball-ups	Where a scrummage develops, if a free kick is not possible the umpire shall stop play, send players back to their positions and nominate 2 players of equal size to contest a ball-up. At the ball-up, 'full possession' and diving on the ball are not permitted.	Field ball-ups are contested by 2 players of similar height (selected by the umpire) after all other players have been sent back to their positions.	Field ball-ups are contested by 2 players of equal size selected by the umpire. Before the ball-up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions. No more than 3 players from each team shall be closer to the ball-up than about 20 metres.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Out of bounds	From a kick - a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary.			As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Contact/bumping	There is to be absolutely no contact or spoiling whatsoever except accidental and light shoulder-to-shoulder contact while running to and at the ball.	Players cannot bump an opponent, knock the ball out of an opponent's hands, push the player in the side, steal the ball from another player and smother an opponent's kick.	Players can apply a wrap-around tackle. A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent around the area below the top of the shoulders and/or above the knees. The tackle may be from either side or from behind, providing a tackle from behind does not thrust the player with the ball forward.	Players can apply a wrap-around tackle. A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent around the area below the top of the shoulders and/or above the knees. The tackle may be from either side or from behind, providing a tackle from behind does not thrust the player with the ball forward.	Tackling is permitted as per the Laws of Australian Football, however, no player shall be deliberately slung, dumped or thrown to the ground in any tackle.
Tackling	Not permitted.	Players can 'hold and release' a player in possession of the ball by grabbing his or her jumper. Bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing a player to the ground, grabbing the arms and applying a wrap-around tackle are prohibited.			
Shepherds	Not permitted.			As per the Laws of Australian Football.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Barging	Not permitted.		No barging or chopping past opponents is allowed. Fending off with an open hand to the body (provided it is not above the shoulders or in the back) is allowed.		As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Marking	A mark is awarded, irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled, to any player who catches the ball, or makes a reasonable attempt to catch the ball from a kick. Set the mark after the mark is awarded. No playing on allowed.	A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled to any player who catches the ball directly from the kick of another player.	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another player's kick that has travelled at least 10 metres.		As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Bouncing	Bouncing is optional but no more than one bounce is permitted. The player must then dispose of it by hand or foot and may not touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player.	Only one bounce is permitted.		Only 2 bounces are permitted.	As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Distance run	A player running with the ball must bounce it within 5 metres.	A player running with the ball must bounce it within 10 metres.			As per the Laws of Australian Football (15 metres).
Kicking off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.				As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Distance penalty	N/A	A 10m advancement may be awarded to a player after a mark or free kick if he or she has been hindered by an opposition player.		A 25m advancement may be awarded to a player after a mark or free kick if an opposition player encroaches on the mark, wastes time, is abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene towards an umpire, does not return the ball directly to the player, or hinders him or her. For a full explanation see the Laws of Australian Football.	A 50m advancement may be awarded to a player after a mark or free kick if an opposition player encroaches on the mark, wastes time, is abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene towards an umpire, does not return the ball directly to the player, or hinders him or her. For a full explanation see the Laws of Australian Football.
Order-off rule	To be applied at the umpire's discretion. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disrupting umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.				As per the Laws of Australian Football.
Coaches	The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players.				The coach is not allowed on the ground during play but messages may be delivered by a runner.
NOTE: When a policy is common to the age groups above these colours apply					

AFL Youth Match Program

13-14 years

15-a-side or 18-a-side: community club and school competitions

Purpose

Learning how to train and consolidate the basic skills is the focus at this age level. Advanced technical and tactical skills start to be introduced, including decision-making in games and training, positional skills (competency in a position), and basic performance-enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery, goal-setting, pre and post-match routines.

It is important for players in this age group to feel an essential part of the team to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and a connection with the community, club and team. Commitment and loyalty to the club and team, and social responsibility on and off the field in line with adult standards should be engendered and acknowledged.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the commencement of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the game.

The spirit and intention is to ensure all games are played in a competitive and fair manner, in an environment that:

- › permits a player whose sole objective is to contest and gain possession of the ball, to do so in a safe and fair manner;
- › rewards and acknowledges commitment and loyalty to the team, club and or school;
- › allows all players to feel an essential part of the team while enabling each individual to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and an identity within the community, their team, club or school; and
- › fosters and reinforces community values and social responsibility.

The player whose sole objective is to contest the ball must be permitted to do so. Ethically it is the responsibility of coaches to provide the best possible teaching and learning conditions; therefore, the use of negative defensive tactics where the opposing player's **sole objective is to prevent a player from gaining possession** is strongly discouraged at this age level.

Tactics such as **tagging** and **flooding** are elements of the modern game, however, they are contrary to the philosophy of providing an environment that maximises the desired fairness, fun, speed, skill and competitive elements of the game at this level.

Umpires should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the laws of the game, awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit and intention of the laws is to ensure a match is played in a fair manner and to protect players from injury. For this reason restrictions are placed upon **tackling** in this age group.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should shake hands.

Laws of Australian Football

The Laws of Australian Football apply to the 13-14 age group with the following modifications.

The ball

A size 4 leather or synthetic football made specifically for this age group should be used.

Tackling

Tackling is permitted per the Laws of Australian Football, however:

- › No player shall be deliberately slung, dumped or thrown to the ground in any tackle.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the competition's controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.



Youth Girls 13-15 years

12-a-side or 15-a-side: community club and school competitions

Purpose

To provide youth girls in this age group with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the maturity level of their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The consolidation of basic game skills is still the focus at this age level rather than competition and winning, along with further developing technical and tactical concepts. These concepts include positional skills and performance-enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery and goal-setting.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the start of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the game.

The spirit of the game is to give all available players a game of football. Therefore:

- › where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers;
- › excess players should be given to an opposition team unable to field the required numbers; and
- › coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate. For instance, if planning 9-a-side but only 12 players are available, play 6-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play one game of 6-a-side and one 9-a-side game.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the game, while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups;
- › understand the spirit of the AFL Junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and to give **the player in possession of the ball given every opportunity to kick or handball**. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to **Contact/tackling**);
- › attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which player is to receive a free kick after the ball has been kicked out of bounds, and by ensuring the effective rotation of players through all positions; and
- › enforce the **full possession rule** at all ball-ups.

In relation to all ball-ups, the full possession rule applies as follows:

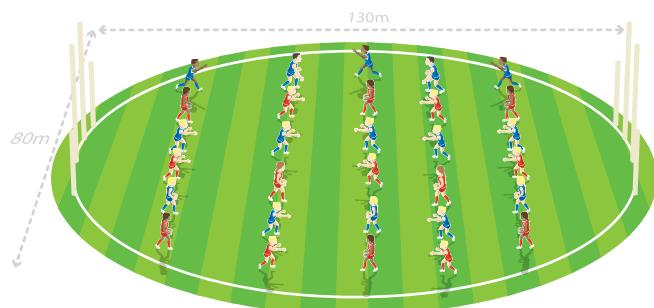
- › a player contesting a ball-up cannot grab the ball and play on; and
- › the player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has either been touched by another player or hit the ground.

The game – premiership points competitions

The football match program to be offered to youth girls 13-15 years of age must comply with the modified match program in this document. Premiership points, finals, ladders and representative teams are allowed.

Playing ground and officials

The playing field is about 130m x 80m.



This field size is the optimum size and flexibility is often needed, in particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players in a team, age and ability level.

A field umpire and 2 goal umpires are needed.

There are no boundary throw-ins so no boundary umpires are required.

The ball

A synthetic or leather size 3 football made specifically for this age group should be used.

The team

12-15 players participate. There are no rucks or rovers. Reserves: maximum of 5 recommended. To ensure maximum participation, if player numbers are such that 2 teams can participate in a game of 12-a-side, this should be considered. Where this is impracticable, players should be shared with other sides.

Interchanges may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three-quarters of the match.

Ensure the teams and opponents are as equal as possible (match sizes, abilities).

Players should be rotated every quarter to give them opportunities in several positions.

Playing time

AFL Junior fixture – a maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time-on.

Start of play and restarting after a goal

When all players are in their positions, a ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height, nominated by the umpire, in the centre of the ground.

Only centre-line players are permitted at the centre bounce. No more than 3 players from each team shall be closer to the ball-up than about 20 metres (full possession rule applies).

Note: there is no requirement to have a centre square marked on the ground.

Scrimmage and field ball-ups

Conducted between 2 players of equal size selected by the umpire. Before the throw up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions. No more than 3 players from each team shall be within 20 metres of the ball up (full possession rule applies).

Out of bounds

A free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball.

If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or a body, the umpire shall call a ball-up 5 metres in from the boundary.

'Full possession' at the ball-up is not permitted (full possession rule applies).

Bumping

As per the Laws of Australian Football.

