

AFL Junior Policy

The rules and procedures for conducting modified matches at varying developmental levels, particularly for children (boys and girls) aged 7-12 years designed specifically to maximise participation, skill acquisition and development. The ‘AFL Junior’ rules are a feature of the AFL Auskick Program but importantly are recommended also for adoption by primary schools, community leagues and clubs that are responsible for delivering football to this age group.

The core philosophy of the AFL Junior program is consistent to ensure that Australian Football for children aged 7-12 years is positioned in terms of the following qualities:

- **Fun & 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, provide challenging match programs and specify a logical transition from introductory level through to competitions at clubs and schools.
- **For children & parents:** to further ensure that the progression from one level of involvement to the next caters for a smooth transition based upon 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
- for excitement and enjoyment
- to experience challenge, achievement, and personal responsibility
- to use and improve their skills.

Underpinning Principles of AFL Junior Match Rules

INTRODUCTION

The Coach plays a key role in the major focus of matches for AFL juniors. His/her primary role, given that safety and 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 allows 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 they allow individual players to have more frequent and longer contact

with the ball and enable the coach to see more clearly problems in basic skill development among the players. It also allows 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 that 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 of learning the basics of defence and attack, highball work and gathering skills.

ROTATION OF PLAYERS

Adherence to the AFL Junior Policy will mean that children will 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

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 body, the umpire shall call a ball-up five metres in from the boundary. The elimination of boundary throw-ins means that 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 endorses 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 "age of readiness" will vary from child to child, but generally is recognised as being around the 11-12 years age group.

GAINING POSSESSION

At the appropriate time, the AFL Junior Policy allows for the skills of knocking and stealing the ball from the possession of 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 over any distance is designed to reduce congestion and to encourage players to attempt to mark the ball. It also recognises that many youngsters cannot kick the ball beyond 15 metres.

BOUNCING

The AFL Junior Policy stipulates that players aged 7-10 years may take one bounce, while players aged 11-12 years 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 the smallest-sided matches, is also made easier.

KICKING OFF THE GROUND

Although it might be argued that this is a skill in itself, the AFL Junior Policy does not allow it in AFL Junior rules to enhance 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, 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 groupings of players of similar size and ability to play within a zone. That is, tallers can play on tallers in one zone, smalls on smalls another. When 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 they occur.

Although the intent of the AFL Junior Policy is to enable teaching and feedback to occur 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 some teaching point or message.

BARGING

The AFL Junior Policy endorses the need to prevent "barging" to prevent players (particularly the stronger players) 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.

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 that:

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

AWARDS

Any 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 RULES



Match rules for children 7 - 11 years of age

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| AFL JUNIOR RULES FLOWCHART - AFL GOLD COAST JUNIORS |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|
|   | Under 6's   | Under 8's   | Under 9's & Under 10's   | Under 11's   |
| 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 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   |
| 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 kick or handball   |   |  |  |
| The game  | 5 mins warm up, 15 min skills and skill games, Modified game (40 mins)  |   |  |  |
| The game  | A modified match program with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (scores), no player names published and no representative teams  |   |  |  |
| Playing ground                                      | Divide into three zones. 6 – a-side 60m x 40m (3 x 20m zones).  | 75m x 50m. The field is divided in to three equal zones   | 90m x 60m. The field is divided in to three equal zones  | 110m x 80m   |
| Officials   | Umpired by both coaches   | One field umpire, two goal umpires  |  |  |
| The ball  | Synthetic Size 1  | Synthetic Size 1  | Synthetic Size 2   | Synthetic Size 3   |
| The team  | 6 – a-side: 2 forwards, 2 centres, 2 backs  | 9-a-side: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs. Interchanges can be made at any time but all players must play at least 3 quarters of the match   | 12-a-side: 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs. Interchanges can be made at any time but all players must play at least 3 quarters of the match   | 15-a-side with 3 lines of 5 players but no rucks or rovers, interchange may take place at any time but all players must play at least 3 quarters of the match  |
| Zones/positions                                     | Backs are restricted to the back zone. Centres are restricted to the centre zone and forwards are restricted to the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions.   | 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 oppourtunities in several positions  | Players will be instructed by the umpire to stay in their correct positions Rotate players to provide oppourtunities in several positions  | N/A  |
| Transition  | When a team moves the ball from the back zone to the forward zone, it must be touched by a player from the centre zone, or a free kick will be paid to the opposition team at the point where the ball entered the end zone   |   |  | N/A  |
| Scoring   | Only forward zone players can score   |   |  | N/A  |
| Possession rule                                     | 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.  | 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 playerin possession). 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.  | N/A  |
| Playing time  | 5 minute warm up, 15 minute skills and skills games, 3 x 8min periods no time on  | 4 x 10 minute quarters, no time on  | 4 x 10 minute quarters, no time on   | 4 x 15 minute quarters, no time on   |
| Start 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 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 conducted between 2 centre players of similar height (selected by the umpire) after all other players have been sent back to their positions  | A ball-up is conducted between 2 centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire in the centre of the ground. Only centre line players attend centre bounces (20m clearance from all other players). The umpire is to enforce a similiar 20m area for field bounces                                    |
| Scrimmage and field ball ups                        | Where a scrimmage 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.  | Where a scrimmage 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 than 20m to the ball up   |
| Full possession                                     | In relation to all ball ups the following 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 |   |  |  |
| 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 5m in from the boundary   |   |  |  |
| 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.  | There is to be absolutley 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 or smother an opponents kick   | Contact is permitted below the shoulders and above the knees with the hip, shoulder, chest, arms or open hand provided the ball is no more than 5 metres away.   |
| Tackling  | Not permitted   | Not permitted.  | Players can “ <b>Hold and Release</b> ” 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 or applying a wrap around tackle are prohibited | 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 on/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 |
| Shepherding   | Not permitted.  |   |  | A player can use his or her body or arm to push, bump or block another player who does not have possession but is no more than 5 metres away from the ball   |
| Barging   | Not permitted.  |   |  | No barging or chopping past opponents is permitted. Fending off with an open hand to the body, provide it is not above the shoulders or in the back, is allowed  |
| 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 a mark is awarded. No playing on allowed.   | A mark is awarded, irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled, to any player who cathes the ball, or makes a reasonable attempt to catch the ball from a kick. Set the mark after a mark is awarded. No playing on allowed.  | A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance 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 players kick that has traveled at least 10 metres   |
| 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  | 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 two bounces are permitted   |
| Distance run  | A player running with the ball must bounce it within 5 metres   | A player running with the ball must bounce it within 5 metres   | A player running with the ball must bounce it within 10 metres   | A player running with the ball must bounce it within 15 metres   |
| Kicking off the ground                              | Not permitted unless accidental   |   |  |  |
| Distance penalty                                    | N/A   | N/A   | A 10m advancement may be awarded to a player after a mark or a free kick if he or she has been hindered by an opposition player. This could include such acts as overstepping the mark, wasting time and abusive langauge and behaviour        | A 25m advancement may be awarded to a player after a mark or a free kick if he or she has been hindered by an opposition player. This could include such acts as overstepping the mark, wasting time and abusive langauge and behaviour  |
| Order off rule                                      | To be applied at the umpires discretion. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disrupting umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged  |   |  |  |
| Coaches   | The coach is allowed on the ground to provide immediate feedback to players   |   |  | The coach is not allowed on the ground but messages may be delivered by a runner   |