



"THIS IS OUR GAME"

FOR THE CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL FOR JUNIOR PLAYERS

AGED 5 – 8 YEARS

(These rule changes are moving towards coming in line with AFL Policy)

AFL PHILOSOPHY AND MATCH PROGRAM

2014

PLAYING GROUND, ZONES, TIME AND EQUIPMENT

Kids can't 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 encouraged to concentrate because the ball is never far away.

USE OF ZONES

The AFL Junior Policy 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 whilst 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, but there is an appropriate sequence for doing so.

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.

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 players 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 warranted or as errors immediately they occur.

PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

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

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

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 JUNIORS MATCH PROGRAM

Under 6, 7 & 8's

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 commencement of play:

- all players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands
- the umpire 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

The umpire should at all times:

- endeavour to apply the rules of the games whilst 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 below).

MATCH PROGRAM

- also see **NEMJFA LAWS Matrix Chart**

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 Junior Fixture – Maximum of 4 x 10 minute quarters with no time on.

THE TEAM

Fifteen-a-side means: 5 forwards, 5 midfielders, 5 backs + reserves

Or if not enough players available reduce to

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 onto 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 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). **Centre Zone players must wear bibs.**

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.

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

BOUNCING

Players can run 10 metres and allowed one bounce within their zone.

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.

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 maybe held. No representative teams should be selected.