Tackling

The wrap-around tackle

A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent with both arms provided they are below the top of the shoulders and on or above the knees. The tackle may be from either side of, or from behind, the player provided a tackle from behind does not thrust the player with the ball forward, ie. push back her in the back.

- › A player in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent applying a wrap-around tackle, should be given a reasonable chance to dispose of the ball by kick or handball, or by attempting to kick or handball, otherwise a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.
- › The field umpire shall conduct a ball-up when the player with the ball has the ball held to the body by an opponent, unless the player has had a reasonable time to dispose of the ball prior to being tackled, in which case a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.

- › The field umpire shall allow play to continue if the ball is knocked out of a player's hands by an opponent.
- › A player not in possession of the ball shall be awarded a free kick if held by an opponent.
- › No player shall be deliberately dumped or thrown to the ground in a tackle.

Barging

No barging or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick is awarded. Fending off with an open hand to the body, provided it is not above the shoulders or in the back, is allowed.

Mark

Any player catching a ball directly from the kick of another player shall be awarded a mark provided the ball has travelled at least 10 metres.

Bouncing the ball

No more than 2 bounces are permitted.

Distance run

While a player in possession of the ball is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 15 metres, regardless of whether she is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above, only 2 bounces are permitted then a player must dispose of the ball.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Distance penalty

A player can be awarded a 25m advancement towards their goals if, after a mark or free kick, the umpire believes an opposing player hinders that player. This includes acts such as: overstepping the mark; wasting time; and abusive language and behaviour.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Coaches

The coach is not allowed on the ground. Messages may be delivered by a runner. However, the runner must abide by the procedure of going directly to the player involved, delivering the message and returning directly to the coaching bench.

At the end of the game all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.



AFL Youth Match Program

15-18 years

18-a-side: community club and school competitions

Purpose

The emphasis at this age level is to optimise the development of players' fitness levels and their individual, positional and team skills. Higher level competition skills should be developed and appropriate competitions provided to enhance players' learning and their chances of being identified for talent pathway programs.

It is important for players in this age group to feel an essential part of the team to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and a connection with their community, club and team. Commitment and loyalty to the club and team, and social responsibility on and off the field in accordance with community standards should be engendered and acknowledged.

Spirit of the game

Before the start of play and at the end of the game, all players, coaches and umpires should shake hands.

The spirit and intention is to ensure all games are played in a competitive and fair manner, in an environment that:

- › permits a player whose sole objective is to contest and gain possession of the ball to do so in a safe and fair manner;
- › rewards and acknowledges commitment and loyalty to the team, club and school;
- › allows all players to feel an essential part of their team, while enabling each individual to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and an identity within their community, team, club and school; and
- › engenders and reinforces community values and social responsibility.

The player whose sole objective is to contest the ball must be permitted to do so. Ethically, it is the responsibility of coaches to provide the best possible teaching and learning conditions. Therefore, the use of negative defensive tactics, where the opposing player's sole objective is to prevent a player from gaining possession, is strongly discouraged at this age level. It could be argued tactics such as tagging and flooding are elements of the modern game, however, they are detrimental to the philosophy of providing an environment that maximises the desired fairness, fun, speed, skill and competitive elements of the game.

The umpire should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the rules of the game, while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups; and

- › understand the spirit and intention of the laws is to ensure that a match is played in a fair manner and to protect players from injury.

Laws of Australian Football

The Laws of Australian Football apply to all matches played in the 15-18 age group.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the competition's controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.



Youth Girls 16-18 years

15-a-side or 18-a-side: community club and school competitions

Purpose

Learning how to train and consolidate the basic skills is the focus at this age level. Advanced technical and tactical skills start to be introduced, including decision-making in games and training, positional skills (competency in a position), and basic performance-enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery, goal-setting, pre and post-match routines.

It is important for players in this age group to feel an essential part of the team to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and an identity within their community, club and team. Commitment and loyalty to the club and team, social responsibility on and off the field in accordance with accepted community standards should be engendered and acknowledged.

Spirit of the game

Prior to the commencement of play:

- › all players, coaches and umpires should shake hands; and
- › the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.

The spirit and intention is to ensure that all games are played in a competitive and fair manner in an environment that:

- › permits a player whose sole objective is to contest and gain possession of the ball, to do so in a safe and fair manner;
- › rewards and acknowledges commitment and loyalty to the team, club and school;
- › allows all players to feel an essential part of the team while enabling each individual to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and an identity within their community, team, club and school; and
- › engenders and reinforces community values and social responsibility.

The player whose sole objective is to contest the ball must be permitted to do so. Ethically, it is the responsibility of coaches to provide the best possible teaching and learning conditions. Therefore, the use of negative defensive tactics, where the opposing player's sole objective is to prevent a player from gaining possession, is strongly discouraged at this age level. Tactics such as tagging and flooding are elements of the modern game, however, they are detrimental to the philosophy of providing an environment that maximises the desired fairness, fun, speed, skill and competitive elements of the game at this level.

Umpires should at all times:

- › endeavour to apply the laws of the game, while awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups; and
- › understand the spirit and intention of the laws is to ensure a match is played in a fair manner and to protect players from injury. For this reason restrictions are placed on tackling in this age group.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should shake hands.

Laws of Australian Football

The Laws of Australian Football apply to all AFL Youth Girls' competitions in the 16-18 age group with the following modifications:

The ball

A size 4 leather or synthetic football made specifically for this age group should be used.

Tackling

Tackling is permitted per the Laws of Australian Football, however, no player shall be deliberately slung, dumped or thrown to the ground in a tackle.

Kicking off the ground

Not permitted unless accidental.

Order-off rule

To be applied at the umpire's discretion, or by the competition's controlling body where applicable. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.



AFL Recreational Football



The AFL has developed a recreational form of the game to capture new participants and fans. AFL Recreational Football is designed so

that everyone can play. It's a safe, easy-to-play, non-contact game that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and ability levels in a social environment.

The game is fun, fast and exciting and retains the traditional elements of football, however, it is less physically demanding, has a minimal time commitment and no risk of serious injury. The game enables people of all ages and ability levels to participate in male, female or mixed competitions. It truly is: '**The Game For Everyone**'.

The following laws should be read in conjunction with the laws of Australian Football.

Playing field/zones

The playing ground measures 100m x 50m and is divided into 3 zones on a 20m/60m/20m basis. At the start of the match and after a goal has been scored, players must be in their zones with one defender and forward for each team starting on the goal line. Once the game is in progress, players may leave their zones, though they are not permitted to enter either team's scoring zone.

The team

No more than 8 players per team are permitted on the playing field at any one time. Interchanging of players may take place at any time as required. However, the interchanging player must be correctly wearing a positional bib before engaging in play. Players must wear 2 flags.

Teams consist of 3 forwards, 2 centres and 3 backs. In mixed competition, teams are required to have a maximum of 5 male and a minimum of 3 female participants on the ground at any one time. There also must be a female participant in each positional line (e.g. forward, centre and back) at all times.

Duration of the game

The game consists of two 20-minute halves with no time-on.

Start of play

- Choice of goal/end: the umpire shall toss a coin and the away or first-named team captain shall call heads or tails. The captain of the team that wins the toss shall choose the end to which his/her team kicks.
- The game shall be started by a ball-up between 2 centre players in the centre of the ground. Opponents must jump from a standing position within a 50cm radius of the ball throw-up.
- Both ball-up participants must engage in the ball-up and not engage in play until the ball has been possessed by one of the 2 other mid-zone players.

- The 2 centre-zone players not engaging in the ball-up must gain possession of the ball before the forward or defending players engage in play.

Disposal of the ball

The ball must be disposed of by a handball or kick. If a player throws or hands the ball to another player, a free kick will be awarded to the opposition team.

Mark

- A mark is taken if, in the opinion of the umpire, a player catches or takes control of the football after it has been kicked by another player irrespective of the distance travelled.
- It is not a mark if the ball touched the ground or was touched by another player between the moment the ball was kicked and when it was caught or controlled by the player.
- The player determined to be in the ball flight or drop zone first is determined to have right of way in a marking contest. If both players are an equal distance apart, the intended attacking player has right of way.
- The player who has taken the mark will have 5 seconds to dispose of the ball before the umpire calls 'play on'. See the pictorial examples on page 47.

Gaining possession of the ball

- If a turnover occurs (i.e. when a loose ball makes contact with the ground), the opposing team gains possession from where the ball first made contact with the ground.
- Players may intercept the ball in flight, but must not make contact with an opposing player.
- If either of a player's 2 flags is removed after he/she has had prior opportunity to dispose of the ball while in possession, a turnover will result.

Dispossessing a player

- The player with the ball is dispossessed when one or both of his/her flags are completely removed by an opponent.
- If there has been no prior opportunity for the player in possession to dispose of the ball – even if a flag has been removed by an opposing player – play on will be called, and the player in possession must dispose of the ball within 3 seconds.

