



# FEMALE FOOTBALL

## *Match Guide*





# FEMALE FOOTBALL *Match Guide*

FOR THE CONDUCT AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL FOR  
FEMALE PLAYERS AGED 13 - 18 YEARS.  
TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AFL JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH GUIDE



**AUSTRALIA'S GAME**

In partnership with AFL State and Territory affiliates:



**Australian Government**  
Australian Sports Commission

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



# AFL GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL FOR FEMALE PLAYERS AGED 13 - 18 YEARS

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## WHAT AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL MEANS TO ME ...

"I started football at AusKick then played with the boys at Bright JFC. Here I learnt how to compete, build my strength, confidence and resilience. I wasn't allowed to play once I reached the age of 14 so turned to volleyball. When I heard about a women's AFL team I switched back playing for Darebin FC and haven't looked back since. The friendships I've made are lifelong.

Football has taught me that if you are honest with yourself and prepared to work hard there is always something that you can improve. I've also learnt that every individual is very different and that within a football team, if used positively, this diversity can be a strength. The same can be said about these two things in life as well.

I keep involved because AFL continues to provide me with new challenges and opportunities to develop my skills and leadership qualities. There is nothing better than being a member of a team; together we strive for excellence and when you achieve something in that group, being able to celebrate and enjoy it with twenty-one of your closest friends is amazing and unique.

I hope other girls can be given the opportunities to develop their football skills and find the same joy from AFL that I have."

**Daisy Pearce**  
AFL Female  
Ambassador  
and Melbourne  
Football Club's  
inaugural  
Women's  
Captain



## INTRODUCTION ABOUT FEMALE FOOTBALL

The development of the Participation pathway for females is critical to the long-term growth and development of the game. Currently females can participate in NAB AFL Auskick (5-12 years) through to Junior and Youth competitions (8-14 years) in mixed gender teams while the female player pathway is being developed. It is well documented that girls want to play in female-only competitions. Reasons for this include:

- » Girls in a mixed gender team may feel intimidated or excluded from learning the game to the level they would like
- » Female players feel that male players exclude them by not passing the ball to them
- » Often experience teasing from male players

(Source: AFL Victoria Junior Girls survey, 2011)

### There are other key considerations that have been well researched:

- » Girls' motivation to participate is more often for social reasons and to learn new skills whereas males tend to be predominantly motivated by the competition and winning
- » Females are more likely to improve their skills in single gender settings

The safety of female participants is paramount and has been considered in the Laws of the Game when previously a mixed competition was the only opportunity open to girls to play AFL. Once a girl turns 14 years she is no longer eligible to participate in a mixed gender team. (Source: AFL Junior Match Policy) However through the AFL's research it is not the preference of females to be members of mixed gender teams anyway.

**The AFL Female Match and Club Guide is therefore designed to assist community clubs and Leagues to set up and conduct single gender Girls competitions (that is, any single gender competition for girls from Auskick through to under 18 years) plus assist clubs to establish and engage girls teams. It should be used in partnership with AFL Junior Football Match Guide as this caters for female participation in mixed gender competitions where a female only pathway is not yet available.**

## The Match Guide aims to:

1. Provide clear direction to leagues and clubs for the provision of appropriate pathways for girls in safe and enjoyable environments
2. Promote measures that will maximise the enjoyment and development of young female players
3. Ensure that girls football (Auskick through to U18) is delivered in a uniform manner (consistent rules and regulations) across all states and territories
4. Maximise the recruitment and retention of players and umpires through programs and match rules appropriate to each age level
5. Offer alternative structures for more social female players

## It should be noted that:

- » The Laws of Australian Football as administered and controlled by the AFL apply to and guide this document. This resource explains how variations to the Laws of Australian Football have been made for the appropriate delivery of girls football matches.
- » The processes outlined in this document are the result of practices by community clubs who have successfully implemented them over many seasons and the results of focus groups conducted with youth girls players and end-of-season surveys. Community Clubs appearing in the Case Studies are willing to be contacted for further information or advice as they are models of best practice.
- » The AFL recognises the need for various controlling bodies to determine their own arrangements within the principles of these guidelines.
- » Young females grow and mature at different rates. The girls rules are considerate of this growth and maturation diversity and accordingly, provide an appropriate and sequential range of programs and match regulations.
- » Until the player pathway is seamless in every region administrators should be mindful that players may be entering the game for the first time at different levels having not come through the pathway. This will present the need to introduce them to the basic skills and rules of the game sequentially before they enter a competition.

