

## THE AFL JUNIOR MATCH POLICY REVIEW – 2012

In 2008, the Australian Football League in collaboration with state football bodies and the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) developed the Next Generation Australian Football Match Policy – for the conduct of the game for players aged 5-18 years. The policy was based on a large body of generic research into best practices for children's sport which had been accumulated at that time.

For some of the affiliated leagues and clubs across the country, the introduction of this policy in 2008 represented a significant shift in the match rules and procedures that were being delivered. By the start of the 2012 season, it was evident that a number of gaps still remained.

As a result, Deakin University was engaged to complete a research project specifically looking at the impact of the presence or absence of the junior match policy on enjoyment and skill development of participants and on the attitudes and match-day behaviours of parents, coaches, officials and administrators.

## WHY DO KIDS NEED DIFFERENT RULES TO ADULTS?

Fundamentally, any person wishing to participate in the game should be able to do so in a manner which is appropriate to his or her skills, needs and aspirations.

For too long young kids have been allowed to play on the same size field and under the same match conditions as senior players – it is simply not right.

It is essential that young players are introduced to the game through modified rules and regulations that consider their physical, psychological and emotional needs.

In other words, young players have different needs to adults.

## The overriding objective of the Junior Football – This Is Our Game philosophy is:

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

## The study by Deakin University involved:

- » Five leagues across two states and 36 matches.
- » Over 1800 minutes of game-time was viewed.
- » 2227 participants completed the national survey.

In addition, the AFL consulted directly with state affiliates, a number of major leagues and many other key stakeholders throughout the review process.

The research was one of the first internationally to begin to understand the experience of children in junior modified sport and its core findings were clear:

1. The intent of the policy was validated by the research – it is good for the game.
2. Better match environments were experienced in leagues that complied with the Junior Policy.
3. It is acknowledged there is value in increasing some of the competitive elements at a younger age – starting at U11 as opposed to U13.
4. The role of umpires and coaches needs to be considered in the junior context with education and accreditation to match.
5. Results of a national survey suggested that Auskick is well understood in the community but junior football is not.
6. A substantial education process and marketing campaign is required to underpin the document.

So, in essence, two bodies of research and a significant amount of stakeholder discussion over a number of years have shaped this match guide.



## **'THIS IS OUR GAME' PHILOSOPHY**

### **PLAYING GROUND, ZONES, TIME AND EQUIPMENT**

Kids cannot kick as far, run as fast or process the same level of match information as adults – so why make them play on the same size field?

The 'This is Our Game' philosophy 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 more engaged because the ball is never far away.

### **USE OF ZONES**

The junior football match program embraces "zones" for the younger children as an excellent teaching practice. Firstly, the use of zones prevents ball-chasing and subsequent congestion where all players congregate around the ball. Secondly, it enables groupings of players of similar size and ability to play within a zone.

### **TEAM COMPOSITION**

Reduced numbers allow individual players to have more frequent and longer contact with the ball while play is more open, even when played on a reduced size oval.

### **ROTATION OF PLAYERS**

Children should 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 and adds variety and interest to the matches.

### **CONTACT**

Deferring the introduction of full tackling is based upon the need to provide players with the best possible conditions to learn, develop and improve their disposal skills by reducing congestion and pressure on the player in possession. All skills are eventually taught and learned, in an appropriate sequence for doing so.

The physiological and emotional readiness of children's bodies to withstand the pressures of tackling also needs to be recognised in assessing when to introduce tackling. The "age of readiness" will vary from child to child, but generally is recognised as being around the 11-12 years age group.

### **MARKING**

Awarding marks over any distance in the development phase recognises that many youngsters cannot consistently kick the ball beyond 10 metres.

### **BOUNCING**

Restricting the number of bounces prevents players running excessive distances with the ball, encourages disposal skills and enhances team play.

### **KICKING OFF THE GROUND**

In a player's development years, the ability to enhance the skill of picking the ball up takes precedence over the need to kick it off the ground.

### **THE COACH ON THE GROUND**

The absence of stringent competition conditions should enable the coach to provide praise, teaching and feedback when required.

### **PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS**

The match environment in junior football must be one of encouragement, learning and development over a focus of "winning".

When winning overrides such aims and encouragement is replaced by a fear of failure, the program for children is inappropriate.

### **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.

**Participation in our game in safe and enjoyable AFL Auskick and junior club environments can significantly contribute to the development and social wellbeing of young people.**

**Australian Football must be the best experience possible if we are going to continue to attract and retain children in the game.**

# **PART 3**

## **JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH PROGRAM**

### **AUSKICK – UNDER 8s**

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#### **PURPOSE**

To provide children 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 (ABCs of athleticism – Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed) and basic game specific 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, disposal 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.
- » Umpires and coaches should ensure that 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 on one team 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 nine-a-side but only 12 players in total are available: play six-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play two games of six-a-side, or one nine-a-side game with one six-a-side game)

Umpires should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the game while preferring to award kicks to players in preference to calling for “ball-ups”.
- » Understand that the spirit of AFL junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and that “the player in possession of the ball should be 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 players are to receive a “free kick” upon the ball being kicked out of bounds and ensuring the effective rotation of players through the three zones of play.
- » Enforce the “full possession rule” at all ball-ups (see next page).