Retaining possession

A player may stay in possession of the ball for any length of time, except when a mark has been taken, unless:

- the player has a flag correctly removed; or
- the umpire directs the player to dispose of the football.

A player who has taken a mark will have 5 seconds to dispose of the ball before the umpire calls 'play on'.

Bumping/tackling/barging

No contact or spoiling is permitted. Players cannot:

- hold an opponent with their hands;
- knock the ball out of an opponent's hands;

- › push a player in the side;
- › steal the ball from another player;
- › deliberately bump another player;
- › smother an opponent's kick;
- › barge, fend off or chop past opponents; or
- › touch the ball while another player has possession.

Shepherding

A player is not permitted to push, shoulder or block an opponent not in possession of the ball.

Scoring

- › A player can shoot for goal only after marking the ball in his/her scoring zone. After marking the ball, the player may go back and take a set shot for goal. The player is not permitted to play on and shoot for goal. The player standing the mark must be inside the scoring zone.
- › A penalty in the scoring zone is awarded if the umpire believes a forward would have taken a mark inside his/her scoring zone, but was illegally infringed against in the marking contest. This player may then take a set shot for goal.
- › A forward may not shoot for goal after a turnover, or if the ball has gone out of bounds in the scoring zone.
- › If a ball is rushed over the scoring line by a forward, a free kick will be awarded and no score will be added to the total. If the defensive player rushes a ball over the scoring line, a point to the opposition will be awarded and a kick-in will take place.
- › In single-sex competitions, a goal is worth 6 points. In mixed competitions, a goal scored by a male forward is worth 6 points and by a female forward 9 points.

Restart

After a goal is scored, play is restarted from the centre. If a behind is scored, the ball must be kicked back into play from between the goalposts by a defender.

Playing on

The umpire shall call play on when:

- › after taking a mark, a player runs around or over the mark where he/she caught the ball;

- › after a turnover has occurred, a player runs around or over the mark where the ball made contact with the ground in a turnover;
- › after being kicked, the ball was touched in transit; or
- › a player has not had prior opportunity to dispose of the ball before a flag is removed.

Bouncing the ball

Where a player is moving while in possession of the ball, he/she must bounce the ball or touch it on the ground after 15m, but may only do so once.

Ball transition

When the ball is in transition from the back zone to the team's scoring zone, it must be possessed by a different player in each zone. If this does not occur, a free kick will be awarded to the opposition team at the point where the ball entered the scoring zone.

Free kicks

A free kick may be awarded when:

- › a flag is removed from a player who has had prior opportunity to dispose of the ball while in possession;
- › a flag is removed when a player is not in possession of the ball;
- › a player makes contact with another player;
- › a player runs too far (more than 15m) while in possession of the ball without bouncing it, or bounces the ball more than once;
- › a player kicks the ball off the ground;
- › the ball is moved from a team's back zone to its scoring zone without being touched by a player in its mid zone;
- › a turnover occurs (i.e. a loose ball makes contact with the ground) – the free kick is awarded to the opposing team from the position where the ball first makes contact with the ground; or
- › a player has a flag removed, and he/she fails to replace the flag before the next act of play (i.e. he or she may not make a play at the football or opposition).



Player in the drop zone has right of way; opponent must concede mark.
No contact allowed.



Opponent is **not allowed** to make contact with the player in the drop zone.



Spoiling by punching the ball from behind or from the side is **not permitted**.



AFL RISING STARS PROGRAM





AFL Rising Stars Program

13-18 years

The AFL talent identification and development program is formalised in the NAB AFL Rising Stars Program. The development program operates from grass roots through to the elite AFL level. It provides recognition and a clearly identifiable direction for a player's career. The program incorporates the:

- › NAB AFL Rising Star;
- › NAB AFL Draft;
- › NAB AFL Draft Camp;
- › AIS-AFL Academy;
- › NAB AFL Under-18 Championships; and
- › NAB AFL Under-16 Championships.

NAB AFL Draft

The NAB AFL Draft is the only process through which a footballer can become an AFL player. It is the most equitable way of distributing the available talent to AFL clubs. Players gain access to clubs by nominating for the draft and can only move to other clubs through the draft process. The draft is critical to the AFL's objective of developing an even competition because:

- › it gives the lesser-performed clubs in a season first choice of the available players;
- › it gives clubs the option of exchanging draft choices, players or a combination of both; and
- › uncontracted players can change clubs by nominating for the NAB AFL Pre-season Draft.

Clubs can also maintain a rookie list of up to 6 developing players between 18-23, although these players are not eligible to play in the AFL premiership competition except as an injury replacement. A separate Rookie Draft is conducted for this purpose. The following components of the NAB AFL Rising Stars Program lead directly to the Draft.

NAB AFL U16 & U18 Championships

The NAB AFL Under-16 and Under-18 Championships are played annually between state and territory teams in 2 divisions, incorporating teams from South Australia, Western Australia, Victorian Country, Victorian Metropolitan, New South Wales/ACT, Northern Territory, Queensland and Tasmania.

AIS-AFL Academy

The AIS-AFL Academy is a joint program of the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and the AFL to enhance the sporting, personal, educational and vocational opportunities for Australia's best young footballers.

Each year the AIS-AFL Academy offers 30 12-month scholarships to young athletes eligible to represent their state or territory at the NAB AFL Under-16 Championships but ineligible for the draft in that year.

Scholarship holders remain in their home states but gather together for 3 national camps and other training programs during the year. Squad members are also given the opportunity to represent Australia at under-17 level in the International Rules Series against Ireland or on a tour of South Africa.

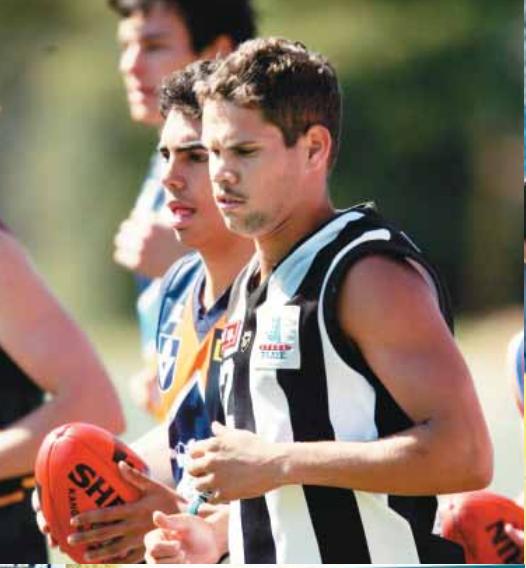
NAB AFL Draft Camp

The NAB AFL Draft Camp has become an integral part of the talent identification process for AFL clubs. The process has been refined and improved and the AFL invites about 70 players to the annual camp at the AIS in Canberra and a further 100-plus prospects to shorter testing programs in their home states.

Information is the AFL club recruiting managers' greatest tool and insights gained through the draft camp and the AFL recruiting reports is invaluable to clubs as they consider which players to draft. Key elements of the draft camp include medical screening, physical and psychomotor testing, formal and informal interviews with AFL clubs and skills sessions.

Players are organised into 7 positional groups for camp operations and testing – small midfielders, medium midfielders, medium forwards, medium defenders, tall forwards, tall defenders and ruckmen.