## The Club Guide aims to:

1. Assist clubs to plan strategically to build new female teams
2. Provide clear direction to leagues and clubs for the provision of appropriate facilities for girls
3. Maximise clubs' efforts and resources in the recruitment and retention of female players, coaches and supporters
4. Offer options to cater for more social female players

## WHAT ARE THE KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE FOOTBALLERS?

Up until the onset of male puberty there are very few physiological differences as to how girls and boys participate in AFL. Once boys move through puberty their larger bodies mean they will have enhanced physical abilities over females for example kicking the ball further or jumping higher at a ruck contest. Within a mixed gender team the skill acquisition of a non-athletic boy is greater than for a non-athletic girl. (Source: Dr Fleur McIntyre, University of Notre Dame)

Another key gender difference across any age group lies in why girls want to play AFL. Boys are more likely to participate for the competitive nature and the outcome of the contest. Girls tend to be more motivated by improving their skills and place greater value on how they fit into the team. Promoting the health benefits of sport is also more likely to appeal to girls than boys.

Currently unlike boys, girls are less likely to have progressed from Auskick and Junior football through to Youth Girls. Many girls will not have had the opportunity to participate and Youth Girls may be their first entry point into AFL. This brings with it the need to introduce the physical and basic skills to these players while still challenging those players who have come through the pathway. Broadly there are two player experiences that clubs will need to cater for:

### 1) Single gender pathway

While girls would prefer to play AFL in this pathway it is not always available.

Where players have progressed along a female-only pathway they will usually have learnt the basic skills but may not be as confident with the physicality of the game as a player coming from a mixed gender pathway.

Where the player is new to AFL this guide seeks to provide information to create an environment that maximises the fun of the game and safe, progressive

skill development particularly of the physicality aspects of the game. This may include girls from diverse cultural backgrounds who do not understand the game, let alone be capable of executing the basic skills.

It is essential that young female players are introduced to the game through some modifications that consider their physical, psychological and emotional needs.

This guide seeks to provide information so that coaches, parents and players can make an informed decision about what option is best for this player commensurate with their age, size and ability.

## 2) Mixed gender pathway

While girls would prefer to play AFL in the female pathway it is not always available. Clubs need to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment. If a girl feels comfortable and confident to play in mixed gender competitions she should be encouraged to play in a team with the boys. Mixed gender competitions provide a more challenging option for skilled female players up to the age of 14 years.

Where girls have progressed from Auskick to Youth Girls in mixed gender competitions they will have learnt the basics of kicking, marking, handball and more importantly, the physicality of the game such as tackling. Sometimes these players find going from a mixed gender setting to a female competition with modifications below their skill level and understanding of the game.

This guide seeks to provide options so as not to disadvantage the progress of these players while placing player welfare foremost.

### **The overriding objective of the AFL Youth Girls philosophy is:**

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

## BENEFITS TO FEMALES STAYING INVOLVED IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

It is well documented that sport is a great activity for young women for many reasons including:

- » It is an excellent way to learn lessons about teamwork, rules, winning and losing
- » Sport provides a positive impact on their personal physical and social development
- » Skills and abilities developed in sport have been shown to transfer to non-athletic areas of life. These life skills include self-assurance, self-motivation, dedication, and the ability to perform under pressure, meet deadlines/challenges, set and attain goals, recognise one's limitations and solve problems.
- » Sport can be used as a preventative intervention for mental wellbeing as it enhances mental health by offering positive feelings about body image, improved self-esteem, feelings of competency and skill mastery and increased self-confidence. (Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls, Presidents Council on Physical Fitness and Sport, 1997)

Girls who are regularly physically active experience less:

- » Obesity and physical health problems overall
- » Delinquency and truancy
- » Likelihood of risk taking with respect to drugs and alcohol

## WHAT GIRLS LOVE ABOUT PLAYING AFL

Female players aged between 10 and 18 years have told us the top reasons why they enjoy playing AFL which include to:

- » Have fun with their friends
- » Socialise and meet new friends
- » Be able to execute the physical aspects of the game such as tackling and shepherding
- » Get fit and stay healthy
- » Challenge themselves and improve their AFL skills
- » Provide a sense of belonging as a member of a team

When developing competitions and new teams for young girls in the youth girls age groups these aspects should be a focus to ensure the girls have the best experience and stay involved.