## MATCH PROGRAM

### THE BALL

A synthetic size 1 football should be used.

### PLAYING TIME

The playing time should be reduced to what is appropriate for the age of the players.

- » **AFL Auskick Program** – It is recommended that grid games be played for a total of 12-20 minutes with regular breaks when required.
- » **AFL Junior Fixture** – Maximum of 4 x 10-minute quarters with no time-on.

### THE TEAM

- » **Six-a-side means:** 2 forwards, 2 centres, 2 backs + reserves.
- » **Nine-a-side means:** 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs + reserves.
- » **Twelve-a-side means:** 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs + reserves.

Interchange 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 and interchange on to the field.

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

### PLAYING GROUND AND OFFICIALS

The size of the playing field should be no bigger than 80m x 60m and divided into three equal zones (thirds) identified by markers or lines on the ground.

This field is a maximum size with flexibility needed depending on the players per team, age and ability level.

A field umpire is needed, there are no boundary throw-ins (no boundary umpires), but two goal umpires are required.

### ZONES

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

### TRANSITION OF BALL

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

### SCORING

Only players who are positioned as Forward Zone players may score.

### THE POSSESSION RULE

The ball is possessed by the act of controlling it by catching it, grabbing it, or laying two 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 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.

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 either been touched by another player or hits the ground.

### START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

When all players are inside their own zones, a ball-up is conducted between two 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 (full possession rule applies).

### SCRIMMAGE AND FIELD BALL-UPS

Where a scrimmage develops, unless awarding of a free kick is possible under the spirit of the game:

- » The umpire shall stop play, send players back to their zones and nominate two opponents of approximately 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)
- » Players should be encouraged to pick the ball up and will be penalised for diving on the ball resulting in a free kick to the other team.

### CONTACT/TACKLING

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:

- » Hold an opponent with their hands.
- » Steal the ball or knock it out of an opponent's hands.



- » Push, bump or barge another player (incidental contact only is permitted).
- » Smother an opponent's kick.
- » Shepherd.

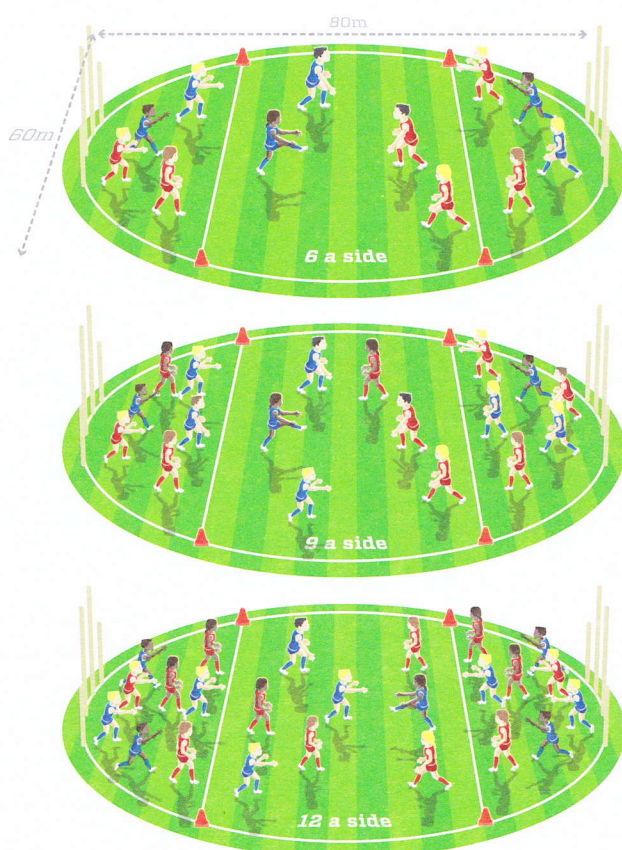
## COACHES

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players; they must not pressure, instruct or make comment to or about officiating umpires or decisions they make. The coach must make every effort to stay out of the play and 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.

## PREMIERSHIP POINTS

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.



Rules & Regulations	Auskick-U8
Phase	Introductory
Players (min-max)	6-12 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	80m x 60m 3 equal zones
Match length	12-20 min total (Auskick) or 4 x 10 min (U18's)
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	No tackle or bump. There is absolutely no contact or spoiling (except when accidental in nature).
The ball	Synthetic size 1
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Parents/coaches
Coaching position	On-field
Bounces	1 bounce
Marking	A mark is awarded, irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled, to any player who catches it or makes a reasonable attempt to mark it.
Out of bounds	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.
Penalties	No distance penalty applies. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.



## UNDER 9s AND UNDER 10s

### PURPOSE

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

The emphasis at this age level is the further development of basic game-specific skills (kicking, handballing, marking, gathering and evasion) and learning technical and tactical concepts.