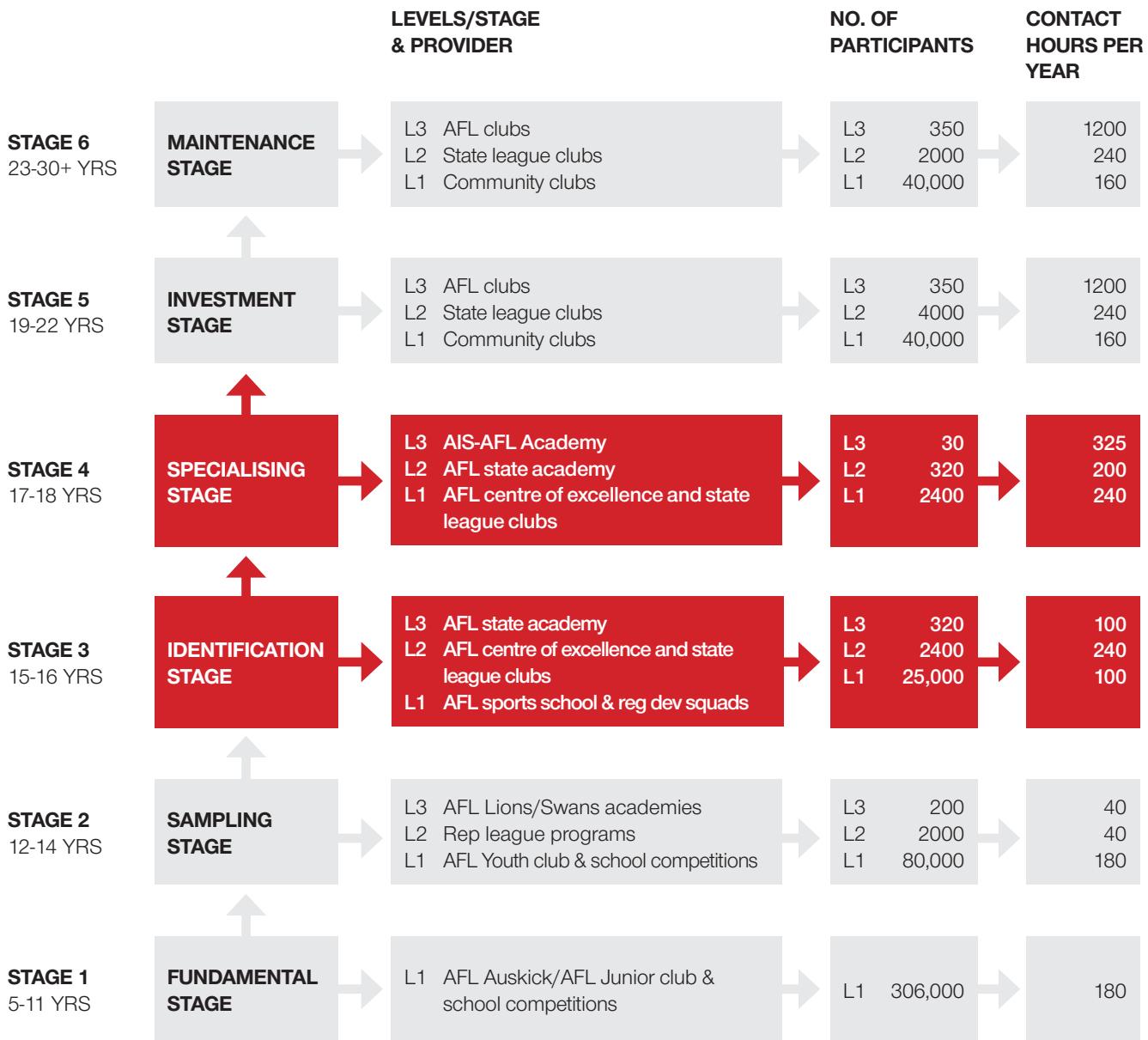
Some of the test protocols used for the draft camp, including speed, agility, vertical jumps and endurance tests can be found in the AFL Youth Coaching Manual. Coaches who wish to use formal testing with their youth players can obtain further information from AFL regional development offices.



Talent development structures

The talent development structure is being further developed to ensure the transfer of the philosophy and curriculum of the AIS-AFL Academy through AFL state academies, AFL centres of excellence and AFL sports schools.

The curriculum is delivered through the following structures:



Minimum standards will apply within each level

AIS-AFL Academy Squad	AFL State Academies	AFL Centres of Excellence
Participants 30 AIS scholarship holders	Participants Up to 40 per age level in each state for a total of 640 players nationally (under-16 and under-18)	Participants 4800 players participating in elite state league competitions
Staffing Level 3 coaches AFL-standard service providers Adherence to AFL philosophies, practices and code of conduct	Staffing Level 3 coaches State-league-standard service providers Adherence to AFL philosophies, practices and code of conduct	Staffing Level 2 coaches Accredited support staff Adherence to AFL philosophies, practices and code of conduct
Facilities AFL-standard playing and training facilities	Facilities State-level playing and training facilities IT (Champion Data) standard practices	Facilities State level playing and training facilities IT (Champion Data) standard practices
Curriculum 325 hours contact time Best-practice curriculum Documented game plan and team rules Personal development plans for all participants Delivered using AFL-standard IT practices including video and other performance analysis techniques	Curriculum Minimum face-to-face contact hours, 200 at the under-18 level and 100 at the under-16 level Documented game plan and team rules Personal development plans for all participants Adherence to nationally established development curriculum Delivered using cutting-edge educational and IT practices	Curriculum Contact time not less than 240 hours Documented game plan and team rules Development plans for all participants Adherence to nationally established development curriculum Delivered using cutting-edge educational and IT practices
Competition International tour	Competition Delivered using cutting-edge educational and IT practices	Competition Participation in state league competition
State academy match program is the NAB AFL Under-16 and Under-18 National Championships		

The curriculum will have 6 core components

Physical Preparation	Skill Development	Nutrition & Recovery	Personal Development	Athlete & Career Education	AFL Policy
Medical screening	Learning style	General education	Psychological profiling	Computer skills	ASADA-AFL policy
Fitness testing	Kicking technique	Food diaries	Mental toughness	Individualised assessments	Respect & responsibility
Conditioning	Running technique	Individualised reviews & food plans	Stress minimisation	Monitoring performance	Race & religious vilification
Profiling	Game sense	Losing/gaining weight	Goal-setting	Study skills	Drafting & the AFL pathway
Prioritising	Game knowledge	Hydration	Positive self-image	Time management	
Program assessment	Game balance	Recovery practices	Personal growth/life skills	Educational support	
Heat & training	Decision-making	Practical sessions	Public speaking	Welfare issues	
Reading your body	Team rules/ game plan	Drugs & alcohol	Media training		
Immunisation	AFL player profiling		Etiquette		
	Basics of the game		Leadership		
	Competition performance		Drugs & alcohol		
	Performance analysis		Travel		

Enhancing the identification, attraction and development of talent

Major improvements to generate better talent outcomes include:

AFL to take more direct role in monitoring/managing second-tier issues:

- the objective now specifically encompasses state leagues: “to develop the talented player pathway and enhance second-tier competitions to capture and develop talented players.”

Transfer the philosophy/curriculum of the AIS-AFL Academy through a structure of:

- AFL state academies (e.g. AFL Tasmania Academy);
- AFL centres of excellence (pilot 2008);
- AFL sports schools (pilot 2009).

Enhance the NAB AFL Under-16 Championships

- Series extended by 3 days to allow for one cross-over match for Division 1 states to play against Division 2 states and for every participant to be screened.
- Finals for Divisions 1 and 2 played on AFL Grand Final Day.

Enhance the NAB AFL Under-18 Championships

- Division 2 becomes a qualifying series to be played separately in May.
- The top-two finishers qualify to enter the Division 1 draw that follows later in the year.
- Division 1 becomes a 6-team, 5-match championship.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The umpire.....	58
AFL umpire development program.....	59
Coaching pathways.....	61
Codes of Conduct	64
AFL Kids First	65





The umpire

Expectations about the roles and responsibilities of umpires should vary according to their age and experience. An experienced umpire may also be able to take on the role of an on-field coach while they officiate. On the other hand, many umpires start their umpiring at junior level and, much like the players, are still developing their skills. Often these beginner or less-experienced umpires will be involved in the AFL's mentoring or Green Shirt program, which is a visual reminder that these umpires are just starting out and should be given time to develop.

In order to perform their role, umpires need to:

- › have a good knowledge of the rules of the game for each particular age group;
- › be able to make clear explanations to players when decisions are made; and
- › provide encouragement and feedback to the players during the game.

Philosophy of umpiring AFL Junior matches

When umpiring children in this age group, it is important to understand the 6 most important things are to:

1. develop a respect for officials in children;
2. assist the development of each player's basic skills;
3. assist with shaping character;
4. build self-esteem through positive feedback;
5. develop sportsmanship; and
6. educate and try to modify inappropriate behaviour.

The umpire as coach

An experienced AFL junior umpire may be capable of providing on-field coaching. For umpires to do this, they need:

- › a thorough knowledge of the skills of the game;
- › an understanding of teaching methods;
- › an understanding of how players develop; and
- › an ability to provide clear explanations and feedback about decisions.

Positioning

Because of the size of the oval and the distances kicked by children in these age groups, positioning should not be a problem.

The umpire should be close enough (side-on to each contest is the best position) to talk to the players and not have to yell too loudly.

Some players will even be bewildered and unsure of which way to kick or that they need to move back after taking a mark. The umpire needs to reassure such children and give them time and guidance in learning what to do. In some cases, children will need to be guided into position

(e.g. on the mark) or be given clear directions on what to do next.

Psychology

When rewarded for appropriate behaviour, children are far more likely to try to repeat such behaviour.

It has been shown this powerful method of controlling, modifying and developing behaviour is most effective when the reward is given immediately after the particular behaviour.

The umpire is in a position to give immediate rewards in 2 ways:

- › by word of mouth ("terrific", "well done", "good pass" etc). If need be, and if time permits, by explaining what was good about it; and
- › by awarding a free kick, or even granting a mark. Such decisions can be based upon the situation (courage, effort, determination or simply because the child had not had prior opportunities to fully participate) rather than a strict interpretation of the rules.