## WHY YOUNG FEMALES STOP PARTICIPATING IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The primary school age to secondary school age transition is now crucial given that Australian girls are dropping out from physical activity at an earlier age.

They are more likely to stop participation between 12 and 15 years of age whereas five years ago it was quoted at 16 years of age. (Source: ABS, 2009) The same census period indicates that females of the same age are 5% less likely to participate than males.

The key reasons young females drop out of sport can be grouped into three main clusters of factors. These factors do not work in isolation and could mean that there are multiple influences on a young female's physical activity behavior. When designing programs or strategies to promote participation in AFL by young females it is important to consider all of these influences.

It is important that clubs address the factors that are most relevant to young females leaving sport at this age.

### INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- » Lack of or perceived lack of skill
- » The sport is no longer enjoyable
- » Lack of time – numerous competing activities impact on an adolescent's available time such as study, part-time work, relationships and other sports
- » Body image issues – concerns about their body shape, weight management and dislike of sweating
- » Cost of participation
- » Injuries
- » Friends no longer participate

### SOCIETAL FACTORS

- » Pressure to conform to popular ideals of beauty and what represents femininity
- » Being teased for being involved in a predominantly male pursuit
- » Lack of support in transition from primary school age to young adult

### ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- » Too competitive where players prefer the social aspects over the competition
- » Poor coaching

- » A big jump in skills required from Under 12 to the next level which makes the sport less fun to play
- » Club culture and inclusiveness
- » Facilities are not female-friendly

The Australian Football community as a whole has an opportunity to reverse the trend of young females dropping out of physical activity altogether. Together the AFL, State affiliates, Leagues and Clubs can assist young females to continue their engagement in physical activity with strong planning to address the factors listed above.

Special consideration needs to be given to girls from multicultural backgrounds who are less likely to engage in physical activity than their male counterparts or locally born females. This may be attributed to the traditional cultural values of their families. (Sabo, D. and Veliz, P., 2008 Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America)

## YOUTH GIRLS PHILOSOPHY

### SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Participants should understand that every female competition is delivered with the 'spirit of the game' in mind. That means that regardless of their role that every participant will:

- » Understand the female developmental phases in the football journey of players, umpires and coaches. The focus should not be on 'win at all costs' but on learning the game and executing skills to the best of one's ability. Learning to win and lose is part of developing as a footballer but should not be the primary focus.
- » Provide a fun, fair and safe environment for all girls
- » Maximise the enjoyment and development of young female footballers
- » Ensure that the values inherent in 'the spirit of the game' which include but are not limited to fairness, sportsmanship, respect and teamwork are developed, encouraged and celebrated

Uphold and actively promote the rules, Laws of Australian Football, codes of conduct and any policies developed around the girls competition. That means not accepting poor behavior that undermines a fun and safe environment for all.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Coaches should focus on teaching the game well rather than what the outcome of the game is.

## PLAYING GROUND, ZONES, TIME AND EQUIPMENT

Most young girls do not have the strength or power capacity to kick as far, run as fast or process the same level of match information as women or boys. Therefore they should not be forced to play on the same size field as adults or boys.

The Youth Girls philosophy is committed to a reduced playing area, playing time and suitably modified equipment (such as a smaller football) to better suit the smaller hands of young players and to build the players' endurance and allow for greater skill development.

Where smaller team numbers (such as 9 or 12 a-side) and grounds are reduced in size the players are encouraged to concentrate because the ball is never far away.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Coaches should ensure the oval is appropriately set up for the skill level and team numbers playing the game.

## 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.

Smaller numbers also allows for greater ease when recruiting team numbers where clubs are fielding a new girls team for the first time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Training sessions should ensure players sequentially develop their skills. Small sided games allow players to gain more disposals while placing less pressure on them to immediately dispose of the ball because they have increased time and space to do so.

## ROTATION OF PLAYERS

Young players 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.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Coaches need to balance the time all players spend in various positions as well as on the bench.