The match program for this age group provides further opportunities to develop game-specific skills and the tactical principles of gaining possession, 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.
- » Umpires and coaches should ensure that 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 it is unable to field the required numbers.
- » Coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate (for instance, if planning 12-a-side but only 18 players in total are available, play nine-a-side)

Umpires should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the game while preferring to award kicks to players in preference to calling for "ball-ups".
- » Understand that the spirit of AFL junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and that "the player in possession of the ball should be given every opportunity to kick or handball".
- » Attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which players are to receive a "free kick" upon the ball being kicked out of bounds and ensuring the effective rotation of players.

In relation to all ball-ups,

- » A player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on.

## MATCH PROGRAM

### THE BALL

A synthetic size 2 or leather football should be used.

### PLAYING TIME

The playing time should be reduced to what is appropriate for the age of the players.

- » **AFL Auskick Program** – It is recommended that grid games be played for a total of 12-20 minutes with regular breaks when required.
- » **AFL Junior Fixture** – Maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time on.

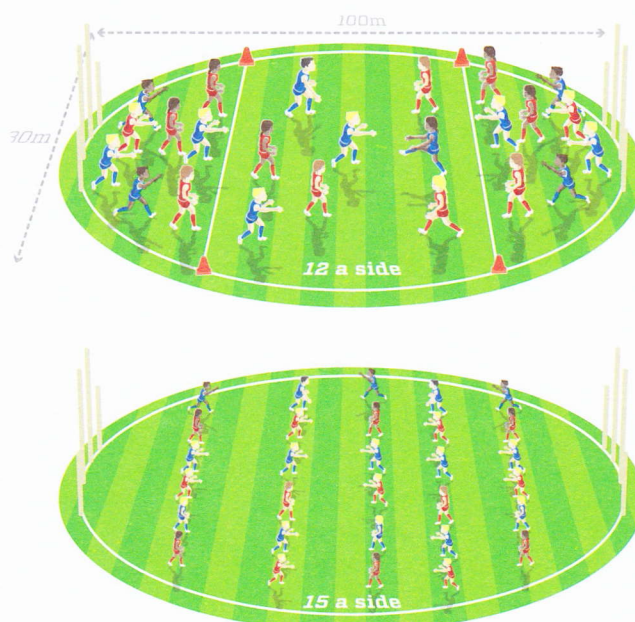
### THE TEAM

- » **Twelve-a-side means:** 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs + reserves.
- » **Fifteen-a-side means:** 5 forwards, 5 midfielders, 5 backs + reserves.

Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play at least half the match.

Rotate players every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone to another and interchange on to the field.

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





## PLAYING GROUND AND OFFICIALS

The size of the playing field should be no bigger than 100m x 80m and divided into three equal zones (thirds) identified by markers or lines on the ground.

This field is a maximum size with flexibility needed depending on the players per team, age and ability level. Playing on a larger field will compromise the intent of the laws and in turn have an adverse effect on the development of players.

A field umpire is needed, there are no boundary throw-ins (no boundary umpires) but two goal umpires are required.

## ZONES

Backs must stay in the back zone. Centres must stay in the centre zone. Forwards must stay in the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions.

*\*For leagues that feel that zoning at this level is not in the best interests of the local conditions, an exemption can be sought via the state body.*

## TRANSITION OF 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. Failure for this to occur will result in a free kick awarded to the opposition team at the point at which the ball entered the end zone.

## SCORING

Only players who are positioned as Forward Zone players may score.

## START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

When all players are in position, a ball-up is conducted between two centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire. Alternate players for subsequent bounces.

## 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 body, the umpire shall call a ball-up five metres in from the boundary. Full possession at the ball-up is not permitted.

## CONTACT/TACKLING

Players can perform a modified 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 forward the player with the ball (i.e. push the player in the back).

- » If the player in possession of the ball is taken to the ground in the act of tackling, they will receive a free kick. If the umpire feels the player drops to the ground deliberately in order to receive a free kick, they will be penalised for holding the ball.
  - » A player in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent applying a modified tackle, should be given a reasonable chance to dispose of the ball by kick or by 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 accidentally knocked out of a player's hands by an opponent.
  - » A player not in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent, shall be awarded a free kick.
  - » There is strictly no bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing the opposition player in possession of the ball to the ground.
- Players cannot:
- » Knock the ball out of an opponent's hands.
  - » Push the player in the side.
  - » Steal the ball from another player.
  - » Smother an opponent's kick.
  - » Shepherd an opponent.

## COACHES

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players. They 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.

## ORDER-OFF RULE

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



# THIS IS OUR GAME

## THE GAME – PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

The football match program to be offered to players 9-10 years of age must comply with the modified match program presented in this match guide, with no premierships 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.



Rules & Regulations	U9/U10
Phase	<b>Development</b>
Players (min-max)	12-15 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	100m x 80m 3 equal zones*
Match length	4 x 12 min
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	Modified tackle/no bump. Players cannot bump/push an opponent, knock/steal the ball out of their hands or smother an opponent's kick.
The ball	Synthetic or leather size 2
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Club/association
Coaching position	Optional
Bounces	1 bounce
Marking	A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled to any player who catches it or shows control.
Out of bounds	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.
Penalties	10m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a player has been hindered in any way. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.

\*An exemption can be sought to cater for local requirements.