It is important that coaches, parents and spectators understand the role the umpires are attempting to perform during junior matches and support them, whether they are young umpires learning the game or experienced umpires helping to direct and coach on the field.



AFL umpire development program

Aim

The aim of the AFL Umpire Development Program is to provide a supportive and quality environment, where umpires and their mentors and coaches can help them develop their skills and enjoy their officiating experience.

The AFL has a number of education and recognition programs to support this aim. At the junior level 3 key programs are offered to assist in the development of umpires. They are:

1. the AFL basic umpire course;
2. the AFL umpire mentor program or Green Shirt program; and
3. the AFL umpire accreditation program.

Overview of the programs

The AFL basic umpire course

The basic umpire course is a training program designed to teach the basics of becoming an umpire and is an introduction to the umpiring development pathway.

It is designed to be used by all entry-level umpires, irrespective of age, gender or background in the game.

This includes parents, coaches and other club volunteers, and is also offered to schools and junior clubs.

An AFL Auskick-style pack and training DVD is provided to participants.

The AFL umpire mentor program or Green Shirt program

The AFL umpire mentor program is an umpire education and development program that aims to use experienced umpires to mentor new and inexperienced ones. The key elements of the program include:

- › the developing umpire wears a green shirt to highlight his or her learner status;
- › developing umpires receive support and training from an accredited mentor over the course of the season. This support includes on-field support in the early stages of their learning and off-field support and feedback on their umpiring progress; and
- › both the new umpire and mentor receive a resource pack and training program, and at the end of that season the AFL conducts a development awards ceremony in each state to recognise their participation in the program.

AFL umpire accreditation program

An umpire's development is recognised through a series of accreditation levels. The National Umpire Accreditation Scheme consists of 3 levels of accreditation, which are sequential and provide education and training at identified stages of the participant's development. Umpires must complete the first level of accreditation during their early years as an umpire.

All programs are designed in accordance with competency-based training principles that will allow the umpire to develop umpiring skills that assist them on match day.

Level 1 – for community league: field, boundary and goal umpires. Participants will be trained in the fundamentals of umpiring.

Level 2 – for community league: field, boundary and goal umpires. Participants will learn the advanced skills of umpiring and should be competent in umpiring open-age football.

Level 3 – for state league: field umpires only. Once selected at state-league level, field umpires undertake intensive training to a Level 3 standard. It prepares them for state league matches and is a prerequisite for trialling for an AFL squad.





Position	Player Name	Notes
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		
26		
27		
28		
29		
30		
31		
32		
33		
34		
35		
36		
37		
38		
39		
40		
41		
42		
43		
44		
45		
46		
47		
48		
49		
50		
51		
52		
53		
54		
55		
56		
57		
58		
59		
60		
61		
62		
63		
64		
65		
66		
67		
68		
69		
70		
71		
72		
73		
74		
75		
76		
77		
78		
79		
80		
81		
82		
83		
84		
85		
86		
87		
88		
89		
90		
91		
92		
93		
94		
95		
96		
97		
98		
99		
100		

Coaching pathways

The Australian Football League and its state affiliates recognise that at all levels of Australian Football the coach has significantly more influence upon players than any other person. As such, all coaches need to be appropriately accredited to their level. Coaches are the primary reason why players either stay or leave football – there is nothing more directly linked to drop out than having an abusive, angry, bad-tempered, or inadequately trained coach.

Training in coaching and communication techniques with primary and youth-aged children is critical for a number of reasons:

- › coaches influence the forming and **development of the personalities in their care**;
- › the primary years are the ‘golden years’ for the development of fundamental motor skills and learning sports-specific skills. This is the most rapid learning phase of young lives and the **failure to develop such skills in these pre-youth years is a major factor influencing teenage drop-out in sport**.

Learning is an active process

Learning is an active process linked to the development of young people. There are:

- › identifiable phases in learning physical skills; and
- › learning processes change over time as young people gain experience.

Strategies for helping young people learn include letting them:

- › watch, listen and then experiment for themselves;
- › try the activity first, and then refine the skills with the help of feedback; and
- › watch other young people.

How young people like to learn differs with the particular skill, their experience and the way they learn best.

Learning is developmental

Learning changes as young people grow and mature with:

- › physical changes in their size and strength;
- › social, emotional and psychological development; and
- › their experience as they progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced skill levels.

With experience young people adapt to changing circumstances with greater speed and ease.

Key characteristics of more experienced players include their ability to:

- › identify and sift relevant cues in their playing environment quickly and accurately; and
- › decide what information is relevant to their performance.

Learning is multi-dimensional

People typically learn more than one thing at a time. In the process of building sports skills, young people are also learning:

- › what is expected of them as a player;
- › how to work with friends and teammates; and
- › the skills they are best at.

This highlights the complexity of acquiring skills and how the broader social aspects of life also affect young people as they learn sports.

Aims of quality coaching

Coaches aim to pass onto young people a sound understanding of:

- › skills, tactics, strategies and rules; and
- › etiquette and behavioural standards.

This aims to help players develop an ability to make decisions independently and to participate within the ethos of the sport.

Coaches aid learning best by being flexible and not overly directive. They need to plan:

- › what they will teach;
- › how they will facilitate; and
- › how they will structure tasks.

Coaching courses – training

The development of Australian Football, particularly at grass-roots and club football level, depends primarily on the environment where the game is organised and played.

The following are key elements in establishing a first-class environment for the recruitment and retention of Australian Football participants:

- › how football clubs and facilities are managed by club personnel;
- › how football activities and games are presented and managed by coaches;
- › how games are umpired; and
- › how players are supported by trainers and sports medicine personnel.

The AFL, through its Game Development Department, develops, implements and conducts training programs to develop coaches, umpires, trainers and club management. These programs are generally conducted through the AFL's state and territory affiliates. In line with the Australian Sports Commission's education programs and sport industry vocational programs, the AFL's accreditation programs for coaches, umpires, trainers and administrators are competency based.

Mandatory accreditation

All state and territory football bodies have a mandatory accreditation policy; coaches **MUST** complete an approved AFL coaching course if they are coaching children. There are no second chances; children need to be appropriately coached through these formative years.

The coaching of children at AFL Auskick centres is the most important aspect of the program. Failure to develop coordination and basic skills is the single greatest factor in children opting not to continue participating in their chosen sport, or sport generally.

Parents can access courses that are highly practical in their content and presentation.

Accreditation courses

The specific accreditation courses offered by the AFL are described below. As part of each course:

- › candidates will be assessed practically in course time and/or on the job;
- › excellent AFL coaching manuals and further presenters' notes are provided as part of the course;
- › coaches must agree to and sign the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct as part of their accreditation; and
- › as accredited coaches, successful candidates receive the appropriate AFL coaching certificate and are entered on the national coaches' database.

Orientation course

- › Introductory 3-4 hour course.
- › Conducted through the practical hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel.
- › Designed for parents/helpers who, regardless of their football background, would like to assist in running activities.
- › Outlines the conduct of a typical AFL Auskick session and how it fits into a season-long program.
- › Introduces appropriate warm-up activities.
- › Demonstrates the skills of Australian Football.
- › Shows, through practical involvement, how to teach these skills to children.
- › Demonstrates a variety of skill games and activities.
- › Introduces the principles of conducting and umpiring modified football games.
- › Offers credits to the AFL Auskick Level 1 Certificate.

Level 1 – AFL junior course

- › The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation for coaching children 5-12 years old in both AFL Auskick centres and community clubs is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › Designed for parents/helpers who want to assume a coaching role, organise activities, teach the skills of the game, and conduct modified games. It focuses on issues surrounding the participation and practices appropriate to the development and enjoyment of players in this age range.

- › Topics include the:
 - role of the coach;
 - planning and organisation of the training session;
 - teaching the basic skills of Australian Football;
 - skill games and modified games/forming a basic team plan;
 - growth and development/safety issues/legal issues.

- › The **teachers' Level 1 AFL Auskick** course takes into account the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and is an abbreviated course.

AFL Auskick coaching coordinator course

- › Designed for coaches who want to develop their skills to manage a coaching program as a leader coach.
- › As with other higher qualifications in coaching, such as the Level 2 Youth/Senior accreditation, this course would normally be conducted over a long weekend in a live-in environment.
- › Coaches undertake activities and are assessed over a full season (in this case an AFL Auskick season) by qualified staff.
- › Improving the coaching knowledge and skills of candidates, along with their technical planning and management skills, are the course's priorities.

