

## WHAT IS "AFL JUNIOR"?

AFL Junior is 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 learning 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 have a responsibility 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 club and/or school.
- **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 reduced size 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 picking up 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 5-10 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, tall can play on tall 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 for the Conduct of Junior Football (Players 5-12 Years of Age) 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 2008



Contact Details  
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Match rules for children  
5-11 years of age

Under 8's		Under 9's & 10's		Under 11's	
<b>Purpose</b>	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.		
<b>Spirit of the game</b>	To give all available players a game of football in which they have every opportunity to gain possession of the ball and kick or handball it.				
<b>Playing ground</b>	75m x 50m The field is divided into three equal zones	100m x 70m The field is divided into three equal zones	130m x 90m		
<b>Officials</b>	One field umpire, two goal umpires				
<b>The ball</b>	Synthetic Size 1				
<b>The team</b>	9-a-side: 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs Inter-changes can be made at any time	12-a-side: 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs Inter-changes can be made at any time	15-a-side with 5 lines of 3 players but no rucks or rovers, interchange may take place at any time.	Synthetic Size 3	
<b>Zones / positions</b>	Players cannot move from their zones	Players will be instructed by the umpire to stay in their correct positions	N/A		
<b>Transition</b>	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	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	N/A		
<b>Scoring</b>	Only forward zone players can score	Only forward zone players can score	N/A		
<b>Possession Rule</b>	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.	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, 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		
<b>Playing time</b>	4 x 10 minute quarters, no time on	4 x 10 minute quarters, no time on	4 x 15 minute quarters, no time on		
<b>Full possession rule</b>	For all ball ups, the two contesting players cannot take "full possession" of the ball until it has been touched by another player or hit the ground.				
<b>Start and restarting play</b>	A ball-up is contested by 2 centre players of similar height (nominated by the umpire) when all players are inside their zones.	A ball-up is contested by 2 centre players of similar height (nominated by the umpire) when all players are inside their positions.	A ball-up is contested by 2 centre players of similar height (nominated by the umpire) when all players are inside their positions. Only centre line players (3 from each team) are allowed within 20metres of centre and field bounces.		
<b>Scrimmage and field ball ups</b>	Where a scrimmage develops and no free kick can be paid the umpire shall stop play, order all players back to their zones and nominate 2 players of similar height to contest a ball up.	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 similar height (selected by the umpire) after all other players have been sent back to their positions. No more than 3 players from each team are permitted within 20 metres of the ball up		
<b>Out of bounds</b>	If the ball goes out of bounds from a kick, a free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. In all other cases, a ball up 5 metres in from the boundary is called.				
<b>Contact/ bumping</b>	No contact or spoiling is permitted except accidental and light shoulder to shoulder contact while running at the ball.	Accidental shoulder to shoulder contact is permitted when players are contesting a loose ball provided the ball is within 5 metres. Front on contact or contact from behind is prohibited	Accidental shoulder to shoulder contact is permitted when players are contesting a loose ball provided the ball is no more than 5 metres away.		
<b>Tackling</b>	Not permitted. Players cannot hold an opponent with their hands, knock the ball out of an opponent's hands, push the opponent in the side, steal the ball from another player, deliberately bump another player or smother an opponent's kick	Players can "Hold and Release" an opposition player in possession of the ball by grabbing the jumper only with one or two hands. There is strictly no bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing the opposition player in possession of the ball to the ground. Grabbing the arms or applying a wrap around tackle is not permitted.	A player with the ball may be tackled with both arms provided contact is made below the top of the shoulders and above the knees. A tackle can be made from either side of the player or from behind but no player shall be deliberately dumped or thrown to the ground by a tackle		
<b>Shepherding</b>	Not permitted.	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		
<b>Barging</b>	Not permitted.	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		
<b>Marking</b>	A mark is awarded when a player catches or makes a reasonable attempt to catch the ball from another players kick regardless of how far the ball has traveled. Playing on after the mark is not allowed no matter how far the ball has traveled, 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 regardless of how far it has traveled.	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another players kick that has traveled at least 10 metres		
<b>Bouncing</b>	Only one bounce is permitted	Only one bounce is permitted	Only two bounces are permitted		
<b>Distance Run</b>	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		
<b>Kicking off the ground</b>	Not permitted unless accidental				
<b>Distance penalty</b>	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	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		
<b>Order off rule</b>	To be applied at the umpires discretion. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disrupting umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged				
<b>Coaches</b>	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				