## 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 young girls' bodies to resist the pressures of tackling also needs to be recognised in assessing when to introduce full 'wrap and drop' tackling. The "age of readiness" will vary from player to player, but generally is recognised as being around the 11-12 years age group.

If the composition of teams opposing each other have a variety of experience levels (ie a player that has travelled the mixed gender pathway versus a player who is new to the game at youth girls) then the ability to give or receive a full tackle safely at under 14s for example, will be compromised.

Girls new to the game but keen to be first to the ball often have not yet learned how to protect themselves when faced with picking the ball up from below their knees and an opponent running at them to do the same.

For these reasons some alternatives are provided in this guide to allow skills to develop while providing the highest consideration to player welfare.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Before the season commences the coach should focus on teaching players to safely receive a tackle and implement a tackle so they are well prepared for the more physical aspects of Australian Football.

## BOUNCING

To prevent one player dominating play the number of bounces they can make is restricted. This also dissuades players from 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. This provides players the opportunity to learn to put their head over the ball confidently to pick it up off the ground.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Coaches need to sequentially teach the skills of picking up a moving ball cleanly from below the knees and at pace while under no pressure so players learn to protect their body against a potential tackle or bump.

## KICKING PENALTIES

As there are few young girls who can regularly kick over 50m the 50m penalty as per the Laws of Australian Football is too much of a consequence to impose.

Therefore in keeping with the majority of young players kicking development the 25m (Under 15) and 40m (Under 18) penalties will be imposed where the Laws of Australian Football impose a 50m penalty.

## GAME TACTICS

While tactics such as tagging and flooding are elements of the current AFL competition, they are contrary to providing an environment that maximises the fairness, speed and skilled execution of Australian Football. Nor do these tactics encourage clean disposals, one-on-one competition or other desired aspects of learning the game.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Coaches are strongly advised to avoid using tactics of tagging, full presses and having only one player behind the ball.

## PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

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

Striving for excellence in teamwork and personal skill development should be primary foci rather than the outcome of the competition.

**Participation in our game, in safe and enjoyable female club environments can significantly contribute to the development and social wellbeing of young females. Australian Football must be the best experience possible if we are going to continue to attract and retain young people in the game.**

## 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.

**For more information on coaching female footballers go to:**

AFL Community Home page and scroll down to Female Football

[www.aflcommunityclub.com.au](http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au)



## THE PARTICIPATION PATHWAY

### THE AFL PARTICIPATION PATHWAY FOR FEMALES

The female player pathway is being developed so girls can commence playing in all girls Auskick groups and centres and move through to Women's League while staying connected to their original club or within the region they started in.

**All girls Auskick – Junior Girls (U10, U12) – Youth Girls (U15s, U18s) – Women's**

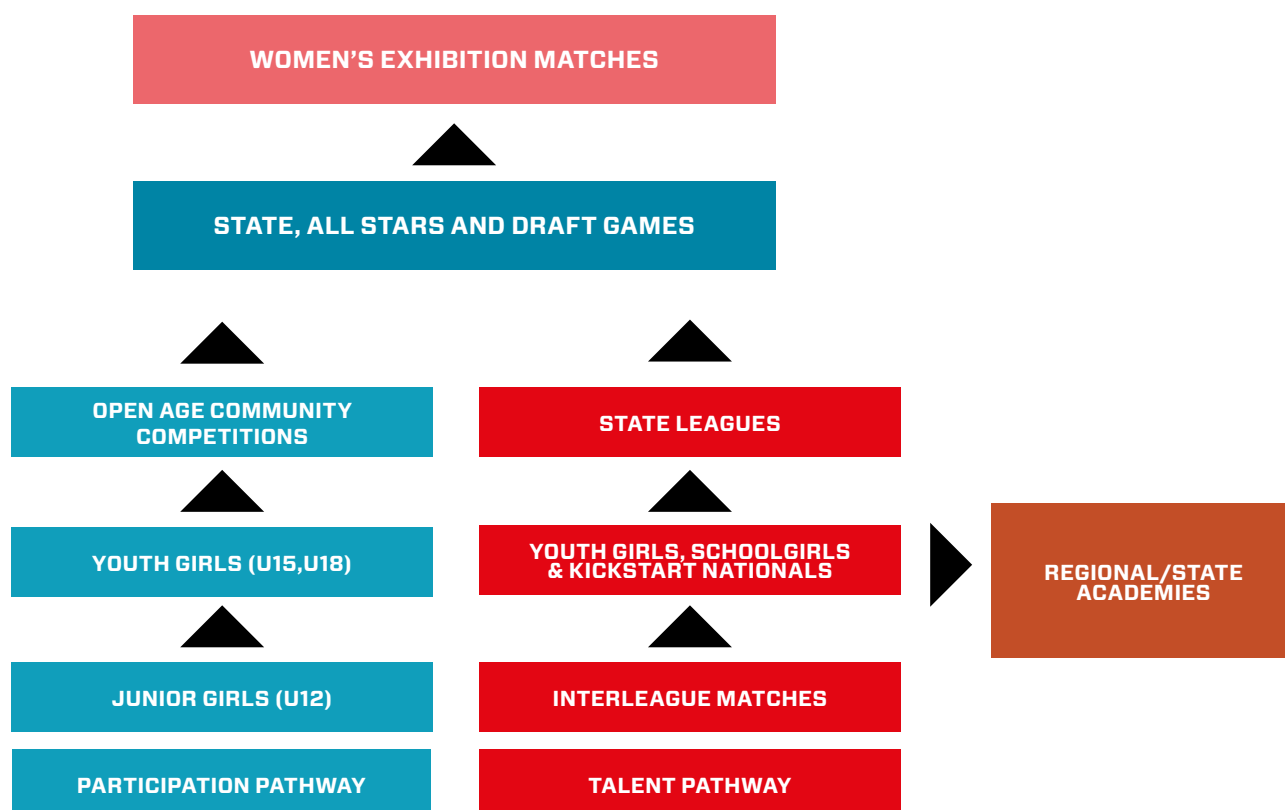
This pathway is being developed to ensure these principles are followed:

- » **Sequential** – progressions that link
- » **Developmental** – meets the needs of the girls

» **Informed** – by research, practice and stakeholder engagement

» **Inclusive** – accommodates all people in an equitable manner

Specifically the female pathway provides a quality environment where female players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of AFL experience, learning and ability.



## FEMALE PARTICIPATION POLICY

As of October 2014, there were over 194,000 females participating in some form of Australian Football. The development of a participation pathway for female participants beyond AFL Auskick is critical to the long-term growth and development of the game.

Until the female pathway is fully developed this document endorses the following participation pathway options for female participants aged 5-17 years.

### NAB AFL AUSKICK (5-8 YEARS)

1. All girls Auskick centres and all girls Auskick groups within a mixed gender centre
2. Mixed gender AFL Auskick

### JUNIOR GIRLS (9-12 YEARS)

1. Girls can compete in female only U10 and U12 competitions where available using appropriate AFL Female Match Guide
2. Mixed gender Junior fixtures using AFL Junior Match Guide

### YOUTH GIRLS (13 - 18 YEARS)

1. Girls can compete in female-only 15s and 18s competitions using appropriate AFL Female Match Guide
2. Up to 14 years of age girls may choose playing in a mixed gender competition or a female-only competition. Girls can participate in mixed gender competitions as a 14-year-old. However, unless the girl is skilled, confident and physically capable, and has the consent of her coach and parents this policy strongly recommends that youth girls aged 13 and 14 years participate in a structured youth girls competition.
3. If there is no youth girls competition at 15s or 18s available the following applies:
  - » In accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)<sup>1</sup>, 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. 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 junior clubs will exclude females who reach 14 years of age as at 1 January in the year of play from playing in any competition that is not a 'female competition'.

**Definition:** A female competition is a competition in which the majority of the players are female.

<sup>1</sup> The provision 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)

### SENIOR WOMEN'S (18 YEARS+)

As of 2015 most Women's Leagues will implement a minimum age of 17 years as Youth Girls graduate to senior level. It is planned that by 2016 all Leagues will endorse a minimum participation age of players being 17 years as of January 1 (turn 18 years during the women's league season).

### ALL GIRLS NAB AFL AUSKICK

To better cater for female participants, regions are encouraged to either set up:

- » An All Girls Auskick group within their centre that runs parallel to mixed gender Auskick **or**
- » A stand-alone All Girls Auskick centre when there is no male club operating

To participate in the AFL Auskick program, girls must turn five years of age in the calendar year that they register. In WA they must turn five by June 30 of the year they wish to commence playing in.

For further guidance and information on how to conduct All Girls Auskick clubs should refer to page 10 of the "This is Our Game" Junior Football Match Guide.

## AFL JUNIOR GIRLS (9 -12 YEARS)

### A GUIDE TO THE JUNIOR GIRLS GAME

Australian Football is our national indigenous game and one that captures the imagination of people all over the country. The development of our young players is critical to the ongoing success of the code and it is our responsibility to help young people fall in love with the game like so many before them.

The young girl who joins our game through the AFL Auskick program may make it all the way to women's representative football or just as importantly, become the next amateur player, umpire, coach or fan of the game.

The rules and procedures for conducting modified matches at varying developmental levels are designed specifically to maximise participation, skill learning and development.

We need to ensure their journey is the best one possible and as such, we feel two clear phases exist after progressing from AFL Auskick.

### AGE POLICY

To participate in a fixtured AFL Junior Girls match, females must be eight years of age by January 1 (turning nine years during the season).

### 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 three-year age span e.g. staggered age groups U12, U15, and U18.

The AFL policy recognizes that in regional and rural areas the opportunity to conduct competitions with a three-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 three-year age span they must firstly seek approval from their State football body. In these instances, coaches should endeavor 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 on full consideration of the circumstances presented.

**This Policy is particularly relevant if a Junior girl is participating in a mixed gender Junior competition and should be implemented in conjunction with the Junior Match Guide.**



## YOUTH GIRLS (13 – 18 YEARS OF AGE)

### A GUIDE TO THE YOUTH GIRLS GAME

Some crucial factors for organizations to plan for at youth girls ages are:

1. Which pathway the players have come through. Some girls may have come through the mixed gender pathway and are now too old to participate in this. They are encouraged to now enter the female pathway. Generally young females who have played in a male team in a mixed gender competition are less intimidated by the physical aspects of the game such as tackling, bumping and blocking. They may need to be challenged if they are now playing in a female team with girls who are new entry players or who have come through the female pathway.

Ways to meaningfully engage them are to buddy them up with a new entry player and assist them to learn the basics during training sessions. Another way is to match them against the more skilled opposition players on game day.

2. Youth girls represents the key 'drop out' time from sport and physical activity for females. Australian girls are likely to stop participation between 12 and 15 years of age. (Source: ABS, 2003) That means some girls may be new entry players to AFL because they have progressed along the pathway of other sports but for various reasons have now changed sports that they have played from a young age.

New entry players will require consideration as they learn the physicality of the game as well as the basic AFL skills before they can safely engage in a game.

**Development Phase** – To provide girls U10 with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that focuses on further developing their basic football skills and knowledge of technical and tactical concepts whilst preparing them for new elements of competition. The spirit of the game at this level is to ensure all games are played in a fair and safe environment that permits players to contest the ball.

**Establishment Phase** - To provide girls U12 with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that further develops their basic football skills and introduces technical and tactical concepts.

The spirit of the game at this level is to give all 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.

### INCLUSION OF GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

The AFL has 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 a 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 participating in all aspects of the day's activities.
- » 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)

## AUSKICK THROUGH TO U12S SHOULD USE THE “THIS IS OUR GAME” JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH GUIDE

Rules & Regulations	Auskick-U8	U9/U10	U11/U12
Phase	<b>Introductory</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>Establishment</b>
Players (min-max)	6-12 a side	12-15 a side	15-18 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	80m x 60m 3 equal zones	100m x 80m 3 equal zones*	Full size No zones
Match length	12–20 min total or 4 x 10 min	4 x 12 min	Max 4 x 15 min
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.	Scoring, ladders, 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.	Modified tackle/no bump. Players cannot bump/push an opponent, knock/steal the ball out of their hands or smother an opponent's kick.	Tackling is permitted. As per the Laws of Australian Football (no sling tackle permitted).
The ball	Synthetic size 1	Synthetic or leather size 2	Synthetic or leather size 3
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Parents/coaches	1 field, 2 goal umpires Club/association	1 field, 2 goal and 2 boundary umpires* Club/association
Coaching position	On-field	Optional	Sideline
Bounces	1 bounce	1 bounce	Unlimited bounces
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.	A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled to any player who catches it or shows control.	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another player's kick that has travelled at least 10 metres.
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.	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.	Boundary throw-in (where boundary umpires are available).
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.	Not permitted unless accidental.	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.	Permitted as per the Laws of Australian Football
Penalties	No distance penalty applies. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.	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	25m 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.

## AFL YOUTH GIRLS MATCH PROGRAM IN SINGLE GENDER COMPETITIONS

Rules & Regulations	U15	U18
Phase	<b>Competition</b>	<b>Transition</b>
Players (min - max)	15-18 a side	15-18 a side
Maximum ground sizes /use of zones	Full size No zones or flooding	Full size No zones or flooding
Match length	2 x 17 mins or 4 x 15 mins	2 x 20 mins or 4 x 17 mins
Competition details	Scoring, ladders and finals. Best players and goal kickers. Representative teams	Scoring, ladders and finals. Best players and goal kickers. Representative teams
Contact	Full tackling is permitted. As per the Laws of Australian Football	Full tackling is permitted. As per the Laws of Australian Football
The ball	Synthetic size 4	Synthetic or leather size 4
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires, *2 x boundary Club / Association	1 / 2 field, 2 goal umpires, 2 x boundary Club / Association
Coaching	Sideline	Sideline
Bounces	Unlimited	Unlimited
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.	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another player's kick that has travelled at least 15 metres
Out of bounds	As per Laws of Australian Football	As per Laws of Australian Football
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.	Not permitted unless accidental
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	Permitted as per the Laws of Australian Football	Permitted as per the Laws of Australian Football
Penalties	25m 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.	40m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a payer 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.

## THESE PHILOSOPHIES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED ACROSS ALL YOUTH GIRLS AGE GROUPS

### PURPOSE

The social aspects of the game should be a focus for players in this age group and cannot be emphasised enough. For this reason clubs may wish to develop informal unstructured social teams for females who do not wish to play in a structured competition.

If girls do wish to play competitive AFL then clubs need to provide girls 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.

When the emphasis is on the social interaction and the opportunity to play skillfully makes the game fun for the girls. Learning how to train and further development of basic game specific skills (kicking, handballing, marking and gathering) allows the girls to experience a sense of mastery. More complex technical and tactical skills can be introduced including decision-making, competency in positional roles (centre half-forward, ruck and half-back flank for example) and basic recovery and performance enhancing techniques such as hydration, nutrition, pre- and post-match routines for warm-up and recovery.

Youth Girls should feel an essential part of the team, develop self-efficacy, self-worth and a connection to their team and club. Commitment to the team and club and social responsibility on and off the field should be engendered in players.

### 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
- » At the conclusion of the game all players, coaches and umpires should again gather to shake hands

**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 12-a-side but only 18 players in total are available, play nine-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, play 15-a-side.

### The umpire should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the games while preferring to award kicks to players whose sole objective is to contest and gain possession in preference to calling for ball-ups.
- » Understand that the spirit of AFL Youth Girls match rules 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 apply the laws of the game so that players should be given every opportunity to get the ball in a safe and fair manner and be protected from injury.

### INTERCHANGE AND ROTATION

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 between areas and interchange on to the field.

Equalise the teams and opponents as much as possible (i.e. match player sizes and abilities).

### GAME TACTICS

To provide an environment that best showcases an individual's skills and allows them to further develop the techniques when full-sided games the following game tactics should be implemented in the 'Spirit of the Game':

- » 4 Forwards to play inside their attacking half at all times (2 inside forward 50) Note: Defenders must also abide by the same principle though not necessarily man on man.
- » No "Tagging/Run With" players whose sole purpose is to prevent an opposition player gaining possession are permitted at any time.
- » No rolling zone or press is permitted at any time. Once the ball is in general play it's important to encourage players to be responsible for their opponent, therefore creating more one-on-one football.
- » Midfielders and ruckmen to be rested at either end of the ground (where possible) rather than being simply interchanged.

## START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

Only centreline players attend centre bounces (20m clearance/centre square from all other players). The umpire is to enforce a similar 20m area for field ball-ups to avoid unnecessary congestion.

### At centre ball-ups set-ups should be:

- » All five forwards are to start behind the line of the centre square.
- » Minimum of two forwards are to start inside forward 50.
- » Defenders must abide by the same principle (Note: They don't necessarily have to play man-on-man, however they must start behind the back of the centre square and must also have two inside defensive 50)

Where smaller-sided games are implemented number of forwards required to start inside the forward 50m will change proportionately e.g. nine-a-side = three players; 12-a-side = four players.

No full possession out of the ruck is permitted. Players contesting the ball-up may not grab the ball and play on. A 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 hits the ground.

At centre ruck contest, to recommence play after a goal and in smaller-sided games midfield numbers should be at least four players to provide learning around centre stoppage tactics.

## CONTACT/TACKLING

Full tackling rules as per The Laws of Australian Football can be applied. However no player shall be deliberately slung, dumped or thrown to the ground via any tackle. A free kick will be paid for such an offence.

Where there are a large number of new entry players and it is early in the season coaches can decide to implement a 'wrap tackle' only and let the umpire know they have agreed to this.

A 'wrap tackle' is legally applied when player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent wrapping both arms (the wrap around tackle) around the area below the top of the shoulders and on/above the knees.

A player's prime objective should be to gain possession of the ball (eyes on the ball). Restrained side (shoulder to shoulder) contact is permitted when players are contesting a loose ball, provided that the ball is within five 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.



## BARGING

No barging, chopping passed an opponent is allowed. Fending off with an open hand to the body (but not above the shoulder or in the back) is permitted.

## KICKING OFF THE GROUND

Not permitted unless accidental. This is to encourage players learning to put their head over the ball with confidence and safely.

## KICKING PENALTIES

As there are few young girls who can regularly kick over 50m, the 50m penalty as per the Laws of Australian Football is too much of a consequence to impose. Therefore in keeping with the majority of young players kicking development the 25m (U15) and 40m (U18) penalties will be imposed where the Laws impose a 50m penalty.

## RUNNING AND BOUNCING THE BALL

A player running with the ball must bounce it within 15 metres and only two bounces are permitted. This is especially relevant for smaller-sided games on reduced oval sizes to encourage passing the ball to bring in teamwork.

## 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.

Where there is a need for equalisation of team numbers Coaches should communicate with the opposition coach and umpire to decide the best outcome so that all players get to play the game for both their own and the opposition team if required.

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.

## EQUALISATION STRATEGY

This rule can be applied to all Youth Girls fixtures:

- » The Goal Umpires are to inform the Field Umpire at the interval, where the score differential between the teams equals or exceeds a set amount i.e. sixty (60) points.
- » No matter when the Mercy Rule is applied the end score will only be sixty (60) points difference.
- » The Field Umpire will instruct the Goal Umpires and any scoreboard attendants to cease further scoring for the remainder of the match.
- » Where the Mercy Rule is applied, the match shall continue for the remainder of the allocated time of play, and the Coaches are to collaborate and do their best to even up the skill levels of the teams.
- » The official recorded result for the match shall be that if the winning team's margin exceeds 60 points (10 goals) the team will only be credited with a maximum of a 60-point winning margin.

## ORDER OFF RULE

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



## FURTHER RESOURCES AND WEBSITE REFERENCES

Australian Football League

[www.afl.com.au](http://www.afl.com.au)

AFL Community Football

[www.aflcommunity.com.au](http://www.aflcommunity.com.au)

Australian Sports Commission

[www.ussport.com.au](http://www.ussport.com.au)

Womens Sport and Fitness Foundation

[www.wsff.org.uk](http://www.wsff.org.uk)

## STATE AND TERRITORY AFFILIATES

AFL NSWACT

[www.aflnswact.com.au](http://www.aflnswact.com.au)

AFL Northern Territory

[www.aflnt.com.au](http://www.aflnt.com.au)

AFL Queensland

[www.aflq.com.au](http://www.aflq.com.au)

AFL Tasmania

[www.footballtas.com.au](http://www.footballtas.com.au)

AFL Victoria

[www.aflvic.com.au](http://www.aflvic.com.au)

South Australian National Football League

[www.sanfl.com.au](http://www.sanfl.com.au)

West Australian Football Commission

[www.wafc.com.au](http://www.wafc.com.au)

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