Level 1 AFL youth course

- › **The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation** for coaching participants aged 13-18 years is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › The course has a focus on understanding youth participation in Australian Football, which permeates all aspects of the course.
It has a specific focus on the things that motivate and demotivate youths in football, the social aspects of working with and managing players in this age range, specific communication skills and how to develop higher-level skills and a higher-level understanding of the game.
- › Topics include:
 - the role of the coach;
 - communication with youth-aged players;
 - issues surrounding youth participation in Australian Football;
 - growth and development factors;
 - planning for participation and development;
 - teaching the skills of Australian Football;
 - organising the training session;
 - team play and tactics;
 - fitness for football/recovery and rehabilitation;
 - coaching and safety issues; and
 - practical assessment.
- › The Teachers' Level 1 Youth Course takes into account the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and is an abbreviated course.

Level 1 – AFL senior course

- › The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation for coaching adult participants aged 18 years and older, is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › Topics include:
 - the role of the coach;
 - planning;
 - teaching the skills of Australian Football;
 - organising the training session;
 - team play and tactics;
 - fitness for football/recovery and rehabilitation;
 - coaching and safety issues; and
 - practical assessment.

Level 2 – AFL (youth/senior) certificate

- › The AFL's coaching accreditation for coaches involved in coaching at a higher level (representative team, development squad, club coordinator etc.) or for coaches who have an aptitude and genuine interest in improving themselves. The course starts with a live-in weekend with a review day at the end of the season (around 30 hours of course work is required, in addition to practical involvement).
- › Conducted through practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of the relevant state director of coaching and expert presenters, this course's focus is on preparing a coach to plan, prepare, conduct, review and adapt a year-long program of coaching.
- › Topics include:
 - evaluating a coach's performance;
 - planning/periodisation of training;
 - developing the skills of Australian Football;
 - team play and tactics;
 - sports psychology and communication;
 - principles of physical preparation;
 - coaching and safety issues;
 - fitness;
 - the coach and umpiring; and
 - practical assessment.

Level 3 – AFL high performance

- › The AFL's coaching accreditation for coaches operating in, or aspiring to coach in the AFL, state leagues, TAC Cup, the under-16 and under-18 national championships, AIS-AFL Academy or other elite programs. Coaches, including talented coaches not yet operating at this level, apply to be invited to this week-long, live-in program.
- › This is the highest accreditation offered by the AFL and covers in greater depth those areas dealt with in Level 2, while also covering up-to-date issues, such as emerging technology, media relations and coaches as program managers and mentors.



Codes of Conduct

Parents/spectators

- › Remember children play sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- › Encourage children to participate, do not force participation upon them.
- › Focus on your children's efforts and self-esteem rather than whether they win or lose
- › Encourage children to always participate according to the rules.
- › Never ridicule or yell at children for making a mistake or if their team loses a game.
- › Remember children learn best by example – applaud the efforts of all players in both teams.
- › Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.
- › Show appreciation of volunteer coaches, officials and administrators – without whom your child could not participate.
- › Respect umpires' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- › Remember smoking and the consumption of alcohol is unacceptable at junior sport.

Administration/officials

- › Ensure equal participation for all: provide equal opportunities for all regardless of ability, size, shape, sex, age, disability or ethnic origin.
- › Suitability of program: ensure that the rules, equipment, length of games and training schedules take into consideration the age, ability and maturity level of the participants.
- › Ensure adequate supervision: adequate supervision must be provided by qualified and competent coaches and officials capable of developing appropriate sports behaviour and skills.
- › Stress enjoyment: remember children participate for enjoyment. Play down the importance of rewards.
- › Arrange adult education: develop improved standards of coaching and officiating with an emphasis on appropriate behaviour and skills.
- › Promote fair play: ensure parents, coaches, officials, sponsors, physicians and participants understand their responsibilities regarding fair play.
- › Modify to suit various levels: modify rules and regulations to match the skill level of participants and their needs.
- › Promote respect for opponents: condemn unsporting behaviour.
- › Maximise enjoyment: publicly encourage rule changes that will reinforce the principle of participating for fun and enjoyment.
- › Keep up to date: make a personal commitment to keep informed of the sound principles of administering recommended football programs for junior players.



Players

- › Play by the rules: they are there for the good of all.
- › Never argue with an official: if you disagree, discuss the matter with your coach or teacher after the game.
- › Control your temper: verbal abuse, racial or religious vilification of other players, and provoking an opponent or the other team are never appropriate.
- › Be a good sport: applaud all good plays by your team, opponent or the opposition team.
- › Treat all players fairly: treat all players as you would like to be treated. Do not interfere with, bully or take unfair advantage of another player.
- › Cooperate willingly: cooperate with your coach, teammates and opponents. Without them there would be no game.
- › Play for fun: Play for the 'fun of it' and not just to please parents and coaches.

Coaches' Code of Conduct (as signed by accredited coaches)

- › I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian Football, including refraining from any discriminatory practices on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnic background or special ability/disability.
- › I will abide by and teach the AFL Laws of the Game and the rules of my club and league/association.
- › I will be reasonable in the demands I make on the time commitments of the players in my care, having due consideration for their health and well-being.
- › I will be supportive at all times and I will refrain from any form of personal or physical abuse or unnecessary physical contact with the players in my care.
- › I will have due consideration for the varying maturity and ability levels of my players when designing practice

schedules, practice activities and involvement in competition.

- › Where I am responsible for players in the 5-18-year-old age group, I will strive to ensure that all players gain equal playing time. I will avoid overplaying the talented players, aiming to maximise participation, learning and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability.
 - › I will stress and monitor safety always.
 - › In recognising the significance of injury and sickness, I will seek and follow the physician's advice concerning the return of injured or ill players to training.
 - › I will endeavour to keep informed regarding sound principles of coaching and skill development, and of factors relating to the welfare of my players.
 - › I will at all times display and teach appropriate sporting behaviour, ensuring that players understand and practise fair play.
- I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators.
- › I will ensure that players are involved in a positive environment where skill learning and development are priorities and not overshadowed by a desire to win. I reject the use of performance-enhancing substances in sport and will abide by the guidelines set forth in the AFL Anti Doping and Illicit Drugs policies.

I agree to the following terms:

I agree to abide by the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct. I acknowledge that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, may take disciplinary action against me if I breach the code of conduct. I understand that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, is required to implement a complaints handling

procedure in accordance with the principles of natural justice in the event of an allegation against me.

I acknowledge that disciplinary action against me may include de-registration from the AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

Note: The Coaches' Code of Conduct is to be signed and followed as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to the Code, they may be obliged to sign a further code of conduct/ethics with their club and/or league.

AFL Kids First

AFL Kids First is a program that has been designed for leagues to guide parents so both they and their children obtain the maximum benefit and enjoyment from their participation in junior programs and matches.



Parents barracking and wanting their children to perform well is natural, but it is critical this is done in a responsible and positive manner and that the ugly parent syndrome is avoided at all times.

AFL Kids First includes recommendations for leagues and their clubs to manage situations where parents become over-enthusiastic and risk having a negative impact on their children's activities. The AFL has produced an operations manual for leagues and clubs, which can be found at afl.com.au/development/forclubs/kidsfirst/tabid/10233/default.aspx.





KEEPING JUNIOR FOOTBALL SAFE

Legal considerations	68
Safety considerations	70
Environmental conditions	72



Legal considerations

These specific policies focus on legislation that exists to ensure the safety, health and welfare of young people and volunteers, who participate in and deliver junior football competitions.

These policies do not cover the legislation applying to the administration of junior sport (e.g. tax law, corporations law, stamp duty).

The law related to the welfare of junior participants emphasises the serious obligations for anybody taking responsibility for providing junior participants with activities and/or care. The people responsible for running junior football competitions have a duty of care of to:

- be aware of the underlying legal issues relevant to the provision of sport; and
- put appropriate safeguards in place.

This protects both volunteers and participants. It is also in line with being a best-practice organisation.

Child protection

Child protection legislation provides a screening process intended to reduce the risk of sexual or physical harm to children. It aims to keep young people safe from abuse and protect them from people who are unsuitable to work with children. Under current child protection legislation, a child is considered to be a person under 18 years of age. Child abuse includes:

- sexual abuse/misconduct – any sexual act or threat imposed on a child;
- physical abuse – non-accidental injury or harm to a child;
- emotional abuse – behaviour that can cause psychological harm to a child (e.g. verbal abuse).

Child protection legislation makes it mandatory for sporting organisations and individuals involved in sport as paid employees or volunteers to meet certain requirements. These requirements also apply to individuals and organisations outside of the states with child protection legislation in place. It is important to note that while Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia are the only states with such legislation, any team from a sporting club or organisation from outside these states that travels to any one of them for camps, carnivals, competitions or activities, must comply with the relevant legislation of that jurisdiction. For example, coaches, team managers and support staff must undergo the appropriate screening for the state to which they are travelling.

In addition to the various screening legislation throughout the country, state legislation also differs in the area of mandatory reporting. Under mandatory reporting, when, upon reasonable grounds, a person suspects a child has been or is being abused, that person must report it as soon as practical to the relevant state government department(s). Junior leagues and clubs responsible for delivering junior football must ensure they comply with all appropriate policies and procedures relating to

child protection legislation. Please consult with your state football body for information about screening procedures and member protection regulations.

Racial and religious vilification

The AFL introduced a policy to deal with on-field racial and religious vilification in 1995. The AFL remains determined to send a strong message to the football community that such behaviour is not acceptable. Racial and religious abuse is best tackled by education and conciliation. The AFL has implemented a procedure for dealing with incidents of racial and religious abuse that is recommended for adoption by all leagues delivering community football competitions. [Visit **afl.com.au/policies**](http://afl.com.au/policies) to view the full policy.

Sexual harassment and discrimination

The AFL took a community leadership position in 2005 by drafting its Respect and Responsibility Policy. This policy aims to ensure a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for women and girls across the industry.

The policy aims to foster a culture and an environment of equality between women and men. It is difficult to ensure an environment of equality is generated where women are not appropriately represented at all levels of club administration, or are discriminated against on the basis of their sex, sexually harassed or otherwise marginalised rather than being recognised for their skills and contributions. Football clubs are an important part of Australian society and, thus, need to be a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for women. The AFL also recognises women and girls are involved at all levels of community football, as players, coaches, umpires, volunteer administrators, trainers, doctors, physiotherapists, team managers, and supporters.

Part of the Respect and Responsibility program involves developing resources that can assist clubs to ensure their environments positively promote the participation of women and girls across all levels of football. The resources will include information about the aims of a respect and responsibility program, the legal and ethical obligations clubs ought to observe, and any benefits (including assessment or accreditation criteria) that could flow to clubs that promote safe, inclusive, and harassment-free environments for women and girls at all times.

For more information about the Respect and Responsibility Policy or to read more about the programs currently being developed go to:

[**afl.com.au/policies**](http://afl.com.au/policies)

Discrimination, harassment & bullying

Direct discrimination occurs when young people are:

- treated less favourably in, for instance, access to training or selection in teams because of their gender, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation; and

- › refused membership or provided membership on less favourable terms and conditions than other members.

Indirect discrimination occurs when a practice impacts on one junior more than another because of a personal characteristic. Discrimination is prohibited in regard to work, education, provision of services and registered clubs.

Harassment is any form of behaviour that is not wanted, asked for or returned, and likely to create a hostile or uncomfortable environment by:

- › humiliating someone;
- › seriously embarrassing them;
- › offending them; or
- › intimidating them.

Sexual harassment is –

- › an unwelcome sexual advance,
- › an unwelcome request for sexual favours and
- › any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature
- in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Bullying is repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards one person or a group of people that creates a risk to health and safety. It is behaviour that victimises, humiliates or undermines an individual or group of people.

Clubs should ensure they put in place a policy and process for dealing with any complaint of bullying, harassment or discrimination. Clubs can obtain a copy of the AFL's Equal Employment Opportunity Policy to use as a guide for their own policy by emailing careers@afl.com.au and requesting a copy.

Occupational health and safety

Every state and territory has legislation governing occupational or workplace health and safety (OH&S). It applies to workers (such as employed development officers or administrators), volunteers, students or club members. Under common law, a duty of care is also imposed on organisations to ensure all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent injury.

The AFL National Risk Protection Program provides a risk management framework for all junior leagues and clubs to ensure they comply with health and safety regulations. Information can be found at jitsport.com.au/afl.

For further information regarding OH&S please visit the relevant Workcover authority website for your state or the Australian Safety and Compensation Council at ascc.gov.au.

Privacy

The Commonwealth Privacy Act governs the collection and use of personal information where a person's identity is:

- › apparent; or
- › is obvious from the information.

The legislation provides strict guidelines (known as the National Privacy Principles) about the collection, use and disclosure of such information and can be found at privacy.gov.au.

All clubs and club officials should familiarise themselves with these principles and guidelines.

One important thing to remember: clubs and leagues should not use any visual image of junior players in any public medium (including their website) without firstly obtaining the written consent of their parents or guardians.

Drugs

Illicit

Drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are commonly available in a range of social settings and sports environments are not immune to this. Their use should be actively discouraged at any activity connected with sport, and young people should be encouraged to carry this policy through to their personal life. If it is believed participants at your club have issues with alcohol or drugs, then they should be referred to appropriate health providers for assistance.

Smoking

While personal choice is acknowledged, tobacco use and/or exposure to tobacco smoke can be harmful to a person's health. Passive smoking (inhaling second-hand smoke) is hazardous and non-smokers should be protected from tobacco smoke. Passive smoking can lead to serious illnesses such as bronchitis, lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, and chest illnesses in children.

The AFL recommends all junior leagues and clubs responsible for delivering junior football adopt a SmokeFree policy to create a healthy family-friendly environment. Please visit afl.com.au/policies to view SmokeFree policy examples.

Alcohol

The AFL recommends at all junior games the consumption of alcohol at grounds be prohibited except inside licensed clubrooms. Under no circumstances shall alcohol consumption be permitted other than inside licensed clubrooms before, during and after junior matches. Junior clubs shall be responsible for the conduct of their members, supporters and followers.



Safety considerations

Research has shown that junior football is very safe. The incidence of injury in junior football is very low, and serious injury is extremely rare. To maintain this position, leagues and clubs should prepare adequately to deal with injuries or medical problems should they occur.

Risk management procedures include the provision of first aid support, safety equipment, and having policies in place for environmental and medical issues. These improve the safety of junior players.

Dealing with emergencies

Planning what to do when an emergency occurs is an essential part of risk management. Junior leagues must be conversant with procedures and able to deal with emergencies so young people are well cared for.

Junior leagues should ensure a person with current first aid qualifications is available at all junior games and seek medical opinion when:

- › the health of a participant is questionable;
- › recovery from illness/injury is uncertain; and
- › a participant is injured during training/competition.

When medical advice cannot be obtained, the junior league and/or club should not allow the young person to participate. A first aid kit must be available at training and competition venues. Sport-specific rescue equipment should also be accessible. Emergencies should be formally reported, discussed, and changes made to procedures if needed.

First Aid Officer

For the safety of all junior players the following minimum levels of accreditation for providing first aid and trainer services will apply:

- › AFL Auskick / AFL Junior (5-12 years) – basic first aid course;
- › Community Youth (13-14 years) – sports first aid course/ basic first aid course; and
- › Community Youth (15-18 years) – Level 1 trainer/basic trainers course (must include current emergency first aid qualification).

Medical conditions

Special medical conditions

Some medical conditions may create concern for coaches and parents. Generally, active sports are beneficial to most people with medical conditions. However, a medical certificate should be provided if there is potential for the condition interfering with participation, or playing football could adversely influence the condition.

Some conditions may require coaches to be informed if specific medical assistance could be necessary.

Common conditions such as asthma, epilepsy and diabetes require an emergency management plan to be provided. Players with heart problems or who have lost one of a paired organ system (e.g. eye, kidney, testicle) need a specific medical clearance to play.

Concussion

Concussion occurs when, after a blow to the head, there is a brain injury with some immediate disturbance of brain function. Any player showing the signs or symptoms of concussion should be removed from the field immediately and referred to a medical practitioner.

A player, who has suffered concussion with or without losing consciousness, should not participate in any match or training session until he or she is fully recovered and has been cleared by a thorough medical examination. Junior clubs must cite a medical clearance before allowing a player who has suffered concussion to resume playing.

Infectious diseases

Playing football, as with all team sports, involves players living and training in close contact with others. While this increases the risk of contracting common illnesses such as respiratory infections, skin infections or gastroenteritis. The following simple measures can reduce the chances of transmission of these infections:

- › avoiding sharing drink bottles;
- › washing hands regularly;
- › avoiding spitting;
- › a generally clean environment in change rooms.

These specific rules apply to players with acute bleeding during a game:

- › they should be removed from the ground immediately and the bleeding controlled;
- › they may require medical attention;
- › all open wounds should be covered before returning to play;
- › all clothing contaminated with blood should be removed and washed.

These measures reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne viruses.

Weight control

In sports where muscle tone and low levels of fat are desirable, young people may attempt to control their weight through dangerous practices such as fasting, diet pills, laxatives and diuretics. A coach or other sport provider should not directly suggest to a young person that they lose weight as this might trigger an undesirable response with severe under-eating.

Positive messages must be provided to young people about healthy eating as an aid to performing well. If you notice a young person is losing weight and if it is believed participants at your club have issues with weight loss or unhealthy dietary



practices, act promptly; they should be referred to appropriate health providers for assistance.

Facilities and equipment

Boundary line

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, the distance between the boundary line and oval fencing should be a minimum of 3 metres.

Goal-post padding

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, all fixed goal and behind posts must be padded as follows:

- a minimum of 35 millimetres thick foam padding, covered in canvas or painted;
- a minimum height of 2.5 metres from the bottom of each goal and behind post;
- a suitable width to allow the padding to be fixed around each goal and behind post; and
- The padding must be securely attached around each goal and behind post.

Mouth guards

It is recommended all children participating in any form of the game should wear an appropriately fitted mouth guard.

Protective head gear (helmets)

There is no strong evidence to suggest protective head gear is necessary in junior football. In the event that protective head gear (a helmet) is required because of a disability or medical condition, a medical certificate should be provided that states the protective head gear will provide adequate protection.

Spectacles

Junior footballers who wish to wear spectacles during matches and training sessions should wear spectacles with plastic frames and plastic lenses. A band must also hold the spectacles on securely. This will minimise the risk of injury to the player, teammates and opposition players.

Environmental conditions

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants. Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training or competition. Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions considered extreme, due to their residents' acclimatisation to the local environment. When scheduling junior matches, junior leagues and schools must always consider the player's health, giving careful consideration to the following environmental conditions.

Heat

Vigorous exercise in sport places some people at risk of heat illness. Even in cool weather, heat illness may occur in people exercising at high intensity for more than 45 minutes. The risk of heat illness is obviously greater in hot and humid weather because:

- › during high-intensity exercise in hot weather people may not be able to produce enough perspiration to adequately cool themselves; and
- › high humidity may prevent adequate evaporation of sweat.

Children perspire less and get less evaporative cooling than adults. In warm and hot weather, they have greater difficulty in cooling themselves; they look flushed, and feel hotter and more stressed than adults. Overweight children are particularly disadvantaged exercising in warm weather. Children should always be allowed to exercise at their preferred intensity, they should never be urged to exercise harder or compelled to play strenuous sport in warm weather. If children appear distressed or complain of feeling unwell, they should stop the activity.

In high temperatures and humid conditions, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing scheduled matches to a cooler part of the day or cancelling them. It is recommended junior football providers follow the Sports Medicine Australia guidelines available on their website sma.org.au.

Cold

In extremely cold temperatures, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing or cancelling scheduled matches. The AFL recommends junior leagues and schools apply common sense guidelines to climatic conditions that exist within their respective regions. Sports Medicine Australia (SMA) has state and territory branches and should be consulted when developing appropriate local policies to manage environmental conditions.

Fluid balance

Substantial amounts of water are lost through perspiration when exercising vigorously in the heat, so fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Junior participants do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity. Junior participants must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

- › Water is the most appropriate drink for re-hydration. However, diluted cordial or sports drinks may be supplied. Flavoured drinks may be more palatable to children who have consistently poor drinking habits during exercise.
- › Players should be encouraged to have their own drink bottles. This ensures that each player has access to an adequate level of replacement fluids and reduces the risk of contamination and passing on of viruses.
- › Where cups and a large container are supplied, cups should not be dipped into the container. Used cups should be washed or disposed of after use.
- › Cups should not be shared.

Sun protection

Junior leagues and clubs have a responsibility to protect junior participants, to the greatest extent practical, from the dangers of sun exposure. Junior participants should be encouraged to protect themselves against sun exposure by applying a 30+ sunscreen in warm weather.

Junior leagues and clubs should also maximise the provision of shaded areas at venues and events, and/or erect artificial shade.

Sports Medicine Australia has developed a policy related to preventing heat illness in sport. These general safety guidelines, which are specific to geographical locations, are available on the SMA website at sma.org.au.

Lightning

The AFL has produced a lightning policy for adoption by junior leagues and clubs. The policy provides a step-by-step process to assist volunteers when making the difficult decision to postpone matches and/or remove participants from the playing surface. The full policy can be found at afl.com.au/policies.



Further resources and website references

Useful websites

Australian Football League afl.com.au

State and Territory Affiliates

AFL NSW/ACT aflnswact.com.au

AFL Northern Territory aflnt.com.au

AFL Queensland aflq.com.au

AFL Tasmania footballtas.com.au

AFL Victoria aflvic.com.au

South Australian National Football League sanfl.com.au

West Australian Football Commission wafootball.com.au

Australasian Legal Information Institute austlii.edu.au

Australian Sports Commission ausport.gov.au

Australian Sports Commission – Junior Sport

ausport.gov.au/participating/schools_and_juniors/juniors/resources

Child Wise and ECPAT childwise.net

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian childcomm.qld.gov.au

Commissioner for Children Tasmania childcomm.tas.gov.au

Department for Families and Communities South Australia familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au

Department of Sport and Recreation Western Australia dsr.wa.gov.au

Disability Sport unit – Australian Sports Commission ausport.gov.au/dsu/index.asp

National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect napcan.org.au

National Institute of Family Studies – National Child Protection Clearing House aifs.gov.au/nch/

New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People kids.nsw.gov.au/check

New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation, Child Protection and Employment Screening dsr.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport nt.gov.au/dlghs/

Office for Recreation and Sport, South Australia recsport.sa.gov.au

Play by the rules playbytherules.net.au

Scale plus Law Resource, Attorney General's Department scaleplus.law.gov.au

School Sport Australia schoolsport.edu.au

Sport and Recreation Queensland srq.qld.gov.au

Sport and Recreation Tasmania development.tas.gov.au/sportrec/

Sports Medicine Australia sma.org.au

Research

The *Next Generation Australian Football Match Policy: For the conduct of the game for junior players aged 5–18 years* is based on the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) Junior Sport Framework. The ASC developed the Junior Sport Framework (JSF) to assist sports in making informed decisions about establishing fun, safe and friendly junior sport environments and experiences for children and young people.

It was imperative the JSF be informed by contemporary research. To this end, the ASC commissioned a set of briefing papers. The papers have been prepared by nationally and internationally recognised authorities who have provided input in their areas of expertise.

Each paper takes a significant issue that is relevant across the majority of Australian sports, and draws upon research from studies conducted with children through to young adults, and on recreational through to elite participation. The papers bring to light the importance of providing a sporting experience that is positive and rewarding for children and young people. Safety, enjoyment, inclusion, understanding, support and learning are pivotal to building the foundations for lifelong sporting engagement.

The rules and procedures contained in the *Next Generation Australian Football Match Policy* have been refined through continual research and evaluation over many years. The JSF briefing papers have provided invaluable contemporary research to support the policy's development.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The ASC has recently published the briefing papers in the form of a booklet called *Junior Sport Matters*, which is available for sale through the ASC's publications unit ausport.gov.au/about/publications/corporate_documents.

Australian Sports Commission – Junior Sports Framework Briefing Papers

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Australian Sports Commission. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction should be addressed to copyright@ausport.gov.au.

1. Junior sport models representing best practice nationally and internationally

David Kirk
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Wolf-Dietrich
Brettschneider Paderborn University, Germany

Chris Auld
Griffith University, Australia

2. The functions of sport delivery systems at national, state and local levels in Australia

Chris Auld
Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management
Griffith University, Australia

3. Legislation related to safe and appropriate junior sport delivery

Steve Bennett
Blake Dawson Waldron, Lawyers, Brisbane

4. Preparation of personnel responsible for junior sport delivery

Chris Auld
Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management
Griffith University, Australia

5. Coaching and officiating for junior sport participants

Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen's University, Canada

Wade Gilbert
Kinesiology Department
California State University, USA

6. Health and welfare of junior sport participants

Sue Hooper, Stewart Trost and Murray Phillips
School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland, Australia

7. Physical activity pedagogy for junior sport

Doune Macdonald
School of Human Movement Studies,
The University of Queensland, Australia

Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology & Health Sciences,
Queen's University, Canada

David Kirk
Dean, Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education,
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

8. OPPORTUNITIES AND PATHWAYS FOR BEGINNERS TO ELITE TO ENSURE OPTIMUM AND LIFELONG INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT

Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen's University, Canada

9. GROWTH AND MATURATION IN JUNIOR ATHLETES

Don Bailey
School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland, Australia
College of Physical Education, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

10. TRENDS IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH
Stewart Trost
Department of Kinesiology and Community Health Institute
Kansas State University, USA

11. HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES OF JUNIOR SPORT

Murray Phillips, Doune Macdonald & Stephanie Hanrahan
School of Human Movement Studies
The University of Queensland, Australia

Australian Football League – Research

1. Report to the Australian Football League

“Analysis of the research and literature into the methods of successfully identifying and developing talent in sport from a global perspective”
Research report prepared by John Turnbull

2. The quality of the philosophy and practice of AFL Auskick: the perceptions of children, parents and coordinators

Research report prepared by
Dr Christopher Hickey & Dr Lindsay Fitzclarence
Deakin Centre for Education and Change

3. Australian Football League youth participation research report

Hans Westerbeek & Aaron Smith
Centre for Change Management – Bowater School of Management & Marketing: Faculty of Business & Law, Deakin University





Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission