



YOUTH COACHING MANUAL





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Keeping them playing

By Luke Power, NAB AFL Academy Head Coach

Welcome to the *AFL Youth Coaching Manual*. It will be an invaluable resource to support you in the mentoring of young footballers. Adolescence is an incredibly important and challenging time in the lives of young men and women. As coaches we play a vital role in the development of players and their enjoyment of the game. AFL and other research has consistently shown that the way coaches approach their role is a critical factor for young people in deciding whether they continue to play or cease playing sports including AFL. Like many, I was fortunate enough to have had great coaches and role models in my early teens that set in motion my passion for our great game.

It is gratifying to now be able to impart some of the knowledge that I learnt through my journey on to the next generation of young footballers. Assisting young players to develop their fundamental skills, decision-making, work ethic and communication provides a great sense of joy as a coach. Nothing gives you a greater buzz than seeing a player under your guidance executing in a game something that has been taught and practised in training.

As coaches we must also be understanding of the stresses placed on our young players. Most participate in a number of extra curricular activities as well as having study and school commitments. It is important to understand that as well as wanting to learn about the game and improve themselves they play our great game to be with friends and have fun. For these players you will be a teacher, role model and leader but most importantly a trusted confidant who can have an enormous influence not only on their football but also in other areas of their lives.

Imparting productive behaviours and strong values through your coaching will help you build lifelong relationships with the players under your care. Young people tend to carry the lessons they learn in adolescence through their adulthood. Without doubt the experiences I had with my coaches at this age have been significant in shaping my beliefs.

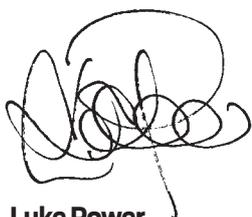
As the NAB AFL National Academy Head Coach, I have the responsibility to live by the Academy's Mission Statement – "Developing Better People, Better Footballers". As coach it is important to instil my personal values into the players under my guidance while also facilitating them to develop their own set of values. As you can see from the Academy's Mission Statement, developing "Better People" rightly comes before developing "Better Footballers" but from my experience they actually tend to go hand in hand.

It is every coach's responsibility, at every level of the game, to make the experience of playing Australian Football as enjoyable and fulfilling as possible and to provide the best possible environment to encourage their continued participation. As the Academy coach I recognise I wouldn't get the opportunity to work with talented young players if it wasn't for their junior coaches who have nurtured them along their journey.

This manual is a great resource for assisting coaches to develop their coaching craft while providing an environment that young people want to be part of. It contains core information about skills and tactics but just as importantly it explores the extremely important social issues associated with welfare and explores the social and interpersonal skills required to deal with young people.

The AFL's coach education programs are world class and, if you haven't already, I strongly advise that all youth coaches undertake the AFL Level 1 Youth Coaching Accreditation Course. AFL coach accreditation is now mandatory in all leagues and associations around Australia. The course with this manual will greatly assist youth coaches to effectively and appropriately perform their role.

Thank you for the critical role you play in guiding the next generation of players at all levels. Best wishes for your coaching. I hope you enjoy coaching young players as much as I do.



Luke Power
NAB AFL Academy Head Coach



Using this Manual

By Lawrie Woodman, AFL Coaching Development Manager

The *AFL Youth Coaching Manual* provides a specific framework for coaching youth footballers. Youth is defined as secondary school players aged 13-17 years.

This is a critical period in the lives of young people when they are faced with regular decisions about how to spend their time, including their continued participation in sport and physical activity. From detailed research we know that the quality of coaching they receive is a critical factor in deciding whether they will continue to participate or drop out.

As part of a review of the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS), the AFL developed a new Level 1 Youth Coaching Course, aimed specifically at coaches of youth teams. The content and structure of the course is based on the developmental needs of players in these age groups.

The AFL brought together acknowledged experts from its coaching and development staff, the general sporting community and specific youth-focused agencies to produce this manual. It has been developed specifically to support the AFL Level 1 Youth Course which was introduced throughout Australia in 2004. More than that, it is a comprehensive reference about youth sport issues which will be valuable to coaches at all levels.

It is AFL policy that coaches of teams in affiliated clubs and leagues hold current accreditation to ensure that they have had a basic level of training to prepare them for this important role. Those who are coaching youth teams now have the opportunity to participate in a course which is oriented around the youth target group and focused very specifically on the tasks youth coaches will be expected to carry out in their crucial role.

As well as the appropriate football-specific content for youth players, the manual has sections dealing with the characteristics and motivations of youth footballers, effective coaching methods and communication skills for youth coaches and youth welfare issues which may be related to the football environment.

The manual is distributed as a specific resource for the Level 1 Youth Coaching Course. It provides further reinforcement for the important principles which are presented during the courses and coaches will find it an excellent ongoing reference as they go about the task of coaching young players.

I encourage all Australian Football coaches to visit the Coaching section on the AFL community website aflcommunityclub.com.au and afl.com.au to keep up to date with latest information about coaching football in general and youth coaching in particular. The site contains a wealth of information about coaching and new material is added regularly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lawrie Woodman', written in a cursive style.

Lawrie Woodman
Coaching Development Manager
Australian Football League

Contents

The manual aims to provide guidance to accredited coaches in Australian Football who are coaching the youth age group (13-17 years):

CHAPTER 1

Youth Footballers – Characteristics and Motivations

Defining Adolescence	11
Adolescents in Sport	11
Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Development between 14-18 years	13
Youth Footballers' Motivations – Why They Do and Don't Play.....	15
Access Challenges.....	16
The Transition to Adult Football	17
Implications for Coaches	18

CHAPTER 2

Effective Coaching

Role of the Coach	21
Coaching Styles	22
Coaching Philosophy	22
Coaching Qualities of Successful Coaches.....	23
Coaching and the Law.....	25
Measuring and Improving Coaching Effectiveness	27
Behaviour Modification.....	27
Ethical Considerations	27
The AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct.....	28

CHAPTER 3

Coaching Youth Footballers

Approaches to Coaching.....	31
Time Management	31
Progressing to Higher Levels of Competition.....	32
Developing Rapport	33
Developing Trust and Mutual Respect	34
Player Discipline	36
Recommended Coaching Behaviours When Working with Youth Players	38

CHAPTER 4

Communication for Youth Coaches

Effective Communication.....	41
Non-Verbal Communication.....	41
Communication through Demonstration	43
Active Listening	43
Effective Feedback	44
Game-Day Coaching.....	45

CHAPTER 5

Teaching and Improving Skills

Stages of Learning	49
Teaching Football Skills.....	50
Fixing Errors.....	51
The SPIR Method for Skills Teaching.....	52
Game Sense and Decision-Making Training	53
Sample Games.....	56

CHAPTER 6

Planning

The Yearly/Season Plan	59
Phases of a Yearly Plan.....	59
Planning the Training Program	60
Training Variables.....	60
Planning a Training Session	61
Training Diary/Planning Sheet.....	61
The Weekly Plan.....	64
Goal-Setting.....	64
Planning Strategies for Keeping Adolescents in the Game	66
Principles for Designing Training Activities.....	66
Adolescents with Disabilities.....	68
Coaching Female Players	68
Training Session Plan	69

CHAPTER 7

Conducting Training Sessions

Principles of Effective Training	73
Designing the Training Session	74
Training Drills and Practices.....	74
Variation in Training Sessions.....	76

CHAPTER 8

Team Play and Game Plans

Anatomy of Team Play	79
Developing a Pattern of Play.....	82
Game-Plans.....	84
Tactics.....	86
Set Plays	87
Optimal Team Performance in Adolescent Football.....	89
Positional Descriptors	91

CHAPTER 9

Conditioning Youth Footballers

Principles of Fitness Training.....	97
Establishing Needs	97
Fitness for Players.....	97
Components of Fitness for Australian Football.....	99
Long-Term Player Development	101

CHAPTER 10

Prevention and Management of Injuries

Preventing Injuries	105
Prevention of Injury is Better than Cure	106
Stretching for Games and Training.....	106
Specific Safety Considerations.....	109
Environmental Conditions	110
Facilities and Equipment.....	111
First-Aid and Injury Prevention Principles.....	112



Contents

Management of Injuries.....	114
Soft Tissue Injury Management (RICER).....	114
STOP (Stop, Talk, Observe, Prevent further injuries).....	115
Unconscious Player.....	116
Management of Concussion.....	117
Blood Rule – Infectious Diseases.....	122
Maintaining Injury Records.....	123
Injury Report Sheet.....	123

CHAPTER 11 Nutrition

Building a Quality Foundation.....	127
Types of Carbohydrate Foods.....	129
Sample Meal Plan.....	130

CHAPTER 12 Talent Identification and Development

AFL Player Pathways.....	135
NAB AFL Rising Stars Program.....	136
NAB AFL Draft.....	137
NAB AFL U16 and U18 Championships.....	137
NAB AFL Academy.....	137
NAB AFL Draft Combine.....	137
Test Protocols.....	139
Skills Tests.....	140
Example Results.....	145
AFL Recruiting Reports.....	148
Evaluation of Youth Players.....	154
Coaches' Evaluation Guide.....	154

CHAPTER 13 Coach, Player, Umpire Relationships

Umpiring.....	159
The Big Picture – where do we all fit in?.....	160
Knowing the Laws of the Game.....	161
Spirit of the Laws.....	162
Role of the Field Umpire.....	164
Role of the Goal Umpire.....	165
Role of the Boundary Umpire.....	167
Scorecards and Vote Card.....	168
AFL Umpiring Pathway.....	169
AFL Umpiring Accreditation Courses.....	170

CHAPTER 14 Youth Welfare

Understanding Youth Today.....	173
The Nature and Prevalence of Mental Health Problems in Adolescence.....	174
Adolescent Risk-Taking Behaviour.....	175
Drugs and Adolescence.....	176
Bullying and Vilification.....	178
Resiliency.....	179
Self-Esteem.....	181
Promoting Emotional Well-Being.....	183
Referring Young People.....	184

CHAPTER 15 Skills Guide

Introduction to Skills Guide.....	187
Kicking.....	188
Drop Punt.....	190
Torpedo Punt.....	190
Banana Kick.....	191
Handball.....	191
Marking.....	191
Arm or Chest Mark.....	192
Hand Mark.....	192
Overhead Mark.....	193
Ruckwork.....	193
Palming: Front.....	194
Palming: Back.....	194
Picking Up: Moving Ball.....	194
Picking Up: Stationary Ball.....	195
Ball Handling.....	195
Running.....	195
Bouncing the Ball.....	196
Sidestep.....	196
Blind Turn.....	196
The Dummy.....	197
Spoiling.....	197
Contact Skills.....	198
Stage 1:	
Landing.....	198
Keeping Your Feet.....	198
Falling Forward.....	198
Rolling.....	199
Stage 2:	
Bracing.....	199
Bumping.....	199
Shepherding.....	200
One-On-One Tussle.....	200
Shoulder Roll/Backward Shoulder Roll.....	200
Tackling.....	201
Stage 3:	
Front 'Drive Tackle'.....	202
Side Impact Tackle.....	202
Behind Drop Tackle.....	202
Being Tackled.....	203
Fending.....	203
Smothering.....	203
High Marking and Landing.....	203
Assessment Form for Australian Football.....	204

References, Further Reading and Acknowledgements

References and Further Reading.....	209
Acknowledgements.....	210

APPENDIX

The AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.....	211
AFL and State Affiliate Contacts.....	216
Resources.....	217

YOUTH FOOTBALLERS – CHARACTERISTICS AND MOTIVATIONS



Chapter 1

Youth Footballers – Characteristics and Motivations

DEFINING ADOLESCENCE

Increasingly over the past few decades, adolescence has been seen as a developmental stage in its own right, where childhood behaviours are adapted and adjusted to adult forms. The beginning of adolescence is generally seen as coinciding with the physical changes of puberty. Where this stage of development ends is harder to define, however, since each individual moves through the tasks of development at a different rate. This is due to the influence of social, cultural and other factors which impact on the timing and nature of change over this period, including the way in which 'adolescence' is viewed in different societies.

The World Health Organisation refers to the age range of 10-24 years as encompassing adolescent growth, and further distinguishes between early adolescence (10-14 years), middle adolescence (15-19 years) and late adolescence (20-24 years).

Broadly speaking, the main tasks within these phases can be seen as:

Early	Middle	Late
Am I normal?	Who am I?	Where am I going?
Transition to adolescence Coming to terms with body/biological changes	'Essence' of adolescence Establish self among peers as a worthwhile individual	Transition to adulthood Vocational/educational issues and one-to-one intimate relationships

This chronological breakdown goes some way to acknowledging the need to differentiate between developmental and health issues for each 'stage' of adolescence, as opposed to viewing adolescents as an homogenous group. While it may seem to encompass a broad age range, there are various reasons why such a view is taken. This definition reflects the variety of the adolescent experience in different cultures, and recognises that opportunities such as employment and marriage, which have traditionally been associated with 'adult status', are occurring later on average than in previous years.

ADOLESCENTS IN SPORT

The period of growth between childhood and reaching one's final size, shape and sexual potential is called puberty. At this time there are increased concentrations of male (testosterone) and female (estrogen) hormones in the bloodstream of both males and females.

Coaching adolescents during puberty places unique demands on the coach. In some instances, the coach will need to modify their program to cater for changes in coordination and balance. In other instances, the coach will be required to offer words of encouragement, words that indicate to the player that the coach at least understands some of the difficulties the player experiences when passing through puberty.

Growth

At the onset of puberty, weight gain occurs before height gain. At first, girls experience enlarging breasts while boys experience enlarging testes. About one year later, the growth spurt begins and physical changes become observable to others.

Certain parts of the skeleton develop more rapidly than other parts. The extremities of the body grow before the central portions. The nose, ears and lips grow before the head and the feet grow before the legs. Often the two halves of the body do not grow at the same rate. The left side may grow ahead of the right. The visible spurts of weight and height occur before the less visible ones of muscle and organ growth.



Oil, sweat and odour glands become much more active, often resulting in problems with acne, oily hair and smelly bodies. The heart doubles in size and the eyes elongate, often causing the adolescent to become temporarily near-sighted and in need of glasses or contact lenses.

When evaluating the effects of puberty on performance, the implications for coaches include:

- Considering the growth factors as the possible cause of the player's rate of skill development slowing down.
- Delaying the introduction of resistance work until the muscle and joint skeletal growth can cope with weight gain.
- Providing the player with greater privacy and space while they learn to cope with changes in primary sex characteristics and any loss in confidence sometimes associated with increased body odour and acne.

Emotional unrest

For many adolescents the challenges of accommodating the effects of puberty on their daily lives and relationships can place them on an emotional roller-coaster. This is particularly true for late and early maturing boys and girls. For these teenagers, there are observable characteristics that signify they are different. For late maturers, the problem is achieving in a culture that applauds sporting achievement and gives attention to physical maturity. Early maturers can become sexually active before they have the emotional maturity or intellectual understanding to manage their relationships with others.

Coaches need to consider that emotional unrest may be more prevalent in particular adolescents. Therefore coaches need to be prepared to give support when there are fluctuations in attitude. On the other hand, coaches can be reassured by the accepting and focused attitude of other adolescent players.

Sex characteristics

Before puberty there is very little difference between the male and female primary sex characteristics. However, during puberty significant changes occur. Up to 50 per cent of females suffer considerable discomfort during this time of change. Menarche, which is the first occurrence of menstruation in a female, is one such discomfort and change during this period. While they can continue physical activity during menarche, they should not be expected necessarily to maintain performance levels or training efforts.

Males grow taller than females and wider at the shoulders than the hips. Females become relatively wider at the hips and develop breasts. Following these developments is the appearance of facial and body hair.

Coaches need to consider:

- The impact of an emerging interest in the opposite sex.
- Re-adjusting training and performance goals to respond to the effects of menarche.
- Developing a rapport with the players which encourages them to openly discuss difficulties they may be experiencing adjusting to the changes in sex characteristics.

PHYSICAL, COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN 14-18 YEARS

The following tables developed by Canadian coaching consultant, Istvan Balyi, provides an overview of the physical, mental/cognitive and emotional developmental patterns of players between the ages of 14 and 18.

TABLE 1: PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Basic characteristics	General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations	Implications to the coach
The circulatory and respiratory system reach maturity.	These systems are generally capable of giving maximum output.	Aerobic and anaerobic systems can be trained for maximum output. Full sport-specific energy system training should be implemented.
Increase in height and weight gradually lessen. Stabilisation occurs in the muscular system.	Muscles have grown to their mature size, but muscular strength continues to increase, reaching its peak in the late 20s.	Strength training can be maximised to improve overall strength development. Neuromuscular training should be optimised during this phase.
Skeletal maturation continues in males and females.	Connective tissues are still strengthening.	Progressive overloading in training should be continued.
By age 17, girls have generally reached adult proportions, whereas boys do not reach such proportions until several years later.	Proportionally, girls gain more weight than boys during this phase.	Aerobic training for girls to be optimised as well, coaches should be aware how to deal with weight gain and its impact on figure. Players should learn how to compete, including all technical, tactical and ancillary components.

TABLE 2: MENTAL/COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Basic characteristics	General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations	Implications to the coach
Generally, by age 16, the brain has reached its adult size but continues to mature neurologically for several more years.	Players can cope with multiple strategies and tactics, particularly near the end of the phase.	Coaches should ensure the refinement of all technical and tactical skills.
Critical thinking is developing well during this phase.	The capacity of self-analysis and correction is developing.	Decision-making should be developed further through technical, tactical development.



TABLE 3: EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Basic characteristics	General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations	Implications to the coach
Peer group influence is still a powerful force.	Independent decision-making and leadership skills are becoming more developed.	Players should be given the opportunity to develop through participation in an appropriate leadership or responsible role (i.e. team captain, athlete representative, etc) but strong direction and discipline must be maintained.
Players are searching for a stable, balanced self-image.	Still very susceptible to successes and failures. Coping techniques are useful.	Positive evaluation of performances and positive reinforcement are imperative.
Activities and interaction with the opposite sex play strong roles during this phase.	Male players must be aware that female players now face a problem of femininity versus sport development. Female players must be aware that male athletes now face a problem of relating performance to masculinity.	Facilitate the recognition of the former issues through education and club programs.

Istvan Balyi, National Coaching Institute, British Columbia, Canada.

YOUTH FOOTBALLERS' MOTIVATIONS – WHY THEY DO AND DON'T PLAY

In 2001, the AFL, through Deakin University, carried out extensive research examining the key factors and circumstances associated with youth participation in football. The main factors why 10-17-year-olds do or don't play are:

The motivators

- Football is fun and fast.
- It is high scoring.
- It is considered very skilful.
- It provides opportunities for social interaction and is team-based, making it more attractive.
- It is community orientated (regional).
- It improves an individual's self-esteem.
- It provides recognition.
- Its physical nature and toughness is attractive for many adolescents.
- It provides dreams of AFL glory.
- It beats boredom.

The competition

- Other team sports offered.
- Individual sports (tennis, swimming and other extreme sports).
- Duration of AFL games compared with other sports.
- The growth of informal activities such as skateboarding.

The 'PlayStation effect'

- PlayStations are one of the most serious competitors.
- The popular games.
- Reality versus fantasy.
- "It's cold outside ..."
- Some parents are alarmed by this trend while others view it as a babysitter.
- Television.
- Internet.

The coach

The coach is perhaps the most important variable influencing a player's participation in Australian Football.

- Nothing is more directly linked to quitting Australian Football than 'abusive', 'angry', 'too serious' coaches.
- Coaches seriously lack social skills for managing 10 to 16-year-olds.
- Coaching plans and preparation is critical.

Participation

- Low involvement through poorly structured participation is one of the most serious de-motivators.
- Not enough time on ground.
- No opportunity in glamour positions.
- Exclusively in the backline.
- Too many players in some teams and too few in others.

Training and games

- Games can be fun and rewarding, but if training is dull, too hard or too serious then dropout is likely.
- Games are often not competitive (more important to parents than players).
- Parents are concerned about grading.
- Dropout can occur when better players leave a club for representative footy.



Social issues

- Fewer physical education teachers in schools.
- PE diminished in size, frequency, quality and range.
- Majority of teachers are female.
- If teachers take sport outside, other sports are preferred.
- Pressures on single-parent families.
- Social pressures on 14 to 16-year-olds.

Playing AFL as a motivator

- Powerful for 10 to 13-year-olds.
- Limited by realism for 13 to 16-year-olds.
- Limited in non-traditional areas.

Other factors influencing dropout

- Simply too lazy.
- Getting up early (parents also).
- Driving to games and training.
- Duration of commitment (parents).
- Violence/perception (also an issue for mothers).
- Serious injury.
- Want to play in games, but not train.
- Becoming better at an individual sport.
- School commitments.
- Natural attrition.

Motivating Youth Players

What adolescents want

- To be appreciated for themselves, not just when they are “good”.
- To feel they have some control over their lives.
- To be successful at something.
- To belong.
- To have other people other than their parents care for and support them.

Six out of 10 boys aged 14 to 17 claim that they love to do as many sports as possible. How can you, as a coach, manage this?

ACCESS CHALLENGES

What do adolescents want out of their involvement in sport? Participation, success, status, health, friends, fun, thrills, risk, challenge, order, support, access and the opportunity to be creative are some of the known reasons why adolescents play sport. The emphasis in the information that follows is on how coaches can make football more accessible to adolescents.

Access does not only relate to physical proximity but also to the individual's perceived compatibility with what the sport program has to offer.

Some of the methods coaches can use to help adolescents participate in football include:

- Using school facilities to reduce the need for adolescents to travel to the training venue.
- Providing flexible schedules to accommodate the demands placed on adolescents by study and family commitments.
- Carefully nurturing the progress of each individual player while offering the ultimate challenge for high achievers.
- Providing quality equipment and facilities.

It could be argued that the above list relates to all ages of players and not just adolescents. However, there are some unique characteristics of adolescents that can require coaches to pay particular attention to these strategies.

Parents do not necessarily provide the same level of support (transport to training and games) for adolescents as they do for younger children. This is partly because adolescents seek to display their independence by not having to rely on their parents. They no longer have a free ‘taxi’ service to get them to games and training, but they are not old enough to get a driver’s licence.

Many adolescents have disappointing sporting experiences as children and subsequently lose confidence in their sporting ability. Unless a sport can provide a beginner level specifically for adolescents, it is difficult for anxious individuals to attempt new sports. This is particularly true in team sports where a beginner adolescent often has to play in a team of people who began playing as children and have many more years’ experience.

The high school academic curriculum gives notice to young people that to make it in the adult world they must perform well in the last two years of high school. This creates problems for talented players who are constantly trying to manage the demands of school and the expectations of high performance coaches. Many parents advise their sons and daughters that they should forgo any sport involvement during these vital two years of their secondary education.

Parents require the adolescent to continue to support family activities, which can sometimes conflict with sporting interests. This problem compounds when the adolescent develops a natural interest in sex and begins to attend social activities. An ideal situation is when all members of a family share an interest in the same activities.

Adolescence is a time when individuals have:

- Many conflicting commitments.
- Limited mobility (not able to drive and less-involved parents).
- The ability to play adult games.
- In many cases, acquired anxieties about their sporting ability.
- No income to support an involvement in adult level activities.

There are many examples of organisations and coaches that have attempted to increase the access of adolescents to their sport by recognising the above problems and developing solutions. The most appealing solution to the problem of travel is to base sporting clubs at local high schools. Some schools have excellent sport programs and teachers are employed for their coaching as well as their teaching ability. Many schools have weekend sport programs for students at all levels of competition. These are examples of efforts to improve each individual’s access to adolescent sport.

THE TRANSITION TO ADULT FOOTBALL

One of the other compelling challenges for coaches is for them to develop programs that guarantee achieving desired competencies while also offering enough diversity to extend each player and/or team. The thrill of playing sport can be gained in many ways, one of which is the absolute mastery of basic skills and tactics, and another is the ability to successfully deploy a range of intuitive, high-risk skills and/or tactics. Some coaches subscribe to one or other of these approaches while others manage to include both in their coaching programs.

Adolescents are in a phase of their lives where there is a distinct shift from a playful, divergent and creative approach to sport coaching and organisation, as is typical of junior sport, to a more structured, imposed and restricted approach, used most often when in adult sport. It is usually during this period of change or transition that the trust between individuals can be tested. Players continue to seek enjoyment through the creative use of high-risk skills while their coaches demand the use of low-risk skills only. The players’ thrill may come from attempting something different, while in contrast, the coach’s thrill may be derived from a player’s conformity to a set of well-rehearsed skills and game routines.

The transition phase from junior to adult sport does not have a defined approach that guides the attitudes of participants. It is this lack of direction that can test the trust between player and coach. While in most sports the rules of the game during the transition phase are the same as for the adult game, the approach of players and coaches varies considerably. The language used can vary between commands such as “You will ...!”, “I must ...!”, “Give more!” and “Try to ...!”, “My options are ...”, “Take a risk.” Tactics employed by coaches can vary. An example is “for anyone who is clear inside 50m, it is appropriate to have a shot at goal,” versus “always try to give the ball to players in a better position to score.”



Because adolescent sport does not have a specific set of guidelines, it relies on adopting either the children's sport or adult sport approach. In most situations, coaches seem to adopt the adult model rather than the children's model when coaching adolescents. Some of the problems created by this unique situation include the following issues:

- Adult training regimes can negatively affect immature bodies and attitudes.
- Previous freedoms are challenged by the demands for conformity.
- Coaches verbalise their frustrations and opinions in an often demeaning and negative way.
- Player skill levels may not be able to match the demands of an adult game.
- Cognitive expectations may exceed the ability of the player to link the coach's instructions with game situations.
- Coaches may question the discipline of their players because they appear to be ignoring the coach's requests.
- Players may question their coach's methods because the coach is often more dictatorial and demanding than their previous coach.

Coaches who do not give enough attention to the above situations may find that a mutual lack of trust develops between them and their players. The coach observes players who seemingly continue to ignore their instructions, and players become disillusioned when they are criticised for a lack of effort when in fact lack of skills and understanding is the problem.

There are many strategies that coaches can use to prevent unwanted tension developing between them and their players. However, before and during the use of these strategies it is essential for the coach to trust the player. Unconditional positive regard for the player is every coach's responsibility. Players also have a responsibility to trust their coach but, for many adolescents, it is too much to expect them to have the emotional and/or psychological maturity to manage the dynamics of complex human relations effectively.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

It is often difficult to know how sensitive players are to pubescent changes. Only when a coach asks the young male player to remove his top when training does the coach discover that the player is sensitive to his newly acquired rolls of fat around the abdomen. Allow variations in training attire when players are noticeably embarrassed about some of their physical developments. Next time there is a team function involving food, use the opportunity to serve a balanced meal, invite the parents, enlist the services of a nutritionist and provide the players with some understanding of the importance of each food type.

Be prepared to modify performance expectations in response to accelerated weight and height gain, eyesight adjustments, primary sex characteristic changes and muscle and organ growth. During this time there may appear to be delays in response to training efforts. In most settings, the adolescent can mask the bodily changes caused by the onset of puberty. However, in the sport setting, everyone is focused on physical matters. Even before and after activity, there is usually a need to change in public. A coach can help to redirect a player's attention away from their own anxieties about their bodies by focusing on the task of becoming a better player and team. Coaches should avoid making comments about physical changes unless they specifically relate to performance. In these cases, the matter should be discussed in private.

Coaches who choose to coach adolescents will have the pleasure of witnessing dramatic changes in their players. These changes bring with them inherent difficulties as well as times for exploration and exhilaration.

Coaches are not required to become obsessed about knowing how to cater for every individual's response to change. It is, however, important to demonstrate understanding and support while focusing on providing an enjoyable and challenging sport experience.



EFFECTIVE COACHING



Chapter 2

Effective Coaching

ROLE OF THE COACH

The coach of an Australian Football club holds a dynamic and vital position within that club. Coaches represent players, officials and supporters as the figurehead of the club. The coach must be a leader, continually analysing, studying, planning and assessing the game as it develops, while being aware of the capabilities of his/her team. The coach must strive to bring out the best result possible for the group of players under his/her direction and develop the team as both a group and as individuals.

The game's emphasis on running and possession football has developed to an extent that at every level players are aware of the need to be fit, skilled and versatile. Players are expected to be able to adopt attacking and defensive roles regardless of the positions they play. It is the coach's responsibility to ensure the development of these attributes to a level equivalent to the age and ability of members of the team. The increased importance of tactics to maintain possession and restrict the opposition has placed even greater emphasis on the coach's role in creating a successful team. The coach must be able to communicate well with his/her team and create the correct environment for players to perform at their optimum level.

Coaches have many diverse roles which can vary in importance according to the age group of the team. In simple terms, the role of the coach is to plan, act and review. This is an ongoing process aimed at improving the qualities of the coach and the performance of players. The basic roles of an effective coach are:

- **Manager** – dealing with a wide range of players, officials and supporters.
- **Leader** – assigned to organise training, match-day events and team morale.
- **Teacher** – instructing football skills and team tactics.
- **Mentor** – behind every successful person there is one elementary truth: somewhere, somehow, someone cared about their growth and development. This person was their mentor.
- **Selector** – involved in the planning and selection of the best team to represent the club.
- **Communicator** – providing clear instruction and feedback to the team and individual players.
- **Psychologist** – dealing with various individual personalities within the team.
- **Public relations** – representing the club at official functions and community activities.
- **Student** – continually seeking to upgrade knowledge of the game.
- **Sports trainer** – with a basic knowledge of injury prevention, care and management.
- **Planner** – annual integrated plan covering pre-season, competition, physical, technical, tactical, psychological, workload volumes and intensities etc.
- **Motivator** – including engendering players' acceptance of own responsibility.
- **Goal-setter** – making sure that goals are achievable, challenging and measurable.
- **Creating a successful learning environment** – focusing on what you can control; recognising individual and group needs.

The coach is the role model so it is important to set standards in everything you do. With this, mutual respect will be gained from all involved in the game. This not only refers to being knowledgeable about the game, but also has to do with coaching within the laws, having respect for the abilities of opponents and the umpires as well as abiding by the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct. A coach who is punctual, organised and willing to provide positive feedback to players will improve the playing standard at a rapid rate.



COACHING STYLES

In a study of more than 500 coaches, five distinct categories of coaching styles were identified. There is, however, no one perfect style that leads to success. Most coaches often possess certain characteristics of each coaching type, but should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the various coaching styles. If a coach is able to identify some of his/her shortcomings, they are in a position to improve.

Coaching style	Characteristics
Authoritarian coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong disciplinarian.• Well organised.• Good team spirit when winning.• Dissension when losing.• May be feared or disliked.
Business-like coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intelligent, logical approach.• Well planned and organised.• Up to date with new techniques.• Expects 100 per cent effort all the time.• May set goals too high for some team members.
Nice-guy coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well liked.• Players sometimes take advantage of the coach's co-operative nature.• Gets on well with the players of similar temperament.
Intense coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasises winning.• High anxiety often transmitted to players.
Easy-going coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very casual.• Gives impression of not taking the game seriously.• May not be prepared to drive his/her team at training.• Well liked but may seem to be inadequate in some situations.

COACHING PHILOSOPHY

Coaches have a significant impact on both the quality of performance and the quality of enjoyment that players achieve in football. Coaches largely determine whether the experience in football is a positive or negative, and whether the players gain or lose self-esteem. It is important that coaches develop a general approach or philosophy towards coaching that will ensure a consistent, positive impact on their players.

It is imperative that a coaching style and philosophy takes into consideration the age and ability of players in the team. A coaching philosophy is individual and reflects both the coach's personality and coaching objectives. However, it should be reasonably constant over time and for different groups of players. The goals of each player or group may vary and the achievement strategies associated with those goals may also vary, but the underlying philosophy of coaching should remain constant.

It is unrealistic to expect someone who is starting coaching to have a clear philosophy to apply, however, developing a successful coaching philosophy should be based on:

- Knowing why you coach.
- Knowing why players participate.
- Considering the opinions of others.
- Developing a set of personal guidelines on how you will operate as a coach.

Developing a philosophy of coaching also centres on the concept of respect. Essentially:

- A coach must respect the players and provide all participants with equal opportunities.

A coach should also encourage players to:

- Respect the principles of fair play.
- Respect opponents.
- Respect officials and their decisions.

In developing a coaching philosophy, players must be the overriding consideration. The sport belongs to the players and coaches should therefore have a player-centred approach. It is the coach's responsibility to assist players to set and achieve goals. Coaching goals may be as simple as creating enjoyment or as demanding as striving to win. The coach should endeavour to ensure that the goals set by players are both achievable and in line with the overall coaching philosophy. It may help coaches to clarify their coaching philosophy by writing it down. The content will be based on the values and beliefs that come from your experience and direct your coaching.

It is not enough to merely have a coaching philosophy. As coach, you must also consider how the philosophy will be communicated to players, parents and administrators. It is also reasonable to consider how to ensure that the coaching philosophy is followed and what you will do if your coaching philosophy is challenged. That is, how will you deal with the different values of different people?

COACHING QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL COACHES

Coaching qualities	Examples
1. Professional preparation	
1.1 Knowledge	Knowledge of football and ability to use it in coaching. Knowledge of coaching technique.
1.2 Planning	Plans for each practice. No surprises, players know where they stand in the team. Establishes rules and regulations for players. Flexible – able to handle disruption to the coaching format, playing personnel, training venues, travel etc. Players lose respect for a rigid thinker unable to change with the times. Encourages players to set personal goals. Continually seeks ways to strengthen the program. Pre-plans the use of staff and facilities.
1.3 Mental and physical well-being of players	Shows concern for the physical and mental well-being of the players. Is a trouble shooter – keeps on the lookout for warning signs.
2. Control of emotional environment	
2.1 Self control	Maintains self control at all times. Is stable, honest and straight forward. Maintains some distance with players while encouraging a warm congenial atmosphere. Does not play the role of a dictator and run the squad like an army drill instructor. Does not succumb to apathy and start believing that other things in life are more important. Shows 'strength of character', e.g. when a key player or two is lost, the coach does not write off the season. Is not easily intimidated by disgruntled supporters. Does not become more irritable and short-tempered while coaching than at any other time. Does not give up when things go wrong during a contest. Does not hold grudges against certain players.



2.2 Personal characteristics	<p>Sense of humour and compassion. Good listening and motivational skills. Thinks clearly in pressure situations. Flexible personality – able to coach over a long period of time and cope with different individuals. A model of socially acceptable behaviour. Has enthusiasm to instil confidence in players. Assumes the role of a strong supporter of players and system. Seeks to improve. Attends coaching courses, seminars and supports accreditation.</p>
3. Communication	
3.1 Handling of discipline	<p>Keeps the team under control. Is fair and consistent at all times. Refrains from embarrassing players publicly.</p>
3.2 Public and player relations	<p>Leaves the door open for discussion. Holds frequent team meetings – listens to players. Keeps administration and maintenance staff informed and establishes lines of responsibility. Communicates regularly with coaches of the other clubs and the coaches association.</p>
4. Player preparation	
4.1 Training	<p>Plans well for each practice. Maintains variety and specificity in training. Urges players to assist each other and take responsibility during training. Provides immediate feedback following the completion of tasks. Understands the basic training routines and their relevance to team play.</p>
4.2 Game preparation	<p>Develops strategies to cope with a variety of opposition strategies, opposition strengths and weaknesses and game significance. Effectively uses and analyses statistics. Is versed in the most effective styles of play – prepared to listen to advisors and adopt suggestions of significant others. Has extensive experience of other team styles of play. Efficiently manages post-game discussions and analysis with players, media and supporters.</p>
4.3 Motivation	<p>Accurately assesses player anxiety, mood changes, stress levels and feelings of competence. Understands the principles of arousal as they relate to player performance. Avoids holding grudges with players. Can prevent the ‘stars’ from becoming egomaniacs by treating them like all other players.</p>
5. Recruitment	<p>Willing to devote time to rigorously pursue young talent. Establishes a criteria for player recruitment.</p>

COACHING AND THE LAW

The law touches all aspects of our lives and sport is no exception.

The issue of sports safety and the legal responsibility of the coach is an extremely important one. The following information outlines some of the legal issues as they relate to coaching. **Please note this information should not be regarded as legal advice.**

COACHING: A LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

By accepting a coaching position, you have made a commitment to your players. You have:

- Indicated you possess coaching and other related skills.
- Indicated you will maintain your skills at a level equal to the skills of other competent coaches in your field.

Some injuries in football are inevitable. However the responsibility of your management of players should not assume such intimidating proportions that you give coaching away, or unduly restrict your programs to the point where players' needs are not being met.

Negligence

Negligence consists of falling below the standard of care required in the circumstances to protect others from the unreasonable risk of harm. In the coaching environment, negligence can be defined as a coach's breach of any duty of care owed to a player and where the breach results in actual damage to that player which should have been foreseen by a reasonable and prudent coach.

The court, in determining whether there is a duty of care owed by a coach and what that standard of care is, will ask: Has the coach failed to provide the standard of care to a player that a reasonable and prudent coach would? The court would look at what a competent coach could be expected to anticipate under the circumstance relevant to the case.

Care

A coach should, under all circumstances:

- Take all necessary precautions to prevent injuries from occurring.
- Treat injuries correctly.
- Ensure the treatment provided prevents further injury.
- Take no action that could cause injury.

A reasonable and prudent coach should provide care based on what should be known about the sport and/or the injury. Ignorance is no excuse.

Other Areas

In better understanding legal issues surrounding coaching, it is important to recognise that there are a number of areas of commonwealth and state legislation that have an impact on the coaching environment. These include discrimination, harassment and child protection.

Discrimination

There are four main types of discrimination that may affect football clubs:

- Racial and religious discrimination.
- Sex/gender discrimination.
- Disability discrimination.
- Infectious diseases discrimination.

Harassment

Harassment consists of offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour that is directed at a person because of a particular characteristic, usually sex, disability or race.

Child protection

Greater attention has been given to young sports participants and their welfare recently and several states have passed Child Protection Acts. While these vary from state to state, they have common principles designed to protect the safety and wellbeing of children. Generally, the key principles include awareness of the issues and procedures that are in place and open communication to increase awareness and manage the issue.

For the latest information in these areas, go to the Policies section of the AFL website afl.com.au/policies.



PROVIDING CARE

In addition to applying that careful parent test (i.e. the way you would act with your own child), carrying out the following steps should assist you to be a competent, reasonable and prudent coach:

The following table is a checklist for coaches to ensure appropriate care is provided to your players.

Provide a safe environment	Facilities and equipment must be safe for both the users and others involved in competition. Adverse weather conditions must also be taken into consideration during competition and training sessions.
Activities must be adequately planned	Impaired learning ability and injury may be the result of unplanned practice sessions. Using the appropriate progressions in teaching a new skill, especially potentially dangerous skills, is imperative.
Players must be evaluated for injury and capacity	Players with an injury or incapacity should not be expected to perform any potentially harmful activity. Players should never be forced to take part in any activity that they do not wish to. Individual differences must be taken into account.
Young players should not be mismatched	Young players should be matched not only according to age, but also height, weight and maturity. Skill levels and experience should also be considered.
Safe and proper equipment should be provided	Existing codes and standards for equipment should be met and all equipment should be kept in good order. It should always be adequately repaired so that it is safe to use at all times.
Players must be warned of the inherent risks of the sport	The inherent risks of any sport can only be accepted by the participants if they know, understand and appreciate those risks. In some situations, even such a warning may not be enough: for example, where young people are involved in a school-supervised activity.
Activities must be closely supervised	Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure the practice environment is as safe as possible. Each sport will have its own specific requirements in this regard.
Coaches should know first-aid	Coaches should have knowledge of basic emergency procedures and keep up to date on them. Coaches should know STOP (Stop, Talk, Observe, Prevent further injury) and RICER (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation and Referral) procedures for managing injuries. Coaches should have a written emergency plan and ensure that appropriate medical assistance is available. At the very least, coaches should ensure that nothing is done which could aggravate any injury.
Develop clear, written rules for training and general conduct	Many injuries are the result of fooling around in change rooms and training venues. Clear written rules should be developed for general conduct and behavior in such situations.
Coaches should keep adequate records	Adequate records are useful aids to planning and are essential in all cases of injury. Record cards should be kept on all players, including relevant general and medical information and progress reports. Accident reports (not diagnoses) should be made as soon as possible after each injury occurs.

MEASURING AND IMPROVING COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Australian Football is continually changing; rules change, techniques change, equipment is refined and coaching methods, including the application of sport sciences, evolve. Coaches must keep abreast of these changes and adapt their coaching accordingly.

All coaches have to know if they are effective or ineffective, independent of the ability of the playing group.

The following techniques can assist coaches in measuring and improving their coaching effectiveness.

Coach self-reflection

Unless coaches can arrange for someone to observe and analyse them on a regular basis, the self-reflection method is the only method that can be used to confirm the effectiveness of their coaching. Self-reflection in coaching is a process where coaches compare their current practice against an ideal set of practices, using a systematic procedure to make comparisons between real and ideal.

Video analysis

Video analysis is another effective tool that assists in the self-reflection process because videotape provides permanent images that can help with in-depth analysis and evaluation. It can also help to identify areas in need of improvement and can also be used to plan for such improvement.

Video self-analysis is a six-step process:

1. Recording – videotape a coaching session.
2. Reflecting – review the tape to find a suitable segment, then analyse the segment against the ideal model.
3. Consulting – invite a mentor to ‘audit’ the analysis.
4. Planning – design a plan to improve.
5. Implementing – carry out the plan.
6. Follow-up recording – videotape a follow-up coaching session and check that the plan has worked.

Mentoring

Effective coaches have often had the good fortune to have been coached by a very good coach. On becoming coaches themselves they may have imitated many of the coaching behaviours and methods used by their previous coaches. This process can be carried on into a coach’s current development through a mentor.

A mentor is usually an experienced person who works individually with a less-experienced coach. A good mentor is someone, chosen by a coach, whom the coach respects for their knowledge, attitudes and mentoring skills to assist them in their development. The mentor asks questions about the methods used and guides the coach toward a better understanding of his or her coaching.

In selecting a mentor, a coach can reflect on who are the people in their field (not necessarily restricted to other coaches) they admire most, why they admire these people and what are the admirable qualities they possess. The answers to these questions will direct coaches to suitable mentors, with whom they can work formally or informally to develop their own unique skills and attributes.

BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

It is sometimes just as difficult to modify coaching behaviour as it is to modify player behaviour. Coaches who are attempting to modify their own behaviour should try the following strategies:

- Identify the behaviour to be modified.
- Establish the characteristics of the new behaviour.
- Look at models of the new behaviour.
- Assess how important the change is – how will it affect the coach’s effectiveness?
- Obtain feedback about the behaviour.
- Reassess the effects of the change on all coaching tasks.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The role of the coach has broadened immensely in recent times and there are a number of ethical issues they have to deal with, e.g. drugs in sport, harassment, fair play, cheating, eating disorders, judging when a player should return from injury and respect for officials. The AFL has introduced a Coaches’ Code of Conduct which provides behavioural standards for coaches coaching Australian Football.



THE AFL COACHES' CODE OF CONDUCT

I _____ of _____
_____ Postcode _____

hereby commit, to the best of my ability, to uphold the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct.

I understand that as an integral component of my accreditation, I must maintain a standard of behaviour and conduct in the best interests of the game and the players/staff in my care.

In representing myself in an honest manner, and without bringing the coaching profession or the Game into disrepute, I will endeavour to uphold the following to the best of my ability:

1. I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian Football, by refraining from any discriminatory practices including, but not limited to, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnic background, special ability/disability or sexual orientation, preference or identity.
2. I will abide by and teach the AFL Laws of the Game and the Rules of my Club and League/Association.
3. I will be reasonable in the demands I make on the time commitments of the players in my care, having due consideration for their health and wellbeing.
4. I will be supportive at all times and I will refrain from any form of personal or physical abuse or unnecessary physical contact with the players in my care.
5. I will have due consideration for varying maturity and ability levels of my players when designing practice schedules, practice activities and involvement in competition.
6. Where I am responsible for players in the 5-18-year-old age group, I will strive to ensure that all players gain equal playing time. I will avoid overplaying the talented players, aiming to maximise participation, learning and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability.
7. I will stress and monitor safety always.
8. In recognising the significance of injury and sickness, I will seek and follow the physician's advice concerning the return of injured or ill players to training.
9. I will endeavour to keep informed regarding sound principles of coaching and skill development, and of factors relating to the welfare of my players.
10. I will at all times display and teach appropriate sporting behaviour, ensuring that players understand and practise fair play.
11. I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators.
12. I will ensure that players are involved in a positive environment where skill-learning and development are priorities and not overshadowed by a desire to win.
13. I reject the use of performance-enhancing substances in sport and will abide by the guidelines set forth in the AFL Anti Doping and Illicit Drugs policies.

I agree to the following terms:

1. I agree to abide by the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct.
2. I acknowledge that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, may take disciplinary action against me if I breach the code of conduct. I understand that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, is required to implement a complaints-handling procedure in accordance with the principles of natural justice, in the event of an allegation against me.
3. I acknowledge that disciplinary action against me may include deregistration from the AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

Note: This "Coaches' Code of Conduct" is to be signed and conformed to as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to this Code, they may be obliged to sign a further Code of Conduct/Ethics with their Club and/or League.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

WITNESS SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

(To be signed by Club President, AFL Auskick District Manager or school principal – whichever applies)



COACHING YOUTH FOOTBALLERS



Chapter 3

Coaching Youth Footballers

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a stage of development marked by dynamic biological and psychological changes, and requires adoption of specific coaching behaviours if young adolescents are to realise a socially fulfilled and worthwhile outcome from their involvement in Australian Football. Coaches not only occupy an influential position in the football setting but their influence can extend into other areas of the player's life as well.

Key areas of consideration are lifestyle and time management, progression to higher levels of competition, developing rapport between coaches and players, developing trust and mutual respect, setting limits and enhancing discipline.

APPROACHES TO COACHING

The following recommended coaching approaches are aimed at assisting coaches to respond effectively to some of the social needs of adolescents. Coaches should view the list as a collection of alternatives to be used at their discretion. The manner of delivery of each behaviour should also be determined by the coach and will be strongly influenced by the interpersonal attitudes that are typically unique to each coach/player relationship.

TIME MANAGEMENT

As a coach of adolescent footballers, you are faced with many problems throughout a football season which are quite unique to the teenage group. Unlike the majority of senior footballers, teenagers are still deciding what their priorities are in terms of their sporting, social and academic careers. This can cause problems in time management whereby they try to fit in too many commitments appropriate for their lifestyle. Eventually, something needs to give.

The challenge coaches face in this situation would be to assist the player with these extra demands. The ideal situation would be for players to manage their time so that commitments are met and at the same time maintain interest and enthusiasm for football. However, this is not always the outcome. The reality is that at some stage coaches will need to deal with low attendance rates at training and even struggling to field a team on weekends. These problems will always be perennial issues, but the following steps may help minimise the effects they might have on your team.

1. Identify potential disruptions

These may include:

- Injuries and illnesses.
- Work – full-time and part-time.
- School demands.
- Family holidays.
- Other sports.
- Cost.
- Travel.
- Family problems.

There may be many others which relate particularly to players, the coach and the club.



2. Establish a club procedure

Discuss this with your players and together come up with a policy for dealing with such situations.

This may include:

- Prior notice must be given.
- Attendance at training re selection.
- Rehabilitation re injuries.
- Penalties re non-compliance.

This is an opportunity to discuss team rules and expectations for the season.

3. Develop strategies

Always try to be pro-active to situations that may occur.

Some strategies may include;

- Preparing a monthly calendar which highlights:
 - Upcoming games.
 - Training nights.
 - Social events.
 - Other important reminders.
- A reduction in the number of training nights/weeks off.
- Providing variety to maintain interest:
 - Indoor training/swimming/basketball/touch football.
 - Social activities.
 - Team-building activities, e.g. triathlon competition.
 - Going to an AFL game together.
- Taking an active interest, ask questions.
- Continue with planned training programs.

Potentially disruptive players especially should be assisted to overcome behaviours that will impede their learning or the learning of others in the team. Ignoring these factors that can disrupt the team and impede learning can result in the teaching/coaching role becoming more and more difficult and contribute to player dropout.

Behaviour problems can destroy the coach's aim to provide enjoyable learning experiences. Most problems can be avoided if training sessions are well planned and a clear code of behaviour is established and reinforced from the outset. A knowledgeable coach who provides training sessions that yield fun, active participation and development of skills, and that allow all players to achieve personal success, will not be confronted with disciplinary problems very often.

PROGRESSING TO HIGHER LEVELS OF COMPETITION

Win or lose – enjoy the contest

Win or lose, remain composed throughout a season, teach players that the contest provides the excitement and enjoyment while the outcome provides a guide for assessing strategies and skills in relation to the opposition. Also, by setting up competitive activities at training, the coach can observe how players react and therefore intervene if necessary. At training, the coach is able to remove a player from a game to provide feedback about the player's composure during the contest. At all times it is appropriate to stress good sportsmanship, fair play, support for teammates, clever play, teamwork, concentration, maintaining effort when being beaten and focus the players' game analysis on the application of skills and strategies rather than the outcome.

Playing competitive sport with friends

One of the important reasons why young people participate in sport is to be in a team with friends and enter a competition against other teams. Sometimes coach, club and organisation strategies, designed to improve the competitiveness of teams, prevent players from realising this need to be with friends.

Adjusting to the pressure of competition

“Did you win?” is the question often asked by parents and friends when young people are involved in competitive sport. Those on the sidelines become more intense and begin to question umpires and criticise opposition players and coaches. Players feel the pressure of the need to win, not just for themselves, but also for obsessive adults, and this can become a huge responsibility. As young players enter into the environment that is the product of competitive activities, they need to be protected from the often irrational behaviour that others display, particularly at the game. Football has developed codes of behaviour to guide players, spectators and officials. Coaches are advised to refer to these continually and lead by example to help young players develop a frame of reference for what is acceptable sporting behaviour.

As with the teaching of skills, introducing competitive elements should be developmental. This developmental process will be different for each player. However, all coaches would be aware of the difficulties young players have coping with the various situations that arise in their competitive activity. Some coaches prepare lists of these elements and sequentially deal with them throughout a season. This list might include:

- How to cope with winning and losing.
- Accepting selection policies.
- Accepting umpiring decisions.
- Supporting teammates when they make errors.
- Supporting team strategies.

Gradual introduction of competitive elements, consideration for each player’s reasons for playing, emphasising the process rather than the outcome in the initial stages and providing players with mechanisms for coping with external influences are ways in which the coach can help players adjust to competitive activities.

DEVELOPING RAPPORT

One of the perceived effective ways for a coach to develop a rapport with players is to train them to do as they are directed. However, today this approach is no longer so effective. It is often justified because the time and coaching skills required to implement sophisticated coach/player interaction strategies are not available in most junior sporting contexts.

A coach may have a squad of 25 players who, for each week during the competitive season, the coach only sees for three hours at training and two hours at the game.

For most of this time, the players are involved in activity and therefore are not available for individual counselling. In this situation, having players who will accept the coach and who will comply without question to every direction, often sacrificing their own development to facilitate the development of others, tends to nullify the need for sophisticated strategies for maintaining rapport between coach and player.

The ‘do as you’re told’ coaching strategy always seems to be tolerated when players are winning the majority of their games. However, the rapport between players and coaches can often become strained if players exposed to this coaching strategy lose the majority of their games.

Adolescents of today are being educated in school to question, interpret and process information as well as role learn and apply information. Subsequently, the adolescent player will bring these questioning skills to their sporting context. Even if the team is winning, these players will be considering the wisdom of some of the directions that emerge from the coach’s ‘do as you’re told’ coaching strategy.

As a result, the emerging interplay between these coaches and questioning players is often critical to the rapport developed between the player and the coach, and subsequently critical to the morale of the team. Despite the powerful proposition that life requires people to learn to cope with ‘doing as they are told’, this management approach is no longer a one-way dialogue. Today’s leaders are having to learn to cope with the needs of the informed masses who can quickly deplete the power of a leader who lacks the ability to manage the attitudes and opinions of his/her charges by using collaborative approaches to the implementation of training, practising and competition.



The following are approaches that coaches can adopt with adolescents to nurture the rapport between coach and player.

1. Physiological awareness

Develop an understanding of the physiological changes that typical adolescents will experience while they are under the coach's control. Dramatic changes occur in muscle fibre types, the presence of the hormone testosterone and the growth of lean body mass. Changes to muscle fibre type are almost completed in early adolescence, which means that a player's potential for endurance versus speed has been determined. Knowing whether a player is capable of speed and not endurance can affect a coach's expectations in game and training situations.

2. Psychosocial awareness

Develop an understanding of the psychosocial changes that will confront the adolescent during the time they are under the control of the coach. Adolescents become increasingly interested in establishing an identity as well as defining their role as a future independent adult. As they move through a myriad of opportunities that confront them, they begin to make choices based on experience and a confirmed belief in their abilities. When coaching these players, it is essential to recognise the importance of supporting the choices they make about their role, particularly in the sporting context.

It can be demoralising for an adolescent who has been encouraged to expect to be played in a particular role to then find themselves relocated accordingly to the policy of 'do as your told'. The scenario can manifest itself in situations such as a player not being selected as captain or being told to shift from defence into attack. Each of these situations has the potential to erode the rapport between player and coach. All can be productive events provided the coach has prepared the athlete to accept the alternative roles that may confront them and their team.

Being able to predict possible management strategies and player reaction to those strategies is one of the attributes of an effective coach. It is recommended that coaches present their coaching philosophy to the players on the day that they start their player/coach relationship. They should also be capable of providing players with the necessary rationale for making decisions about changing the player's previously defined role.

3. Awareness of self-responsibility

- Show respect for the player by acknowledging their every effort and by entrusting them with positions of responsibility. This begins by making every role in the team as important as the other roles.
- Adopt a non-threatening posture when the player's body language may suggest a lack of support for the coach. It is often worthwhile when players seem to be ignoring the coach, to make an effort to informally interact with the player about any topic which is known to be of interest to the players. The icebreaker approach may be enough to curb a potentially strained relationship from negatively affecting the quality of the players' performance and subsequently the team's performance.
- Be noticeably consistent in supporting the worth of each player's goals and roles. This may require making a mental note of the comments made by significant others who are close to the player and can provide useful inside information about the player's needs and wants.
- At all times, the coach should avoid making the player feel as if they are being constantly analysed. Adolescents should expect that they have intimate discussions with those people who necessarily affect their lives. No matter how intriguing a particular player's situation may be, managing their personal domain is not part of a coach's role unless directed to do so by the player.
- Understanding and respect from adolescents can only be developed through knowledge of their unique characteristics. However, it is also important to acknowledge that adolescents must understand the importance of being able to 'do as they are told' when part of a team.

DEVELOPING TRUST AND MUTUAL RESPECT

Coaches seem to be aware that an adolescent's commitment to a training program and/or performance strategy will be greatly enhanced if there is mutual respect and trust not only between the players and their coach but also between the players themselves. Developing both types of respect is largely the responsibility of the coach.

How do coaches develop mutual respect?

There are many opportunities for coaches to gain the respect of their players. There are also opportunities for coaches to lose

the respect of their players. On occasions, this loss of respect may be due to the input of a 'significant other' such as a parent, previous coach and/or friend. The player may not even be aware that there is a problem until a significant other chooses to criticise the coach. Therefore, the strategies coaches use to gain the respect of their players must consider the degree of influence that significant others will have on the player.

Establish codes of behaviour for effective team function

Codes should include parameters for attendance, dress, demeanour, teammate support and attitude. Each of these codes should be stated, clearly defined and any code violation linked to appropriate consequences. For example, players who do not comply with a stated code may be:

- Spoken to by the coach.
- Requested to carry out certain duties.
- Act as a reserve for a period of time.
- Asked for a special effort at training or during competition.
- Required to apologise to those whose participation has been disrupted by the offending player.

The severity of a consequence will greatly depend upon the offending player's control over the situation and the previous history of the player. Obviously, with adolescents, their late arrival at a training session or a competition can be caused by factors outside their control such as parent transport being delayed. A poor attitude may result from a lack of consideration given by teammates or other aspects of their lives being in disarray. Coaches must be sensitive to the various factors that may cause a player to stray from the expected standards.

Use a consistent approach when delivering the consequences

- Avoid allowing personalities to affect your decisions.
- Act immediately when an infringement of the code occurs.
- Consult with parents if a situation with a player is becoming unmanageable.
- Be calm and objective when applying a consequence to behaviour.
- Speak with the offender in private whenever possible.
- Create a policy for team, strategy and/or event selection.

This policy can be as simple as 'players will be selected in positions that the coach considers will give the team its best chance of winning, given the circumstances of the competition (i.e. playing conditions, opposition ability and availability of players)'. This policy should be clearly articulated to the players and, in the case of the younger adolescents, to the parents as well. Should there be a need to vary the policy, then it is advisable to conduct a team meeting to communicate the reasons for the change.

Establish the worth of every player's contribution

This is achieved through the consistent reinforcement of effort. Some guiding principles include:

- Ensure that the player who has the least ability and can contribute only in a minimal way feels worthwhile. For these players, the sport may not be a priority in their lives, however they give a maximum effort. A coach lacking in empathy may unintentionally burden these players with feelings of guilt. Public acknowledgement of their contribution is encouraged.
- Challenge the high-ability and totally involved players to measure their performance against a higher standard rather than against that of their less-involved peers. Make certain that all involved are aware of the contribution talented and committed players make to a team and how difficult it is for them to cope with the high expectations of others.
- Give equal consideration to players who fit between the two extremes. Take time to discuss their ambitions and roles. They are not the captains of the ship or the porters, they typically work in the engine room and often go unnoticed.

Open discussions about the relative worth of each participant can ensure that young adolescents develop empathy for their peers and the various situations that they themselves must face as players.

Identify acceptable comments for players to make in most team sports

Basketballers have developed a supportive slap of hands to signify support for their teammates. This usually occurs either after a mistake or good play. Comments such as 'What do you think you were doing?' or 'You idiot!' have no place within a team and should be replaced with 'Keep it up', 'We're with you' and 'Hang in there'.



Coaches should attempt to anticipate when a player may be troubled and then create an opportunity for a discussion to occur. It is not advisable to do this when emotions are high but rather before the anticipated moment of tension or at a time when those involved have calmed down. Having regular times for review often relieves the anxiety between individuals who may not be able to resolve their differences and/or disappointments.

Trusting the adolescent player

Effective coaches not only set goals for the performance of their players but also for their own performance as coaches. One of the critical performance indicators is the harmony between the players and between the coach and their players. Good coaches will have supportive and striving players even when they are not winning. Although, all things being equal, the coach who develops mutual respect with and between players will eventually be a winner.

Setting limits

Another important role for coaches of adolescents on their journey to adulthood is to set limits. Setting limits has a number of important consequences for young peoples' development:

- Protection and safety.
- Socialisation and consideration of others.
- Developing a sense of obligation.
- Maintaining order and peace in the team.
- Self control and discipline.
- Learning moral values.
- Establishing expectations.
- Assisting in defining their roles.
- Giving them a sense of security.
- Letting them know we care about them.

It is normal that these limits will be tested. Make allowances when negotiating them. Mistakes will be made – this is part of the learning process. Present outcomes as consequences rather than punishments.

PLAYER DISCIPLINE

Player discipline is an important factor underpinning learning, development and performance. ACT Academy of Sport Psychologist Michelle Paccagnella produced the following framework for enhancing player discipline.

Enhancing player discipline

A disciplined player is one who is in control of their behaviour and conduct, adheres to training protocols and consistently trains and performs to a required standard. While good discipline is not a prerequisite for achievement, it is certainly an ingredient that can make the life of both the player and coach a lot smoother. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the player, however a good coach can greatly assist them to instigate and maintain good discipline.

How to identify the disciplined player

Discipline can apply to both commitment to off-field issues (for example, organisation, healthy diet, etc.) and during the course of training or competition to adhere to team plays or control emotions. Good player discipline incorporates a high level of commitment, responsibility, motivation to train and perform, meeting all requirements (such as administration), organisation and good focus. At the more elite levels, this entails a certain level of professionalism, including ownership of goals, self-control and maintaining good life balance.

Benefits of player discipline

There are some obvious benefits of player discipline.

These include:

- Setting the scene for a good work ethic.
- Providing structure.
- Not relying on talent alone.
- Helping to put players in a position to achieve their goals.
- Facilitating leadership when other players rely on you.
- Assisting in adhering to team plays (players put team goals before their own).
- Increasing coachability of the players.

Educating your players

The first step in enhancing player discipline is education. Do your players know what discipline is, or how it can enhance their performance and enjoyment of football? Does your players' understanding of discipline match your own? These questions can form the basis of an education session to help you and your players embrace and understand the concept of discipline. Education sessions can take the form of group brainstorming sessions, formal workshops, informal discussions or individual player meetings.

Strategies for enhancing player discipline

Once players have a good understanding of discipline, there are many things a coach can do to further support and enhance player discipline. The following approaches will help to establish an environment where discipline problems are largely avoided and where the few discipline problems that may occur are managed well.

- Provide concrete training rules, particularly with young players. Establish the rules and the consequences of breaking them. Allow your players to help with the establishment of rules and consequences so they have ownership of them.
- Create the kind of culture you want.
- Have set routines at training and competition.
- Provide a structured, consistent training environment.
- Lead by example.
- Encourage the behaviour you want and reward it.
- Teach your players to believe in themselves.
- Learn what enhances your players' motivation. Help them discover this for themselves.
- Be supportive and flexible.
- Make training fun/enjoyable.
- Maintain a process orientation where you focus on performance, not outcomes.
- Be aware of other influences on the player (for example, other sports, school demands and talent programs).
- Do not give up on undisciplined players. Find a way to get through to them. Think creatively.
- Allow for flair/creativity/spontaneity (both yours and your players).
- Encourage your players to set and review their goals.
- Be a role model/mentor or provide them with role models. Provide examples of other player discipline (how they train, live etc).
- Maintain a good coach-player relationship and communication.
- Enhance players' ownership of their training/program.
- Know when to be autocratic and when to be democratic.
- Encourage player honesty – how are they really feeling/coping?
- Encourage your players to keep log books or training diaries.
- In dealing with unsatisfactory behaviour, focus on the behaviour not on the individual as a person. Do not insult or embarrass a player.
- Intervene at the earliest signs of misbehaviour so players can easily redeem themselves before things get out of hand and are less easy to resolve.
- Early intervention strategies include issuing clear reminders of expectations, introducing a 'diverting' activity, inquiring if there is something wrong, discreetly informing the offender that his/her behaviour is getting out of order, and other 'low key' reactions signalling that the behaviour has been noticed and that it should stop.
- Discipline firmly, fairly and consistently.



Mental discipline

Discipline can be applied to players' thoughts and emotions, as well as their on and off-field behaviour. Teach your players to review their goals, discover their optimum level of arousal, control their self-talk, replace negative thoughts with positive ones and deal with their emotions.

Unfortunately, many players don't learn how to be disciplined until they experience real failure, disappointment, adversity or injury, forcing them to improve their discipline. However, through education and a commitment to enhancing player discipline, you may be able to help your players learn this valuable lesson sooner rather than later.

RECOMMENDED COACHING BEHAVIOURS WHEN WORKING WITH YOUTH PLAYERS

- Establish and consistently apply participation rules and regulations for players.
- Work with each player to determine their personal goals.
- Be enthusiastic and show enjoyment for the task of coaching.
- Promote the value of each player and the role that they have in the team.
- Encourage players to evaluate their own performance and discuss their evaluation openly.
- Show concern for the physical and mental wellbeing of each player.
- Learn to identify player anxiety and help the player cope.
- Be an appropriate role model for players to follow.
- Always publicly support players and the system, including officials and administrators.
- Emphasise effort and enjoyment as well as winning. Do not emphasise winning to the exclusion of effort and enjoyment.
- Ensure that all players have an equal opportunity to participate.
- Maintain some distance with players while encouraging a calm, congenial atmosphere.
- Learn to identify and understand the physical changes that can occur during early adolescence. Help players to adjust their sporting involvement to allow for these changes.
- Use reward systems to maintain discipline and only occasionally use predetermined and high-impact disciplinary strategies.
- Promote and insist on fair play and good sportsmanship.
- Use each player at various times to take responsibility not only for the conduct of training and competition but also the conduct of the club.
- Assign individuals to coaching and management roles with younger teams and/or players.
- Allow players to take risks and explore the options in their sport.
- Assess players according to their commitment and ability, not their personality.
- Have a thorough knowledge of the rules, techniques and tactics of football.
- Focus on all aspects of individual growth – developing physical and social skills and promoting attitudes such as fair play, sportsmanship, consideration for others, work ethic, striving for success, overcoming adversity and having fun.

If included in a coach's coaching repertoire, these approaches will enable them to help adolescent players satisfy their social and psychological needs through football more effectively. In particular, coaches should strive to:

- Nurture the self-esteem of young adolescents.
- Raise their sense of responsibility.
- Confirm the worth of consistent and enduring relationships.
- Promote sportsmanship, fair play and an honest effort.
- Create a convivial and supportive environment.



COMMUNICATION FOR YOUTH COACHES



Chapter 4

Communication for Youth Coaches

INTRODUCTION

Good communication is an essential component of good coaching. Communication is a process that involves far more than the spoken word. It is the information link between coach and player which pulls together all aspects of coaching from sport science to team management. In the coaching environment, effective communication involves skill in sending messages and skill in interpreting messages.

A coach may possess all the technical knowledge and skills of Australian Football, but without the ability to communicate this information, it is of little use. Communication skills, like all other skills in coaching, need to be practised to improve your coaching effectiveness.

Consider the following questions:

- How do your players know if what they are doing is actually what you want?
- How do you correct a player's faults or weaknesses in a positive manner?
- How do your players and your team improve by having you as a coach?

Communication and feedback in coaching terms refers to information which is transferred from you as coach to your players, which is primarily aimed at improving both the individual's and team's performance.

Some other benefits of good communication:

- Improves morale.
- Provides a sense of involvement (belonging).
- Promotes commitment and understanding.
- Is more efficient (saves time and effort for coach and player).
- Promotes better teamwork.

Coaches should remember that:

- Coaching is a two-way process.
- Clear and consistent messages help to avoid miscommunication.
- Open questions will glean more information from your players.
- 'Good' feedback will complement your coaching.
- 'Active listening' shows interest in your players and gains valuable information.
- Non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

All players respond differently to various forms of communication. Some will find visual cues most effective, others respond to verbal cues and others to touch. Using a number of forms of communication will not only maintain a playing group's interest, but increases the chance of finding a communication 'trigger' that works for each player. Communication is also more effective when a coach encourages open communication and welcomes input from the group of players. This involves establishing an environment of mutual trust and respect between player and coach.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication refers to all information which is not presented verbally by the coach but has powerful messages that can bring about both positive and negative behaviours in players. Non-verbal communication can be very effective if used in the correct manner, but destructive if used inappropriately.



A large percentage (studies suggest over 80 per cent) of the meaning we get from communication comes from the non-verbal cues that go with it. If your non-verbal cues match or complement your spoken word then your communication can be more effective. If, however, your non-verbal message conflicts with what you say, your message will be confusing. For example, if coaches tell their players they have done a great job and then let their shoulders slump and sigh heavily, the players are more likely to get the message that the coach is not really happy with them. Non-verbal information from coach to player can incorporate gestures, clapping, facial expressions, shaking the head, hands on hips, deep breaths etc.

There are four main areas of non-verbal communication:

1. Visual

This includes all aspects of body language, such as posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact.

2. Touch

Touch can be a very effective way of imparting meaning. For example, a pat on the back or hand on the shoulder, or using manual manipulation (physically guiding a player through a movement) as a teaching skill. Significant caution must be taken with physical contact. Different players will feel comfortable with different amounts of physical contact and closeness and this should be respected. In addition, there are legal implications with sexual harassment. A good rule of thumb is only to use physical contact if it is essential and then ask the player if they are comfortable with you using it. Coaches should familiarise themselves with the *Guidelines for Coaches* booklet in the Harassment-free Sport series published by the Australian Sports Commission (activeaustralia.org/hfs).

3. Voice expression

A phrase often said is 'it's not what you say, but how you say it'. The tone of voice, rate of speech and volume of voice can dramatically change what is being said. For example, depending on how you say the word 'no', it can express fear, doubt, amazement, sarcasm or anger. How you say something can also gain attention, maintain interest and emphasise points.

4. Role model

This area covers the other things a coach can do to communicate to their players, i.e. arriving to training on time and being dressed for action. Making the effort to do these things communicates to the players that you are interested in what they are doing. Most of the 'meaning' we give to words comes not from the words themselves, but from the non-verbal factors, such as facial expressions, tone, body language etc. Non-verbal communication can complement a verbal message and may even substitute for it – a coach may only need a slight nod or raised eyebrow to tell the player all they need to know.

Skilled coaches will use non-verbal communication to improve their coaching effectiveness. Using the SOLVER checklist is an easy way to remember how to use non-verbal communication in a positive manner.

- S** Squarely face the player. Face the player and move to their height level.
- O** Open posture. Crossed arms or legs puts up a barrier and suggests an unwillingness to listen.
- L** Lean slightly forward. Again this demonstrates interest and shows you are listening.
- V** Verbal comments are relevant. Comments should also support what the player is saying.
- E** Eye contact. Contact should be made and maintained, without overdoing it.
- R** Relax. Be comfortable and show it.

COMMUNICATION THROUGH DEMONSTRATION

Communicating to players by demonstrating or having someone else demonstrate while the coach instructs can be one of the most engaging ways to impart knowledge to a player of the team. An example based on correcting a player's kicking style is outlined below:

Problem: Player kicking the ball too high in the air.

What the coach can do: Firstly, the coach would identify with the player that the problem lies in the position of the foot at impact, where the toe is pointing to the sky rather than the intended direction of the ball. In the next step, the coach could demonstrate an example of the player's current kicking style illustrating the problem, and then demonstrate the desired kicking style, with corrected problem. Ideally, the player will then, with the aid of a teammate and coach, work on practising and improving this skill.

ACTIVE LISTENING

An important skill for coaches to master is 'active listening'. This is when you concentrate completely on what the player is saying, both in their actions and words.

This can be one of the hardest skills for a coach to do as they feel it is their job to direct and will often butt in or attempt to solve the problem without all of the necessary information.

There are large advantages to a coach listening actively to his/her players:

- It shows interest and fosters a positive environment.
- It reduces the chance of being misunderstood (more efficient).
- It encourages further communication.
- The player is more likely to listen to the coach if the coach listens to them.
- The coach can learn from the player.

Four simple steps to improve active listening

Stop

Stop what you are doing and pay attention to what the player is telling you. This may be difficult in a coaching situation with other things going on, but paying attention, even briefly, lets the player know that he/she is important. Avoid interrupting.

Look

Make eye contact with the player by being at the same level and facing the player. Show interest in your expression and look for non-verbal cues the player might be giving out.

Listen

Focus your attention on what the player is saying by listening to their words and the emotion in what is being said. Use non-verbal cues such as nodding, smiling or frowning, appropriate to the context of the message. Support this with encouraging words to show you are focused on what the player is saying.

Respond

Re-state what the player has told you, in your own words. This shows you have been listening, checks that you did understand and can summarise what was talked about. Remain neutral and supportive. Use open questions to prompt the player for more information if needed.



COACHES: PLEASE LISTEN!

When players ask you to listen to them and you start to give them advice, you have not done what they asked.

When players ask you to listen to them and you begin to tell them why they shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on their feelings.

When players ask you to listen to them and you feel you have to do something to solve their problem, you have failed them, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All players ask is that you listen.

Don't talk or do – just hear them.

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

The ability to provide effective feedback is an important tool for coaches to have. 'Good' feedback can result in dramatic improvements in comprehension, awareness and skill, however, 'bad' feedback can alienate, discourage and bring about a decrease in player skill level. Providing constructive or negative feedback is generally another component of coaching, but it must be constructive. Effective feedback provides information that helps learning and development of skills and attitudes. It can positively affect maturation, learning and self image and can be the key to motivation. Players should be allowed to practise for a period of time, which arises with the complexity of a skill before offering them feedback (observe for a longer period). Correct one error at a time, allowing more practise time before attempting to correct other errors. What the coach says as part of the error correction must give the player the information with which to improve the individual's performance.

Positive reinforcement will hasten skill development – shouting and criticising will achieve very little. While players are practising, consistent errors may appear. Re-demonstrate the skill or rephrase instructions for those needing extra assistance. Players who are unable to correctly perform the skill following the second presentation should receive specific feedback immediately following each practice. It is equally important to provide feedback for the competent performer as well as for those making errors. Highlight what the player is doing right, and then provide feedback relating to errors.

Feedback is effectively given by using verbal reports, physical cues, checklists, video replays and/or peer comments. The style of feedback depends on the availability of resources, type of skill and the personality of the player. The ability of players to critically analyse and evaluate their own performance is often underestimated. An immediate critique of a player's initial attempts at a new skill may be an insult to the athlete's intelligence and a waste of time.

To be effective, feedback should be:

Specific – feedback should only relate to those components of a task that the player has been asked to attend to before performance.

Constructive – if feedback is used to identify an error, it should provide reasons for the error and possible solutions.

Immediate – for a brief time after a performance, a player retains in their memory information about the performance. Therefore, the sooner feedback is presented, the more meaningful it will be to the player.

Clear – when players perform rapid, complex movements, it is difficult to relate to them the nature of specific errors in performance. Therefore, to clarify feedback, it is sometimes necessary to use slow-motion video replay. Whatever the situation, players must understand exactly what is required.

Positive – most feedback should serve to improve the quality of performance. Feedback should be positive and encouraging as this will generally hasten skill development.

Simple – feedback should be brief and to the point to improve skill development and to avoid confusion between player and coach.

GAME-DAY COACHING

Communication and feedback on game-day

It's always difficult for coaches to place a desired timeframe on the amount of information that should be communicated to players, not only before the game but in general. It is, however, supported and acknowledged by many coaches that the KISS principle be adopted (Keep It Simple Sport). Communication should be very specific, concise and clearly communicated to both the team and individuals within the team.

Players are naturally nervous before playing and their ability to absorb great amounts of information is generally low. A team meeting prior to the players preparing physically should reinforce key themes/processes and tactics that may relate to weather/ground conditions etc.

It is important that all communication and feedback provided to players during the game is specific and in the best interests of both the team and individual performance. The role of the runner is also crucial in communicating information quickly and efficiently to the players.

Golden rules for coaches on match-day

- Ensure players are aware of their positions on the field (a whiteboard is useful for this).
- Provide appropriate warm-up exercises with footballs (if possible do this on the ground).
- Encourage players to encourage each other.
- Use interchange players freely.
- Encourage all players to acknowledge their individual efforts.
- Focus on teaching the game, not on winning the game.
- Addresses to players before, during and after the game should be used as teaching and learning opportunities (coaches should be calm and positive and avoid any emotional gosselling, derogatory or sarcastic remarks).

Tips for match-day addresses

- Addresses to players are a means to teach them about the game: both its skills and values.
- Prepare the pre-match talk beforehand and consider what to say to individuals and groups (e.g. forward line players) and what to say to the whole group.
- Talk to players individually and in small groups about their responsibilities as they are getting ready.
- Stress that the game is an opportunity to practise skills.
- Encourage players to do their best.
- Use words and expressions they have heard before to enhance understanding.
- Be positive and encouraging.
- Use statistics as positive reinforcement during breaks.
- Make sure all players are attentive and focused when being spoken to.
- Reinforce plans and policies that have been practised.
- Comments during game breaks could refer to the playing conditions, skill strengths and areas for improvement, position play, good efforts from groups or individuals and plans for the next stage of the game.
- Post-game comments should review what was done well, what needs improvement, what can be learned from the opposition's play, what individuals did well, what was learned, the extent of player satisfaction, what needs to be worked on and what the team should aim to do better next time.

SUMMARY

Depending on which form of communication and feedback you adopt as coach, it's critical that communication is clear, concise and, wherever possible, reinforcing. Obviously, players prefer positive communication rather than negative communication, however, as we all mature and develop, there is a place for both types. Most coaches in today's football acknowledge that positive individual communication is well received by all players, both publicly in front of peers and in a one-on-one situation. Negative communication, however, is probably best received in a one-on-one situation and not in public where humiliation or embarrassment can be very disruptive to the player and the team as a whole.

5

TEACHING AND IMPROVING SKILLS



Chapter 5

Teaching and Improving Skills

INTRODUCTION

Fundamental skills form the basis for the development of all sporting skills. Many complex skills are made up of a coordinated sequence of fundamental skills (techniques) and the importance of these should not be underestimated.

It is exciting to witness a champion displaying faultless techniques while performing in extremely competitive situations.

Every player and coach strives to achieve ultimate game skill performance. However, the process of developing skills is long and detailed. It begins with a command of the basic, simple and complex skills and progresses through a mastery of mildly competitive situations to competence in full-scale competition.

To achieve high-quality performance, players are encouraged to attend rigorously to each stage of skill development. Neglect at any stage of learning may result in the emergence of an exploitable weakness.

STAGES OF LEARNING

From motor coordination to major game skills

There are three identifiable stages of learning. Players will move through these stages at varying rates, and when new skills are introduced may regress from a later stage to an earlier stage. The coach's responsibility is to carefully assess each player's current stage and develop appropriate practices so that each player is motivated and challenged.

Early stage

Players in the early stage of learning a skill tend to make a large number of errors and may look and feel clumsy and uncoordinated. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Parts of the skill performance are missing, particularly the preparation and follow-through components.
- Some parts of the skill are exaggerated, while in other parts the use of the body is highly restricted.
- Rhythm, coordination and control are poor.
- Minimal outcomes result from maximum effort.
- Poor decisions are made regarding response options.

Intermediate stage

Players in the intermediate stage of learning a skill have a basic command of skills and are able to perform the skills at a faster pace and, therefore, place them in a competitive situation. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Movements have better control, coordination and rhythm.
- Some parts of the skill continue to be either restricted or exaggerated.
- While the overall skill produces reasonable results, some components of the skill are performed incorrectly.
- Many of the movement patterns, such as an individual's unique backswing in golf, remain throughout life because of the lack of opportunities to practise, poor motivation and/or the lack of qualified instruction.

Final stage

In this stage, players are able to perform skills subconsciously and under pressure. The player is ready to advance to more complex skills. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Mechanically efficient and coordinated movements.
- Automated performance of the skill, which allows the player to process other information while performing the skill – the types of information includes strategies to counter opposition movements, responding to changes in the environment and planning for the next game play.
- Confident and purposeful movements.
- All components of the skill are correctly performed, well sequenced and optimally timed.
- Minimal variation in the outcome of the skill performance.



During all stages of skill development, coaches should:

- Provide knowledge of results and performance.
- Encourage players to feel the effect of their movement choices.
- Develop the player's ability to imagine correct skill movements.

The coach's responsibility is to carefully assess each player's stage and to develop appropriate practices so they are motivated and challenged.

TEACHING AND REMEDIATION OF SKILLS

Technique v skill – technique involves performing the skill, skill is doing it in a game under pressure with limited time and space.

Adolescents tend to display problems when trying to master the skills of Australian Football. Group or individual instruction can target common problems and help overcome skill barriers.

TEACHING FOOTBALL SKILLS

A great deal of training and coaching is based on the misguided notion that practice makes perfect. This is not necessarily true. Practice makes permanent and this applies equally to both good and bad practice. In preparing a training program, an effective coach should be able to:

- Know how to introduce a skill.
- Know the key points to emphasise.
- Recognise skill errors.
- Know how to rectify skill faults.

1. How to introduce a skill

To become a better and more efficient coach, some of your training sessions must be devoted to skill learning. A simple formula for a coach to follow when teaching a new skill is the SPIR method, which will be outlined later in this chapter. After some practice, the coach will find this procedure becomes second nature. It is efficient and follows the major principles of learning.

2. Know the key points to emphasise

To create an effective learning situation, the coach must take into account the following points:

- Minimise the number of teaching points. Don't confuse the player with a long list of instructions – keep it simple! Likewise, when teaching an advanced skill, e.g. kicking for goal on the run, break the skill down into simple manageable stages.
- Ensure the skill is being performed correctly as practice makes permanent. During a training session, a coach should spend time observing and analysing various aspects of the session. Not only should the coach observe the general performance of the team, he must also analyse the specific performance of individual players within the group. The coach must also possess a good understanding of the skills of the game.
- Finally, the ability to organise and observe counts for very little if the coach lacks the ability to communicate. In teaching skills, a coach can communicate:
 - By showing or demonstrating.
 - By speaking.

3. Recognising skill errors

The most important part of skill teaching is to determine whether correction is necessary. The preferred procedure in identifying skill error is as follows:

- Watch the player carefully to identify what the problem is.
- Break down the basic technique of what is actually wrong – e.g. eyes, hands, feet, follow through.

- c) Work out what is required to overcome the problem.
- d) Take the player aside – be positive and gain his confidence.
- e) Demonstrate the correct technique.
- f) Have the player practise, practise, practise. Repetition is the key to learning.

4. Rectifying skill faults

There are broad techniques which coaches should use to remedy problems in the performance of a skill:

- a) Rebuild the skill if the performance in no way resembles the desired model.
- b) Renovate the skill when the performance only partially deviates from the desired model.

FIXING ERRORS

Skill errors do occur. Many footballers are taught skills incorrectly and subsequently perform them poorly under match conditions. Individualised coaching can rectify many of these problems. Some common skill errors and suggested remedies follow. In all instances, it is preferable to break the skill down into its simplest form to ensure the technique can be performed at the basic level.

Kicking – ball guidance

Problem: Using two hands to slam the ball on to the kicking foot.

Remedy: Using the one-handed technique – the ball is held in the palm and fingers of one hand underneath its bottom end. Other hand is placed behind back.

Problem: Using both hands to guide the ball on to the kicking foot.

Remedy:

1. Walk 2-3 steps, drop ball on to a mark on the ground.
2. Repeat, bringing kicking foot through.
3. Repeat with one finger of opposite hand on the side of the ball.
4. With one hand behind the back, use the one hand drop.
5. Hold the ball with two hands, walk through the kick and guide the ball down with one hand.

Kicking – goalkicking

Problem: Inconsistency

Remedy: Focus on a target behind the goals.

Begin a short distance from the goals (about five metres and increase as the kick improves).

At all times, player's optimum power should be used (optimum power is the power at which the player kicks comfortably).

Marking – Overhead marking

Problem: Incorrect positioning of fingers and thumbs.

Remedy:

1. Mime mark (stress fingers spread and correct position of thumbs behind the ball – “W” formation).
2. Player grabs ball from coach's hand held above player's head.
3. Throw ball from hand to hand.
4. Throw in air and catch; bounce off a wall.
5. Increase frequency of catches and introduce opposition.
6. Run, jump and mark. Adjust your hands as the ball approaches.

Handball

Problem: Repetition – repeated handball can cause pain to the striking hand.

Remedy: Both hands can be used to minimise the pain of hitting the ball. Use the platform hand to help propel the ball. Develop movement with the platform hand before the ball is hit.

Problem: Throwing the ball in the air or dropping platform hand before hitting the ball.

Remedy: Stabilise platform hand on table, fence or partner's back.

'Fist into hand'. Player grabs punching fist with platform hand after punching the ball.



General remediation suggestions

Coaches should refer to the main coaching points contained within the Skills Guide (Chapter 14) when setting out to teach the particular skills of the game.

It is important to use the SPIR method and to introduce only two or three coaching points at a time. For instance, in teaching handball, the first coaching point might be:

- Make a proper fist with the striking hand.
- Hold the ball with the other hand forming a platform under the ball.
- Strike the ball close to its point.

Having mastered that, add a new coaching point:

- Catch the fist in the hand and strike the ball.

Master that, then add:

- Step forward on to the front foot (same side as the hand holding the ball).

And continue over a period of weeks to “build” the skill. It is a trap to try to teach it all at once. Be patient and allow players to master each point along the way.

THE SPIR METHOD FOR SKILLS TEACHING

As previously identified, a particularly successful teaching method for assisting players to learn new skills is the SPIR method.

S for Show (demonstrate)

- Name the skill.
- Show the whole skill first.
- Show again while making the instructional points.
- Make no more than three coaching/instructional points.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Demonstrate once more, asking the players to watch for the coaching points.

P for Practise

- Practise immediately.
- The learners copy what has been shown.
- Practise the whole skill first.
- Revise parts of the skill if problems.

I for Instruct (intervene to correct errors)

- Observe each group for 15-30 seconds.
- Keep repeating the key points about the skill.
- Provide further instruction.

R for Reward

- Praise good efforts.
- Show pleasure.
- Make every player feel his/her efforts are valued.

S	Show	Name the Skill Demonstrate three times Provide three coaching points (max)
P	Practise	Have players practise immediately via an appropriate activity
I	Instruct	Give feedback on their performance based on what they have been taught
R	Reward	Encourage and reward effort and achievement

USING SPIR EFFECTIVELY

During the Show (demonstration)

- Select appropriate learning information.
- Each skill demonstration requires a formation which allows each player to obtain a clear view of the key aspects of the skill.
- Use simple, precise instructions.
- A key word or cue should be used to emphasise the important parts of the skill.

During the Practice

- Let players freely experiment without much feedback at first.
- Get players practising as soon as possible so they don't lose their mental picture or the sense of how the skill is performed.

When Instructing

- Provide feedback as this lets players know how they are going.
- Allow them to practise for a time before offering any feedback.
- Offer specific, constructive, clear and positive feedback.

When providing Reward

- Encourage freely, particularly when an individual's progress seems slow.
- Set standards according to the capability of each player.
- Understand and allow for the fact that each player will improve at a different rate.
- Only compare players with themselves – what they could do and now what they are doing.
- Avoid comparing players with each other.

GAME SENSE AND DECISION-MAKING TRAINING

Game sense is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of the training session. By focusing on the game (not necessarily the full game), players are encouraged to:

- Become more tactically aware and be able to make better decisions during the game in pressure situations.
- Start thinking strategically about game concepts.
- Develop football skills such as kicking and handballing under pressure within a realistic and enjoyable context, rather than practising them in isolation.
- Develop a greater understanding of the game being played.

Game sense activities also aim to:

- Increase individual and team motivation to training – players love to play games!
- Physiologically prepare the body where conditioning is specific to that of a game.

This approach to coaching is 'game centred' rather than 'technique centred'. While most traditional coaching sessions have focused on the practice of techniques, the game sense session focuses on the game.

In the past, technique has often been over-emphasised within training sessions. While technique is an important part of the overall skill, it has often been taught in isolation, without requiring players to think and apply the techniques to the situations required in the game. By using game sense, players are challenged to think about what they are actually doing, and why. Players are taught to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place in the pressure situations of a game.

When designed well, mini-games appeal to the players' (especially adolescents) ability to problem solve and process information and subsequently raise their levels of attention and desire to do well.

Why use game sense?

The fact that games are intrinsically motivating is probably the best reason why coaches should adopt game sense, but there are a number of other reasons for using this approach, including:

- Encouraging a holistic approach to the teaching of games – players are taught to solve problems that arise in a game through tactical awareness and understanding; skills are developed in a more meaningful environment.
- Promotes enjoyment for participation – a fun environment increases motivation levels and encourages participation.
- Assists the beginner, who often has limited technical knowledge of a sport. For instance, for these coaches it is more appropriate to set challenges for players through games rather than conduct technique-based sessions that are based on unsound techniques due to a lack of technical knowledge. It helps avoid developing players with inflexible techniques, that is players who are unable to cope with change in the playing environment.



- Aids efficient group management – game sense is particularly useful as group management is often easier if the players are having fun and less time is being spent on drills; teaching space, equipment and time can be used more efficiently. It also lets the coach cater for all ability levels by encouraging players to concentrate on the game aspects, rather than on the textbook execution of the technique which some may never master.
- Coach talk and intervention is kept to a minimum – the coach questions players to challenge them to find solutions, rather than providing all the answers; cooperation between the coach and the players is increased due to the player involvement.

The coach's role in game sense

The role the coach takes in game sense is somewhat different. The coach adopts a role as a facilitator and co-ordinator rather than a director and creates situations where players have to find solutions for themselves. The coach guides rather than directs players in their understanding and playing of the game. The coach designs activities and games that progressively challenge players to develop an understanding of the strategies, skills and rules required to succeed in games. The coach should construct games with specific objectives relative to the team and individuals, such as first-option handball. If “first-option handball” was the theme of the training session or week then a game would be devised with this in mind, such as a game of six-on-six handball football played over a field of 30m x 20m.

This change in role should not be interpreted as a lesser role for the coach. In fact, it requires greater planning of activities and organisation on the part of the coach. Although many coaches take on coaching as a short-term proposition, perhaps for just one season, game sense is about the long-term development of players. Providing an environment where players can develop the strategic side of their game, as well as becoming an independent thinker, is a long-term goal. Coaches at all levels can contribute to this side of a player's development.

Traditional v game sense training session

For many years, coaches have adopted a traditional approach to training, which would look something like this:

- 2-3 laps warm-up.
- Stretches.
- Technique drills such as lane handball and kicking.
- Skill drills.
- Game drills such as full-ground game plan specific.
- Cool down, including stretches.

A game sense approach to a training session may look something like:

- Warm-up game.
- Questions, challenges and discussion about game (particular theme).
- Return to game.
- Questions/challenges.
- Extension of the game.
- Further extension of the game, incorporating other team plans and themes.

Modifying games for a purpose

With a game sense approach to coaching and teaching skills, the coach as facilitator plays a very important role in modifying games to emphasise or exaggerate a particular aspect or theme, for example:

- Number of players.
- Number of possessions.
- Length of time a player can hold the ball once tagged (1 sec, 2 secs etc).
- Size of playing area.
- Scoring areas.
- Equipment used (such as a soccer ball if playing a game of International Rules).
- Structure of scoring system.

When developing games for a particular purpose, as a coach you must have answers to the following questions before explaining the drill to your team. Some questions to think about when developing your game sense drills can include:

- What particular themes or tactics do I want to focus on in the game?
- What will be the main challenges to the players?
- What are the rules and who will umpire?
- What will the dimensions of the playing area be?
- How can I extend or modify the game to continually challenge the players?
- How can I construct bias if necessary to make individuals work harder than others?
- How can I include all players in the game?
- Will I carefully pre-select teams or will I run with several captains choosing teammates?

When discussing game sense, one very important aspect is that of questioning players on specific outcomes or focusing on specific aspects, which have been evident or not evident during the game.

It is important not to spend too long questioning the team as part of the success of a game sense approach is in fact the playing. Questions will generally relate to aspects of the game and are used to enable players to reflect and then visualise in a match-day situation.

The types of questions a coach might use include:

“What happens when you handball short?”

“How can you create more time for the receiver to decide and dispose?”

“How can you identify if a team mate is clear?”

Player empowerment ... players as game-designers

So far, information relating to game sense has been coaching-team facilitated and led. Once players are familiar with the concept of game sense and its relationship with aspects of the game, players can then be empowered to work in small groups or individually and presented a task of developing a game.

This can be an exciting, enjoyable and valuable process in reinforcing key concepts, tactics and themes and assists in the development of leadership within the group.

In this approach, the coach would explain the concept and construct some clear guidelines which players would use to develop a game. Some guidelines might include:

- Your game must run for about 15-20 minutes.
- It must focus on a particular aspect of the team plan (themes or guidelines).
- How will you explain the game?
- Will there be a scoring system?
- Who will umpire the game?
- How will teams be selected?
- What are some examples of player behaviour you might see, and how will you explain this to the group with strategies to improve this area?
- What equipment is required? Who will organise this?
- What will the playing dimensions be? Can this be extended?

Coaches, step back

It is necessary to stress that the young player's interest in processing information and problem solving at the same time will only be possible if the coach steps back from the practice and allows players the time to confront the challenges on their own and/or with teammates. Well-designed practices will ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved according to program guidelines. During practice, coaches should concentrate on providing accurate feedback and prompting. If it is essential to accelerate the learning process beyond what is occurring during a particular mini-game, the coach should attempt to interact by asking questions rather than offering a series of commands. By using the above coaching approach, the coach can provide the player with a balance of interactions which contains a healthy mix of 'do as you are told' and self-discovery practices.



SAMPLE GAMES

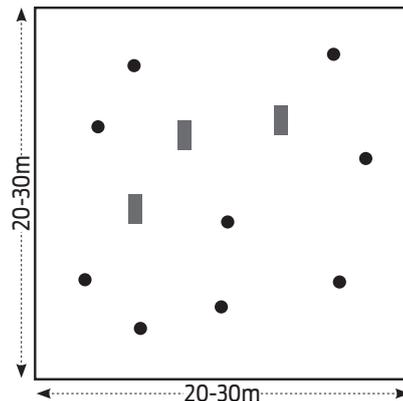
Following are two examples of ways to organise games which can be used to develop game sense.

Keepings Off

Themes: Clear communication, protect ball carrier at all times, follow your skill disposal.

Equipment: Football, different coloured tops for “chasers”

Key: ■ Chasers (3 players)
● Possessors (9 players)



Instructions/Rules:

1. Ball can be handballed only. Once an unforced disposal occurs, “chasers” team get possession of the ball from the point at which ball was released.
2. Compulsory rules are:
 - Must nominate who the player is handballing to (communication).
 - Must make a concerted effort to protect the receiver (teammate) by blocking and then tagging your receiving teammate after delivering ball (protecting ball carrier and following possession as in a game situation).
3. The aim of the game of “keepings off” is for the team in possession to maintain possession using quick hands and following team guidelines, each time “chasers” touch the ball or the ball hits the ground as an ineffective disposal then a point is awarded to “chasers”. Game lasts 1-2 minutes before three more chasers rotate.
4. Game can be played by any number but field must be adjusted particularly if introducing short kicking. Other extension ideas include playing seven players in possession and five chasers, and ultimately even numbers.

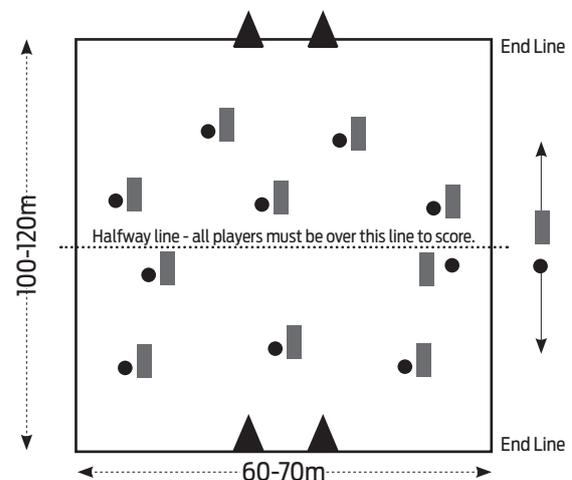
Corridor football

Themes: High skill disposal in pressure situations, hard attacking running and accountability

Equipment: Cones as boundaries, football, two different sets of jumpers/T-shirts. (Full length of ground can be used. Cones or portable goals can be used for a shorter playing area.)

Basic rules

1. Seven to eight players per team.
2. Each half seven to eight minutes with a one-minute interval
3. Normal AFL rules with the following modifications
 - a) Player last touching the ball prior to it crossing the boundary loses possession to the opposition who return it to play from behind the line with a kick or handball.
 - b) Goals may only be scored if all members of the attacking team are on the forward side of the centre line when the ball passes through the posts. Scoring as for normal AFL rules.



There are many other games in use, including touchball (tackling and non-tackling, indoor and outdoor), touch rugby (handball), forwards and backs, front and square grid ball, centre square clearance game, end ball, etc. Coaches are encouraged to develop various aspects of game skills.

PLANNING



Chapter 6

Planning

INTRODUCTION

There are many factors that are important for effective coaching. However, if there is any one area that is perhaps more important than the others, it is the area of planning.

THE YEARLY/SEASON PLAN

A yearly plan is an essential component of effective coaching for players intending to optimise their development. Players involved in the lower levels of sport often achieve some success without a yearly plan, but few will reach their full potential and go on to become high-level players unless they have a structured training and competition plan. School, club, zone, state and national programs should all be linked together, and through optimal calendar planning should ensure a progressive structure and sequence of training and competition.

The yearly plan helps players maintain a balanced lifestyle, prompts the coach to organise facilities, equipment and transport well in advance, enables parents and schools to cater for the needs of the participant (and allows the players to organise training and competition around school requirements) and provides an objective measure which coaches can use to assess the effectiveness of their program.

Yearly plans vary between sports, players and cultures. Many factors affect the composition of such plans, including:

- Family and school commitments.
- Characteristics of competitions.
- Level of maturity and ability.
- Resources.
- Climate.
- Attitudes.
- Demands of the sport.
- Coaching events.
- Time of day.
- Access to athletes

PHASES OF A YEARLY PLAN

In order to be successful, the coach must be well prepared and plan ahead. The importance of planning cannot be underestimated. A major reason for having a yearly plan is to schedule the various phases throughout the year in order to bring about optimal performance so that the playing group is at the peak of its training at the time of competition. A team's training schedule should be organised and planned to also ensure individual and group goals are achieved. The planning process therefore should be an organised, methodical and scientific procedure which assists the players and coach achieve predetermined standards.

A yearly training program should be simple and flexible. All coaches should have a yearly plan dividing the training year into small phases. Each of these phases will have specific training objectives. This enables the coach to work within manageable segments.

A yearly plan can be divided into three phases:

- Off-season or transition phase.
- Pre-season or preparatory phase.
- In-season or competition phase.



PLANNING THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Off-season phase (October-November)

This eight to 10-week period follows the intense competitive season. The aim during this time should be to maintain physical conditioning and facilitate recovery.

- The following principles apply to the off-season phase.
- Maintain a general level of fitness around 50-60 per cent of the in-season phase.
- Change the training venue and later the type of training.
- Analyse past performance and construct a yearly plan for the new season.

During this period, players should stay active to maintain endurance fitness and control body weight. Off-season recreational activities are useful. This period is the most suitable for overcoming weaknesses in body structure, conditioning and skill. Weight-training programs, speed work and skill development can be carried out.

Pre-season phase (December-March)

This is the period which immediately follows the off-season phase. During this time the coach should plan to develop the players' capacity for effort, general physical preparation, techniques and strategies. After a base has been established, speed and power activities should gradually be incorporated with endurance activities decreasing. Skill activities should be the focus of training.

During the pre-season phase, activities should be structured to:

- Progressively adjust the physical and psychological components according to the requirements of competition.
- Provide a high volume of training with only 30-40 per cent devoted to high-intensity training.
- Improve endurance, strength and speed as the physical groundwork for further performance accomplishments.
- Devote the later portion to specific exercises directly related to the skills and/or technical aspects of the sport.
The intensity of training should increase but the total volume of training will be reduced by 20-40 per cent.
- Improve and perfect techniques and tactics.

In-season phase (April-September)

Training during this period should be appropriate to football. Activities should be selected to maintain pre-season fitness and develop individual and team skills.

During the competitive phase, activities should be structured to:

- Maintain the physical standards acquired in the preparation phase.
- Perfect techniques and tactics.
- Gain competitive experience with the aim of improving game skills and mental capacities.

TRAINING VARIABLES

The training variables that need to be taken into consideration in the yearly planning process include the volume, intensity, frequency and specificity of training and training load.

In the practice of planning:

- The volume of training relates to the amount of time spent training or total number of repetitions per exercise.
- The intensity of training is related to the amount of effort required.
- The frequency of training refers to the number of training sessions performed within a given time frame (i.e. day, week).
- The specificity of training refers to the content or to the 'direction of training' performed within a given time period, or to the percentage of training performed with reference to sport-specific versus general training.
- Training load includes the quantitative and qualitative components of training, that is, combined volume and intensity of training.
- The volume and intensity of training are related in that when training volume is high, the intensity should be low, and vice versa. When training volume is low, the intensity should be high.

The general operating principle of planning is to start with high volume, low intensity in the pre-season and move towards high intensity, low volume during the season.

PLANNING A TRAINING SESSION

The training session is the basic building block of coaching. It is essential that coaches thoroughly plan each training session. At training, football skills are learned, conditioning and fitness levels are achieved and team confidence is developed. In football, the training session will contain various drills and training activities set between a warm-up at the beginning and a cool-down at the end. To decide on what drills are suitable for a particular session, the coach must first evaluate the team performance and then plan for optimal practice time. Goals should be established before each segment of a training session. This will ensure individual and team deficiencies and strengths will be focused on.

When planning a training session, the following considerations should be noted:

Venue

Various venues can be used during the football year, particularly in the pre-season period. In addition to the home ground, coaches should seek alternative venues ranging from an athletics track or swimming pool, to a well-grassed hilly surface, indoor gymnasium or basketball court. If carefully selected, these venues can greatly improve the general standard of training.

Equipment

The well-prepared coach will have a variety of equipment on hand at training.

This can include:

- Footballs, pump.
- Whistles hats.
- Whistle, stop watch.
- Handball target.
- Tackle bags, ruck bags.
- Portable goal posts.
- Training jumpers and an adequate supply of water for players during and after training.

Outline of the training session

Many coaches now provide the players with an outline of the training session before training. Players can be informed on the overall aims of the session, in addition to the approximate length and intensity of practice.

Be specific

Training must be specific to the demands of the game. With running training, the distance covered, the intensity and the number of repetitions must be appropriate to the game and the various playing conditions. It is essential that running work be supplemented with activities using footballs.

Quality not quantity

In general terms, the emphasis should be on a quality, non-stop training session rather than one of low volume and long duration.

TRAINING DIARY/PLANNING SHEET

Coaches of all levels should use a system for planning and recording details of training sessions and competitive performances of their players/teams. This will enhance sequential development of players. The following sample pages from a football coach's diary illustrate one method and you can use any diary or notebook to develop your own if you wish. A sample training session plan, which you can copy and use for planning your sessions is included on page 69.



SAMPLE TRAINING DIARY

Training Plan: Pre Season or In Season

Phase of Season: In season

Session Number: 3

Date: Tuesday 20/4

Time of Session: 75 mins

Venue: Ripplebrook Res - U/15 Team

Aims of Session:

Assistants: P Clogg J Johnson

Work on individual level ground skills - Open forward line

Equipment Needed: Bump Bag, 15 balls, Focus Pads

Reminder Notes for Team Briefing:

Map out training; chase up forwards from weekend re congestion and on-ballers, organise forwards vs backs

Session Outline (Don't forget hydration breaks)

WARM UP/CONDITIONING - 15 mins
lane warm up - Stretches
Include low-to-ground pick up
Introduce Bump Bags
"Bag Barge" in Warm-Up Library

SKILL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES or TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT (Game Sense Game)

ASSISTANTS: All

TIME: 30 mins

J Johnson and P Clogg umpire
"Dodgem" - see Games Library
2 teams
Need 2 Focus Pads, 10 cones
Use injured players as catchers
x 2 games



GAME SPECIFIC DRILLS

ASSISTANTS: As above

TIME: 20 mins



"Feed the Forward" - see Full Ground Library
"Forwards vs Backs" - see Full Ground Library

"Feed the Forwards" - Set up forward lines as shown. Coach kicks to groups of 3 at A, B and C (throughout drill), group deliver to half-forwards or full forwards and follow kick until goal scored.

WARM DOWN:

ASSISTANT:

TIME: 10 mins

lane cool down

EXTENDED DRILLS or GAME SENSE EXTENSIONS

ASSISTANTS: N/A

TIME:



(Show diagram here)

GAME SENSE QUESTIONS TO ASK

How can we create space in forward area?
What do forwards need to do to create space?
What can backs and onballers do to help keep forward line open?

Training Plan: Pre-Season or In Season (cont)

Managerial Duties

PLAYERS TO TALK TO:	
NAME:	COMMENTS:
Peachy	Running backwards into spaces
Browny	Not offering second lead
Sticks	Poor timing of lead
Jacko	Poor decision making re delivery into forward line
Smithy	Fantastic tight game at full-back

TEAM MEETING:
TEAM MEETING: 15 mins
VIDEO POINTS:
Show self-inflicted congestion
Show good 11ers in defence
Show fumbling by on-ballers and forwards
STATS HIGHLIGHTS:
Ball-ups inside 50 m
Marks taken by key forwards "one on one"
OUTCOMES:
Reduce ball-ups inside our forward 50m
Increase marks taken by our forwards "one on one"

INJURY STATUS:			
NAME	INJURY	PERIOD OUT	REHAB PROGRAM
Harry	Hanstring	2 weeks	Pool, physio
Sticks	Corky	1 week	Pool, physio
Ando	Knee	1 week	Resume training at 3/4 pace

Session Evaluation

TRAINING: Rate and comment on the following:
DURATION OF SESSION: Adequate
EQUIPMENT: Need more bags and ruckbag
ASSISTANTS: Clogg - more info re delivery to forwards
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED: CHF still running backwards into space
DRILLS USED: Good
MOTIVATION LEVEL OF PLAYERS/STAFF: Good

MENTOR FEEDBACK:

PLAYER TRAINING PERFORMANCE:
Random notes on performances you noticed:
Ellis Looked "hungry to play seniors"
Jeff Looked lethargic
Stan Got aggro in forwards v backs drill

AREAS TO FOCUS ON AND IMPROVE:
Forwards prepared to sacrifice leads
Clogg needs more input from me
AREAS TO CONTINUE WITH:
"Area coaches" will work
Sharp video highlights were good - use more positives



Recovery

Optimal hydration, nutrition and recovery activities such as swimming can facilitate recovery and maximise team performance. It is extremely important that appropriate recovery strategies are included following games, particularly, and training to ensure complete recovery of all team members. In addition to this, massage, relaxation and stretching should either be an integral part of the cool-down procedure or be completed following training and competition. After the season has finished, it's important for players to have active rest, which can be anything from 8-18 weeks, depending on the level of football. This time is for recovery and vital in preventing symptoms of overtraining/fatigue. Players should also significantly reduce the volume/intensity of training and focus on other recreational pursuits.

Tapering

As part of the coach's yearly plan, it's important that they include periods of tapering in the program. There are several times throughout the yearly plan when coaches should consider tapering and these include:

- Following the pre-season period or at the start of the season.
- Mid-way during the season.
- If the team is looking likely to contest finals, taper again for the finals.

Coaches can incorporate tapering into the yearly program by reducing the quantity of training. This will allow player fitness levels to be maintained while also continuing to refine and develop technical and tactical skills. Scheduling appropriate times to refresh the players is also important to limit wherever possible the risk of injury and overtraining.

THE WEEKLY PLAN

Just as the football year can be divided into three main phases, so too can these phases be further subdivided. Training progresses in cycles of activity usually considered to be of seven days' duration. The format of these cycles will depend on the number of training sessions held each week. In planning the typical competitive week, the coach should take into account both the volume and intensity of training. The coach must allow for the physical nature of the game and the limitations of his/her players in coping with heavy loads without adequate rest. Overtraining is a real problem and can lead to a sudden drop in performance. The coach must be able to evaluate all these factors in planning the weekly program. The effective coach must monitor the players' performances and tailor the volume and intensity of training to have the team at a peak before each game.

Most clubs organise two or three training sessions a week with rest days between sessions. A complete rest day or a light training session becomes an important consideration during the normal rigours of a football season. This 'hard-easy' approach to the planning of a weekly training program is a sound principle to follow. It allows players to progressively adapt to a greater level of work without suffering undue fatigue.

GOAL-SETTING

The words "goals", "aims", "objectives" and "targets" essentially mean the same thing – they are statements by which the success of a team can be judged. Goal-setting is one of the most basic preparation techniques. Goals set targets for achievement over a certain period of time. They help in planning and monitoring the development of skills and other abilities. They are also natural and powerful motivators because they focus attention on relevant activities for progress towards desired results.

The coach should involve each individual and the team as a whole in the goal-setting process. Under the coach's guidance, players can set appropriate goals that they are eager to work towards. Process goals (factors which can be controlled by individual effort) should predominate over outcome goals which can be too dependent on external factors. Both long-term and short-term goals should be set.

Goal-setting is an important part of the planning process. Goals should follow the SMART principle. They should be:

S Specific

Set goals specific to your players'/team's needs. Identify weak areas in your game and develop appropriate strategies that address these weaknesses. Specific, challenging goals are most effective in improving performance via behavioural change.

M Measurable

Goals need to be expressed in measurable terms. Quantify everything wherever possible by identifying target times, etc., e.g.

- Each player will get equal time in games over the season.
- The team will finish higher in the league than last year.
- Players will better their score on a skill circuit.
- Players will better their times by 10 per cent.

A Achievable

Goals need to appropriately reflect your players' and team's potential. While some goals should be challenging, it is important initially to establish goals that can be achieved before progressing to more difficult goals. Coaches should also discuss the goals within the group to convince their players they can reach the standard set.

R Realistic

Coaches need to set goals that are difficult enough to challenge but realistic enough to be achieved. A way to ensure the goals are realistic is to use past experiences as a guide, thus indicating what you are likely to achieve in the future.

T Time bound

Identify target dates for accomplishing your players'/team's goals. Setting dates helps motivate coaches and players and is a continual reminder of the urgency of achieving such goals in a specified, realistic time frame.

Other essential goal-setting tips

- Set positive goals on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis.
- Set goals for both training and games.
- Develop strategies for each goal.
- Write goals down and keep them where they can be reviewed regularly.
- Provide for goal evaluation. Recording your goals and evaluating your feedback is essential if goals are going to be effective in enhancing individual and team performance.
- Be flexible in the approach. Unforeseen circumstances may cause you as coach to re-evaluate your team goals and develop alternative strategies.
- Ensure ownership over goals. Goals become motivating when the whole team has direct input into them and feel accountable to achieving the goals.

Long-term goals

To provide a blueprint for a season, long-term goals should be set from the start. The first step is to map out the training and competition schedule for the time period under consideration. Then the coach and players should decide on what they would like to have achieved by certain dates. The majority of long-term goals should be process-orientated and focus on development of physical and psychological abilities through means controllable by the player.

Goals are set not as an end in themselves, but as a guide to and measure of achievement. Monitoring and adjusting goals is an essential part of that process. It is rare that a goal is exactly achieved and people either fall short or exceed a goal. The coach should help players understand that each evaluation of goal progress is simply a way of determining whether to adjust the standard to a more reasonable level or raise it to a new, more challenging one. Long-term goals should be reviewed on a regular basis.



Short-term goals

While long-term goals determine the desired destination, short-term goals describe the steps to get there. These are the daily and weekly goals which promote continual development. They should be process goals which are challenging enough to be motivating, but also achievable. Good short-term goals focus on things that improve abilities relevant to achieving the long-term goals.

Short-term goals can be set for:

- Fitness – conditioning, weight training, flexibility and endurance.
- Specific skills – development of new skills, maintenance of well-learned skills.
- Performance strategies – overall style of play, contingency plans for varying circumstances, decision-making.
- Emotional control – controlling arousal levels, coping with frustrations/anger, remaining positive.
- Team play – communication, co-ordination of players' performances, co-operation.
- Social aspects – friendships, cohesion, managing life around sport.

To get the most out of training and competitions, clearly state specific short-term goals before each session. This will help direct attention to working on these aspects. After the session, ensure that any evaluation is based on how well these goals were achieved. Much of the value of goals is in the evaluation of progress and the adjustment of goals for the next time.

No one can focus effectively on a large number of goals at the same time. On any given occasion, players should be directed towards only a small number of goals (no more than four). As skills develop, earlier goals will be achieved automatically and new ones can be put in their place. In addition, alternating the goal focus from session to session will help to keep players fresh and motivated. Finally, recognising successful advancement on goals through verbal praise and occasional rewards is crucial. It is just as important to provide lots of encouragement when players fall short of their goals. Great coaches will help players to get over the temporary failures and eagerly move to the next challenge.

PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR KEEPING ADOLESCENTS IN THE GAME

The following information proposes a set of principles for designing training and practice activities for adolescents. These principles are aimed at increasing the young players' desire to participate not only in the game but also the training program for an extended time over several seasons. It must be remembered that in a structured coaching program, the effective design of activities alone will not guarantee that a player will participate for a long period of time and/or realise his/her potential. Therefore, the following principles need to be supported by quality interactive coaching behaviours, effective management and organisational techniques and an applied knowledge of sports science.

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Field time

Most sporting organisations now include in their codes of coaching behaviour for children's sport that coaches must give all players equal time on the field. With adolescents, the concept of providing maximum participation for all players tends to demand a more sophisticated interpretation than just the amount of time on the field.

Adolescents will assess the fairness of their injection into a game according to the ratio of 'opportunities to respond' (moments of competitive activity) to 'time in the game'. An acceptable ratio will be situationally specific. Also more mature adolescents will fully understand and accept the complexities of their sport and will adjust the ratio according to the position they play. A back pocket player in football will not expect to have as many possessions as the rover.

Effective coaches will ensure that all of their players have adequate opportunities to respond, not only to develop their playing abilities, but also to satisfy the player's participation expectations. This principle needs to be applied to training and practice as well as to competition. For example, if a footballer has had their allotted amount of time on the field compared to their teammates, but has not had the opportunities to perform their prescribed function, then they should be left on the field until there have been reasonable opportunities for them to perform their function.

“What’s next?”

A feeling of worth is usually associated with successful completion of tasks and/or achievement of standards that are either defined by the players themselves or by others (coach, team, community and/or the sport culture). Players who have sound self esteem regarding their ability to perform will adopt the attitude of “what’s next?” at training or in competition they accept the challenges that will take their abilities to a higher level. To nurture the self-esteem of adolescent players, coaches should design activities which guarantee a positive outcome. This can be achieved by varying the terrain, the regime and/or the drill so that each player has the opportunity to use their strengths and avoid overexposing their weaknesses.

When using competitive team drills at training, it is appropriate to consider using grids and to divide the team into practice units. The number of players in each unit and the ability of the players per unit will determine the success of each of the competing players. For example, when teaching players to use a variety of passing plays to evade the opposition, the slowest and least-skilled players could be in a larger grid with fewer players in each team (unit) while the faster and more skilful players could be in a smaller grid with more players on each team (unit).

Peer acceptance

One of the more difficult factors to control when designing training activities is an adolescent’s feeling of peer acceptance. On many occasions, friends will choose to participate in a sport to play on a team together. Even before they start training and competition against other teams, there is a feeling of acceptance between them. Continuing to have opportunities to play together to achieve a common goal is often important to them. If the anticipated link between friends is not maintained by the coach then they may choose not to play the sport. All other factors being equal, coaches should endeavour to provide opportunities for friends to work together in training drills and practices and for them to play on the same team.

In the more common situation where young people independently join a club to become a player, the coach needs to develop inter-player confidence, respect and acceptance. Structuring activities so that players have the opportunity to gain the respect of their peers is important. When improving players in difficult and new training situations where the chances of success are minimal, the drills should be designed so as to limit the opportunities for players to observe other players’ attempts at achieving the task. When players consistently reach a level of performance that the coach knows will be acceptable to other members of the team, then the pressure of the drill can be increased by introducing extensions to the drill.

During training, practice and games, the coach should use every available opportunity to place players in positions of responsibility. The behaviours required in these positions should be understood by all team members. When a player fails to meet the intended criteria, coaches need to immediately confirm that it was not due to a lack of commitment or ability on behalf of the player, but rather the circumstances that surrounded the event. This can be achieved by quietly talking to them about the event and by outwardly acknowledging respect for their interpretation of the event. At this point, the player and coach should be seen to be working on possible solutions should an error occur in the future. By modelling respect for players, the coach encourages similar attitudes in team members.

Creating a convivial atmosphere allows the coach to structure drills where all players constantly have to work with all other athletes and therefore cope with the ineptness of some and the wizardry of others. Through these experiences, teammates learn what each of their peers are capable of doing and also learn to support their teammates when they are below their best and acknowledge them when they exceed expectations.

Success

Obviously there is no greater motivator than success. Grading players into appropriate competitions, sequentially increasing the level of difficulty of training drills, resetting the required performance standards and establishing realistic coach expectations of the player are well-documented principles that coaches should adopt when designing their programs. This principle applies to all stages of player development and probably warrants equal attention at each stage.

Coaches and adolescents are often overheard discussing the significant dropout of players that occurs in the mid-to-late teenage years. While the above principles do not pretend to solve the dropout problem, they will enhance the quality of the experience for all participants and therefore increase the probability of them remaining in the sport for longer periods of time.

Effective coaches will ensure that all of their players have adequate opportunities to not only develop their playing abilities, but also to satisfy the players’ participation expectations.



ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Some coaches may feel apprehensive about including players with a disability in football. It is important to remember that every individual has the right to participate in sport. Including players with a disability is not difficult – it simply requires enthusiasm and understanding.

When involving players with a disability in your club, remember to:

- Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the player.
- Work with what the player can do and if you are not sure, ask their parent or carer.
- Introduce the player to other members and create a 'buddy' system with other players.
- Make simple modifications to various activities. This will allow greater participation by everyone.
- Allow the player to participate in all aspects of the day's activities.
- Provide activities where players can succeed and develop self-esteem.
- Encourage all players to participate in all activities.

COACHING FEMALE PLAYERS

When coaching female players, whether they are members of an all-female team or as individuals in predominantly boys' teams, the most important thing to focus on is that you are coaching people. Therefore, all of the general coaching advice provided throughout the manual applies equally to coaching female players.

Generally female players come to a team with similar motivations to male participants and they respond to training with the same physical, physiological and skill development outcomes as their male counterparts.

Each athlete is an individual and has a unique set of circumstances under which they will perform at their best. Female players (and generally all players) will be best served by a coaching process which pays attention to the following:

- Be welcoming, supportive and ensure safety and an absence of any forms of harassment – a safe, supportive environment is the key to encouraging girls to become or stay involved.
- Coaches, particularly males coaching females, must be sensitive to the impact of personal proximity and be aware that unnecessary touching is inappropriate and may offend. Ensure physical contact with players is appropriate and necessary for their skill development. Contact should only be used to facilitate learning or safe participation. (For more information about this area, see Australian Sports Commission, Harassment-free Sport Guidelines for Coaches – activeaustralia.org/hfs/Coaches.pdf)
- Conduct programs where individuals experience success and skill development.
- Respect each player's abilities – do not water down activities specifically for females.
- Spend equal time and attention with all players to avoid perceptions of favouritism or neglect.
- Do not treat females in a totally different way or continually draw attention to the fact that they are girls.
- Ensure female players have a say in program planning and any issues discussed by the team.
- A person's sports performance should not be a measure of their self-worth.
- Learn as much as possible about young female athletes and be open and professional with players about specific issues related to their growth and development as outlined in Chapter 1.



TRAINING SESSION PLAN

Session no:

Date:

Topic:

Aim of session:

WARM-UP

(Generally includes activities to increase body temperature, stretching, ball handling and movement specific activities)

Time:

EXTENDED DRILL ACTIVITY

(Generally drills designed to extend skill level to game situation)

Time:

Extended drill:

SKILL DRILL/SKILL DEVELOPMENT

(Generally reinforces skills taught or tactics introduced or can include introduction of new skills to players)

Time:

Skill drill:

GAME ACTIVITY DRILL

(Generally use drills that reinforce the method or pattern of play the team should adopt)

Time:

Game drill:

WARM-DOWN

(Generally used to assist in the recovery of players after training sessions)

Time:

CONDUCTING TRAINING SESSIONS



Chapter 7

Conducting Training Sessions

Planning and conducting practice sessions. It is important to continually stress to players that through practice sessions they will be taught skills and techniques that will lead to individual improvement, and that it is an opportunity for the team to develop into a cohesive offensive and defensive unit. As part of effective coaching, coaches should follow the **'Plan – Act – Review'** strategy, which will set them on the correct path. Training activities may be planned to emphasise various components of the game, including skills and techniques and decision making and tactical thinking.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING

The coach needs to be aware of the general principles which ensure effective training. This makes it possible for coaches to formulate training programs and sessions which have a positive impact on both the team and individual. Coaches are able to design their training with appropriate consideration to the standard of the team.

Keep all players active	Maximise training time by keeping all players active and involved.
Give clear concise instructions	Learning improves when players know what is expected of them.
Demonstrations improve the accuracy of instructions	
Record progress	Certain drills allow measurement by which coaches and players can assess progress.
Give positive feedback	Emphasise and reward good performances.
Provide variety	Maintain interest by using various skills.
Encourage enjoyment	Training sessions should be fun and enjoyable.
Create progression	Learning improves if progression occurs from the simple to the complex.
Plan maximum use of resources	Ensure that you have the correct equipment (footballs, markers etc). A ratio of one football to two players is ideal.
Allow for individual differences	Allow for different learning rates among players.
Plan yet flexible	If a planned drill is not working or circumstances have changed (e.g. weather), be prepared to change immediately.

Keep drills and activities short

Shorter drills are more effective than lengthy ones. Unless practice time is pre-planned, drills may become long and boring to players and learning may be reduced. It is important to ensure players know the purpose of the drill being undertaken. Players tend to perform better when they know why they are working on a specific skill. The coach should also begin the session with a brief explanation of the session's goals. This will give the session more direction and relevance and players will be clear on individual and team goals for the session.

Conclude each practice session with an evaluation of the players' performances and the effectiveness of the session itself. This should include an honest personal assessment by the coach.



DESIGNING THE TRAINING SESSION

Many of the problems which new coaches have at training have nothing to do with their personality, their level of control, or football knowledge, but are due to their lack of preparation before training. Deciding what drills to include and in what order is fundamental to achieving your objectives.

- Time spent in organising the training session will make the problem of controlling the group much easier.
- Observe your players during the drills, moving to individuals or groups that may need assistance.
- During each session, the coach should stand back and assess what is going well and what needs to be improved.
- Never stop the group until you are sure of what you are going to say. If the drill is going well, let it continue.
- Be clear in your instructions. If you want the players to finish the activity, use one clear word 'stop' or a whistle.
- Bring the group in. Before speaking make sure you can see all players, then direct your voice to the furthest person.
- If a demonstration is called for, group placement is most important. A single file, square, circle or semi circle are all ideal learning formations.
- Keep instructions to a minimum by emphasising the main teaching points. Send the players back to practise.
- A skilful coach can judge when to stop a current activity and move on to the next drill. In most cases, it can be achieved with minimal disruption to the pattern of training.
- Take notes as soon as possible after training, listing the worthwhile drills and modifications to be made to existing drills.

The training session – in season

The primary objective during the playing season is to maintain the current level of match fitness of every player. In addition, it is important to develop individual and team skills through a good selection of drills.

A format for a training session is outlined below:

TRAINING DRILLS AND PRACTICES

Drills are the lifeblood of the training session and ultimately reflect in the team's on-field performance. A long list of drills and activities have been used over the years at all levels of football.

It is not the intention of this section to describe specific drills, however, there are some key fundamentals of training drills.

TYPES OF DRILLS

Drills can be categorised under three main headings:

1. Individual Skill Drills

These involve the basic skills and incorporate practice in kicking, marking, handball, etc.

2. Part of the Game Drills

Drills in this category refer to certain parts of the game and include centre bounce practice and centring the ball from the forward pocket.

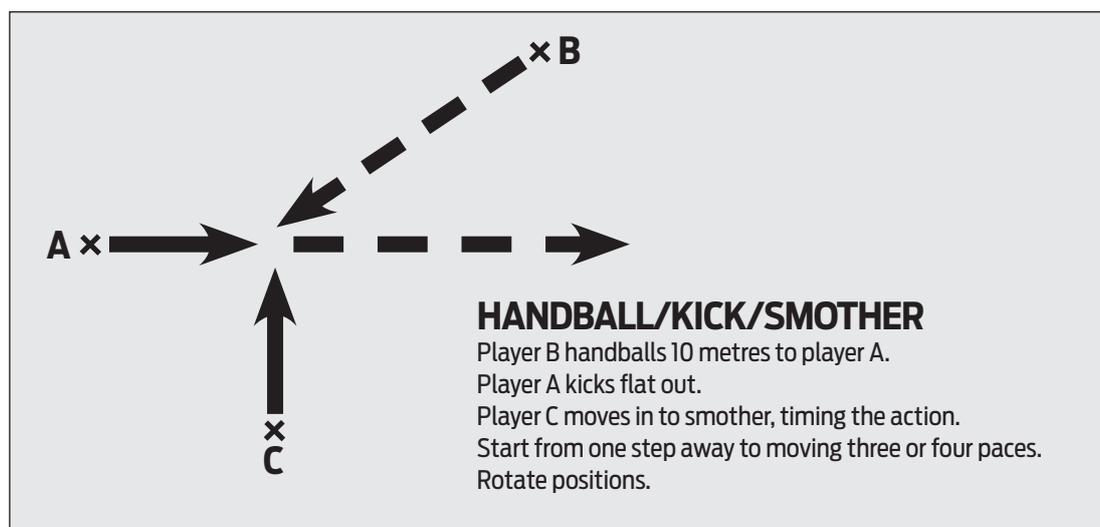
3. Team Pattern Drills

These include activities which practise an overall system of play. For example, moving the ball down the centre corridor.

Skill Drills

The selection of drills suitable for your team requires a great deal of thought and planning.

Drills should develop the running and possession skills so important in football today and at the same time prepare players for realistic match conditions. Skill drills should progress from simple to complex. When introducing a skill drill, begin with a basic drill, gradually building up the degree of difficulty. Repetition is the key to learning. As the players become familiar with the drill and your expectations, the skill drill will run efficiently with maximum involvement. The following is an example of a drill that has been developed from its simplest form into a realistic skill activity.



Training drills with purpose and focus

While there are many publications containing hundreds of football skill drills, the best drills and perhaps most satisfying drills you can use and implement are those developed by you for a specific purpose. Any drill or coaching exercise/activity must be aimed at giving your team the best chance of achieving its potential, both in the short and long term. You can choose almost any aspect of the game, however small, and design a drill or activity to practise it.

Before deciding which drills to incorporate into the team training sessions, a few key points must be considered:

- What are your themes for the session/week/month?
- What are the intended outcomes of the session?
- Why do you want to run the drill and for how long?
- Is the drill aimed at exploiting a particular weakness of the upcoming opposition or to use a particular strength of your team?



INTRODUCING A NEW DRILL

Often coaches waste valuable time and become frustrated at their lack of success when introducing a drill for the first time. A simple procedure to follow is set out below:

1. Have all the equipment ready

It may seem self-explanatory but it is an important part of running a successful coaching session. Coaches must be able to move players quickly from one drill to the next. A new drill can quickly lose its appeal, regardless of its value, if the appropriate preparation doesn't appear to have been made.

2. Rehearse selected players to go through the drills before the whole team is involved

If certain players within the group have an understanding of the drill, they will quickly be able to explain to other players what needs to be done. Communication among players builds a sense of team.

3. Give the drill a name

This saves the coach having to remind players of the drill each time it is to be used. If players are aware of the name of the drill, the team can immediately move on to it. A continuous training session is of enormous value.

4. Explain the aim of the drill

By explaining the aim of the drill, players will be able to see for themselves the inherent value of performing every part of the drill with enthusiasm. It will also serve as a guide to the type of skills the coach believes the team needs to work on.

5. Select players to walk through the drill

Similar to point two, players can observe for themselves the drill being performed, avoiding confusion which can quickly ruin a drill.

6. When the whole group is ready, begin by performing the drill slowly

A new drill should be eased into so that players can gain confidence in the way it operates, and concentrate more on the skills they are trying to develop than the actual machinations of the training drill.

7. Gradually increase the tempo and degree of difficulty

There are several ways to lift the pace:

- Adding more footballs.
- Having fewer players at each marker.

It is important to add variety to drills so that players believe they are continuing to gain value out of it. By adding more footballs you add to the pace at which the drill is performed and players learn to quickly dispose of the ball.

Having fewer players at the marker means that players have less time not participating in the drill, thus alleviating problems of boredom/cooling down. Players must concentrate at all times, which also replicates a match situation more closely. As the players become more confident and drills are known, they often do not need the markers or explanations before performing the drill.

VARIATION IN TRAINING SESSIONS

The benefits of training indoors periodically or outside the normal training environment with footballs include:

- New venue and a break from normal routine, which can enhance player motivation levels.
- Smaller confined areas means skill level needs to be high and players need to focus on skill basics to ensure targets are hit.
- Smaller dimensions of distances between cones/lines can mean shorter recovery, which enhances aerobic conditioning.
- Indoor arena can lead to more noise being generated, which enhances morale and communication between players.
- Alternate training games and competitions can be used to enhance team morale throughout or at the end of the skill session, such as a volleyball competition or an indoor football game with a possession focus, where teams score a point by handballing the ball between a set of goals at each end.



TEAM PLAY AND GAME-PLANS



Chapter 8

Team Play and Game-Plans

INTRODUCTION

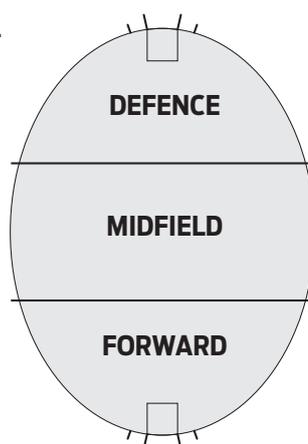
Football has undergone rapid change over the past five years. The rules of the game are continually evolving. Players, too, have become more versatile with fitness and skill levels continually improving. Advances in the coaching area have seen an increased emphasis on tactics as coaches strive to gain an edge over their opposition. Before the start of a season, a coach should analyse the previous season, setting down the team's strengths and areas for improvement and assessing all new players, as well as closely analysing the competition's better teams before finalising a game-plan.

In considering the development of a game-plan and tactics, it is useful to have a basic understanding of some of the concepts and terminology commonly used to describe areas of the playing field and roles of the players.

ANATOMY OF TEAM PLAY

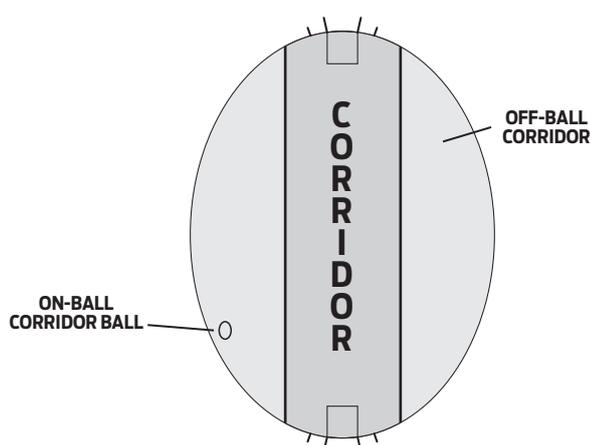
Zones

The ground is divided into three separate playing zones.



The Corridor

The Corridor is the area of the ground running from end to end, approximately the width of the centre square. It is the area within which most of the play occurs. It is of strategic advantage whether defending or attacking.



LINES

• Goal-to-goal Line

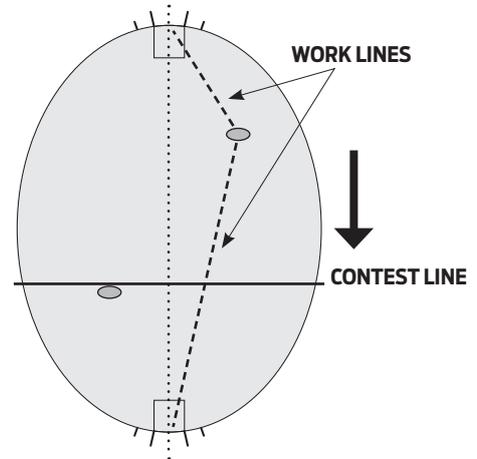
Line that splits the ground lengthways into equal halves

• Contest Line

A line across the ground in line with where the ball is.

• Work Line

Imaginary line between the ball and the goals at either end.



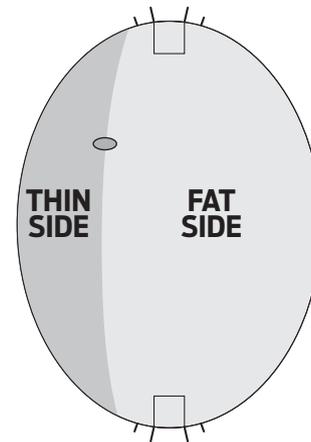
FAT AND THIN SIDE

• Thin side

The side of the ground between the ball and the closer boundary line

• Fat side

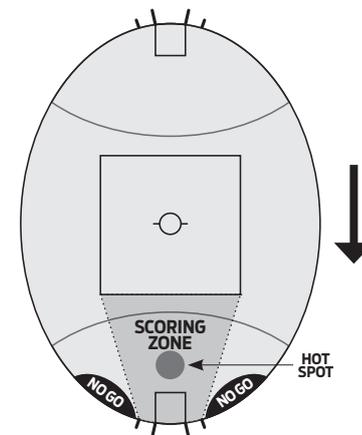
The side of the ground between the ball and the further boundary line



SCORING ZONE

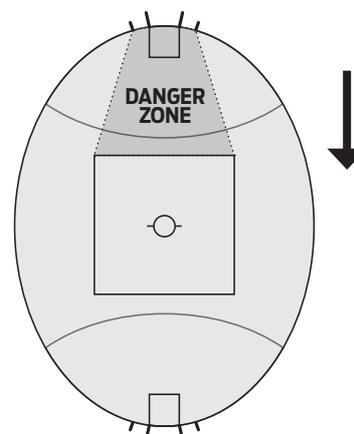
The area of the forward zone from which most goals are kicked. It includes the "hot spot" approximately 10-15m out from the goalsquare.

The "no go" areas are the most difficult areas of the forward zone from which to score goals.



DANGER ZONE

The reverse of the scoring zone from the defending team's perspective.

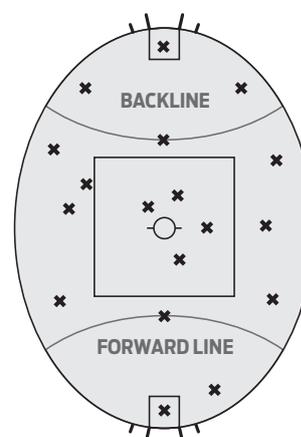


TEAM SET-UPS

Traditionally, football has been played with five lines of three players plus three players running on the ball. The increased versatility of footballers today combined with the importance of the midfield area has led to a move away from the more established line-ups.

One such variation is the five-man forward line.

This formation allows extra space for a key forward while relocating an extra player in the midfield or defence.



TERMINOLOGY

The terminology in football continues to evolve, particularly when we refer to positions on the ground. For the purposes of the manual, we will refer to the traditional defender's positions as back pocket, half-back flank, centre half-back and full-back, and the forward positions as forward pocket, half-forward flank, centre half-forward and full-forward.

Midfielder will be the common term for what has traditionally been broken down individually as centre, rover and ruck-rover.

The ruckman and wingman shall remain as positional terms.



DEVELOPING A PATTERN OF PLAY

Following is a simple approach to developing a pattern of play which can form the basis of a team plan. A pattern of play should be recognisable and applicable to all game situations and is generally developed in a series of stages.

The table below is devised for implementing a longer-kicking approach to the game. The emphasis builds on each stage as do the key terms.

	Emphasis	Key Terms
Stage 1	The development of the basic skills of the game need to be established to perfect any game-plan or pattern of play. Emphasis can then be applied to kicking the ball longer as a key requirement for the style of play a coach wants to implement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-to-goal line • Scoring zone
Stage 2	Fundamental to any game is the ability to win the ball in a contested or neutral situation. And then having the capacity to give the ball to teammates in better positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contest line • Contest set-up – stoppages and general play • Corridors
Stage 3	Fewer possessions and longer kicking to key marking players and then the organisation of player numbers to crumb the aerial contest is a key feature of a long-kicking game.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoring zone • Kicking long • Key marking targets • Front and square players • Run and carry
Stage 4	Setting up in general play and the use of the ball and role of players.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switching the play • Handball receives • Leading options • Creating space • Tempo of ball movement

BASIC PATTERN

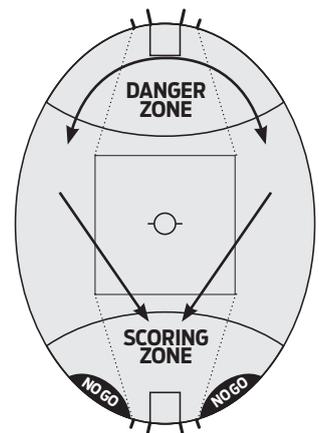
To move the ball out of the danger zone, either by switching wide to outside corridors or using central corridor if players receiving are free and who can run and carry or at the very least maintain possession.

Danger Zone

- When the opposition is in possession, there must be man-on-man in this area of the ground to stop them marking or winning uncontested possession.
- In possession, the ball should be cleared from this zone and not brought back into it unless player receiving is well clear.
- No risks in possession, particularly backward of centre.
- Disciplined and predictable ball movement and positioning.
- Key is to maintain possession.

Scoring Zone

- Bring the ball into the scoring zone as quickly as possible.
- Look for key marking forwards or leading targets.
- Hit the scoring zone with numbers if kicking long.
- Plenty of player movement to keep defenders guessing.
- Objective is to kick goals.

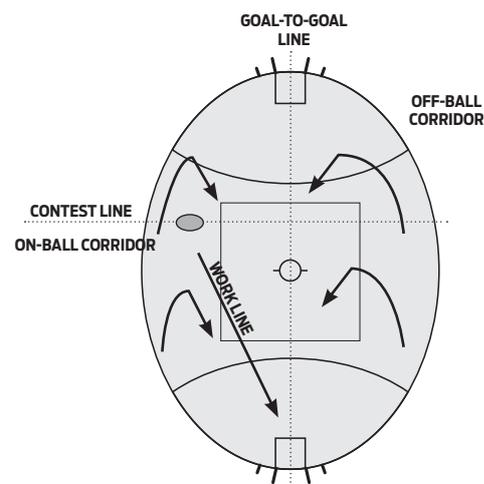


THE GAME SET-UP

On-Ball corridor is the corridor where the ball is.

As a general rule, the following applies:

- The bulk of players will move towards this corridor because that is where the play is setting up.
- The team not in possession will pressure the ball at the contest line and in general play try and win possession back or pressure disposal.
- They will also cover the corridor or off ball corridor to stop switch of play to space in all situations, but particularly if the team in possession is in a mark or free kick situation.
- Depending on the pattern of play of the team in possession and the part of the ground they are in possession, this will determine how they will play the ball.
- Long-kicking teams forward of centre will kick to the scoring zone, a run-and-carry team will often create confusion among the defending team by running at them and gaining ground until they can find a free target in the scoring zone. A possession-based team will try to maintain possession and build more methodically until they can set up a shot at goal by working the ball around to find the best possible option.



Work Line

Once out of the danger zone, this is the direct path into the scoring zone.

CONTEST SET-UP

This basic set-up around a contest is relevant to:

- Centre bounces.
- Boundary throw-ins.
- Marking contests.
- Pack situations.

BASIC PATTERN

Players set up to cover all the options around a contest (where ball is). And where they can transition quickly to either defend or attack.

CENTRE BOUNCE

Specific roles

Ruckman (R)

Stands to face 12 o'clock. Using preferred (e.g. RH) hand, the target areas are (see diagram):

1. 9 o'clock.
2. 3 o'clock.
3. 12 o'clock.
4. 6 o'clock.

Midfield 1 (M1)

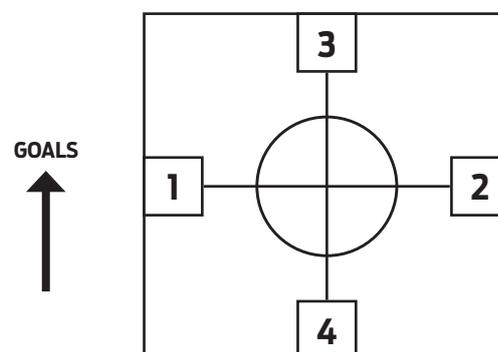
The midfield 1 role is to:

- Never get in front of ball and remain behind the contest – play the sweeper role.
- Assist the defence by reading opposition ruckman's target hit out areas.
- Present as a straight running option.

Midfield 2 (M2)

The midfield 2 role is to:

- Be the primary target for ruckman's tap work and move to target area.
- React to assist defence if team lose hit-out.





Midfield 3 (M3)

The midfield 3 role is to:

- Cover the forward side of contest.
- Create a pathway for Midfield 2 by blocking.
- Be a target for 12 o'clock target area hit out.
- Use handball to any straight running option.

Wingers (W)

The wingers need to:

- Start and then run in behind contest.
- Once hit-out is won, move forward and attack.

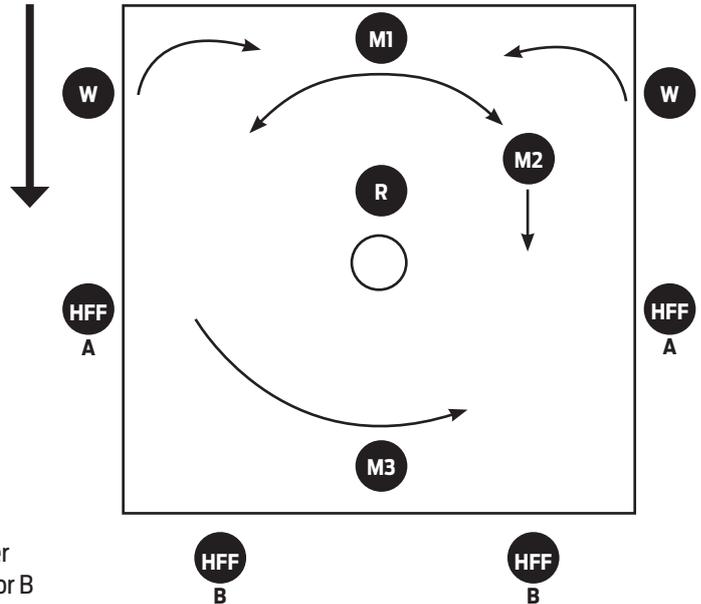
Defenders (D)

As a general rule all defenders:

- Start man-on-man.

Half-forward flank (HFF)

The half-forwards can start in either position A or position B (as per diagram in book). They can work together by starting in position A or B or they can alternate where one starts in position A and other in position B.



Over time, teams can develop more detailed game-plans based around specific situations such as which team has the ball (or is neutral), which zone the play is in (forward, midfeild or defensive) and variables related to desired player and ball movement such as direction, distance and speed.

GAME-PLANS

Game-plan refers to a recognisable/predictable standard or style of play adopted by the coach that suits his/her football philosophy. A game-plan is simply a plan for a match consisting of a few major parts. A good generic game-plan is based on a direct flowing game, focused on player movement and control of the ball in possession, and what the role of every player is when not in possession. It should incorporate the following elements:

- Clearly defined style of play.
- Team rules (as determined by the players/coach).
- Area rules (defenders, midfield and forwards).
- Strategies/tactics.
- Encouraging 'smart' risk-taking.
- Specific match plan (suited to explore opposition team).
- Set match plays.
- Accountability.

1. Team rules or guidelines – rules that do not change.

Every coach should have his/her own set of basic team rules.

Listed below are a few examples of these team rules:

- Get back off mark quickly when in possession from a mark or free kick.
- Handball back under pressure.
- Punch from behind.
- Centre the ball from the forward pockets.

A coach should clearly outline a collection of basic rules to be followed by the team. This is particularly important of junior and youth teams. Not only should these basics be clearly explained, they should also be reinforced at training and on match-day. Basics form the foundation of the team plan.

2. Tactics – measures or changes made to team play. These can vary from week to week depending on a variety of factors, e.g. the opposition, ground size and condition, weather and players available. The implementation of set plays on the football ground generally revolves around 'dead ball' situations (stoppages), e.g. out of bounds, centre bounce and after a behind has been scored.

Sample club team guidelines and area principles

Theme: “Take them on and run, long and quick.”

Defence: “Low risk, ruthless, miserly – play the percentages”

Responsibilities:

- Always in front of your opponent at the right time.
- Touch and feel, know where he is all the time.
- Back yourself to win the ball on every occasion.
- Look to switch play, change direction (smart risk taking), remember to play the percentages.
- Strong punching of the ball when behind.
- Strong, vice-like tackling of all opposition players (no easy frees through high tackling).

Midfield: “Hard working, accountable, creative”

Responsibilities:

- Must get to as many contests as possible.
- Create an option in midfield when ball comes out of defence.
- Push back into defence to assist backline to fill holes and man-up (especially if your opponent runs forward).
Remember to have at least one midfielder (where possible) ready for transition play.
- Be a crumbing or another marking option up forward (don't be stationary inside the attacking 50m).
- When opposition has the ball or when we lose the ball, everybody is accountable and must transition quickly to defending.
- Know your role at stoppages and kick-ins.

Forwards: “Kick goals, keep ball alive inside 50m, exciting!”

Responsibilities:

- Always create and recreate space by leading in different directions (sacrificial leads).
- Adopt front position and work hard to keep it.
- If you can't mark, bring the ball to the front of the pack when spoiling.
- Be ready to crumb front and square off each pack.
- Be the team's best chasers and tacklers, be ruthless and strong and keep the ball inside the forward 50m.
- Work for other forwards by helping create space and provide legal blocks.
- Convert opportunities.

Establishing core team guidelines and on-field area principles

It is essential that coaches lead the development of a set of club core values and principles, which everyone can follow. In addition, coaches should develop a game based on the characteristics, including strengths and areas for improvement of the playing group. All players and coaches have ownership of the rules/guidelines and these are constantly reinforced.

Before being able to develop a particular style of play, a coach must ascertain the strengths and areas for improvement of players in the team. The following factors should be considered in this appraisal:

- Strong midfield – plenty of options and hard workers.
- Two key forwards.
- Tall, strong-marking side.
- Small, quick and skilled.
- Aggressive, particularly in contested situations.
- Very fit, hard running.
- Very quick (may have two or three explosively quick players).

Once coaches have worked out their team's strengths and weaknesses, tactics and processes can be developed aimed at maximising the potential of the team. Coaches must then decide how to structure the team guidelines or rules, set plays, etc.

The coach and a flexible team should be able to adapt quickly to a number of different styles of play, including long and quick, possession-based, zoning and transition play.



There have been some very successful clubs, which have five team rules, which work very effectively as all players are fully aware of these and these become automatic throughout the game. Another very effective strategy, which could be adopted, is to establish the rules as a collective unit (players and coaches) where everyone has ownership of the rules. This can be done in an open brainstorm situation following training.

Training to reinforce stated rules/guidelines

The next step once all players have established club core/principles and learnt these rules, is to reinforce them through practise. Practise allows learning to occur, so if you structure training around your game-plan and team rules, you increase your players' chances of truly understanding them.

Following is a simple example:

Be front and square to all contests.

To reinforce this rule, a lot of training drills will incorporate players running to the front and square of contests in order to gain possession of the football. As the coach, the drill may be stopped periodically to reinforce smart positioning, and how to better read the flight of the ball and where it may drop.

TACTICS

Tactics are an important part of the coach's plan and must be used to serve a number of purposes:

- To increase the chance of improving team and individual performance or outcome by building on the team's strengths and advantages.
- To increase the chance of improving team performance by exploiting the opposition's weaknesses and nullifying their strengths.
- To increase motivation and enthusiasm of players as a result of trying new processes and set team processes.

There are a range of tactics that a coach can develop and use including:

- Forward line set-ups in general play.
- Forward line set-ups at centre-bounces (e.g. horse shoe).
- Centre-bounce set-ups (all player roles).
- Ball ups (inside forward 50m, defensive 50m and midfield 50m).
- Boundary throw-ins (inside forward 50m, defensive 50m and midfield 50m).
- Defensive set-up against opposition kick-ins (zone, man-on-man, combination).
- Kick-ins after opposition score a behind (designated kicker, screens, blockers, breakers, second phase considerations).
- Style of play which may be determined by team guidelines, area guidelines, your team personnel, opposition personnel and their style, ground conditions, weather conditions, etc.
- On-ball or midfield rotations (time, positions etc).
- Zone defence.
- "Flooding" defence.
- Coaching against "zone defence".
- Attacking through a "go to" defensive player, to whom your team may release the ball to gain an advantage or to exploit a weakness of a particular player.
- Rotating the number of forwards or defenders within a period of the game.
- Rotating the number of forwards within a quarter.

Whatever tactics coaches adopt, there are a few key guidelines that should be in place:

1. Tactics must be practised frequently at training so all players are aware of their implications in a practical sense.
2. They must serve a purpose which should be clear to all personnel (players and coaches).
3. Every player must understand the tactics, signals and their roles.
4. They may be supported by being written as a handbook for all players to study and learn.

SET PLAYS

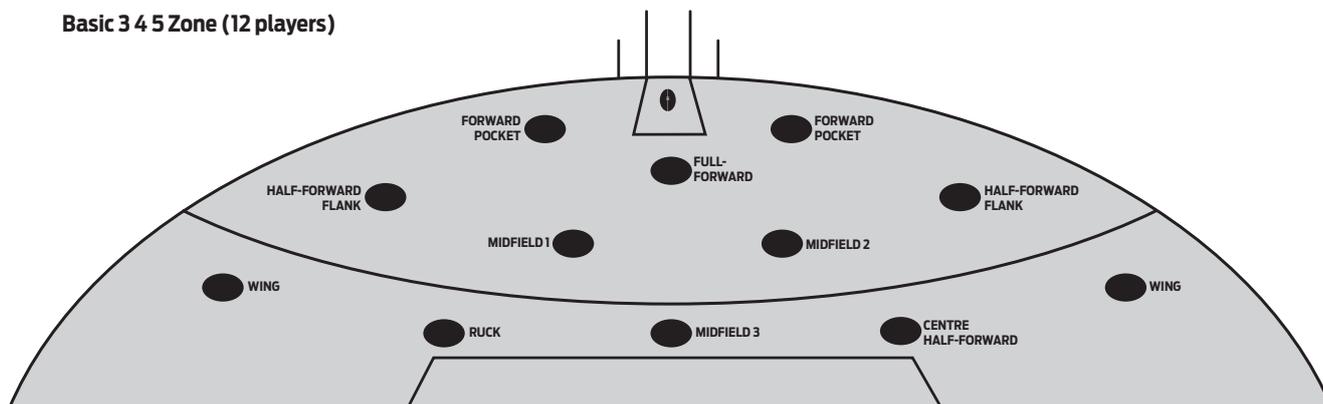
Set plays are part of a team's tactics and must be rehearsed and familiar to all players. Listed below are some examples of tactics which can be used and the guidelines which should be adopted to assist the team.

Opposition kick-ins

After your team has kicked a behind or the opposition has rushed a behind, your team has basically three options:

1. Play man-on-man accountable football. Every player has one opponent to which he/she is accountable. This will require lots of communication and discipline.
2. Play a zone. This can be a basic 3,4,5 zone (12 players) or a 15-player zone, which includes the half-back line. The coach can construct the zone anyway, but must ensure all players know their roles in the zone and follow these exactly, e.g work their area, all players calling opposition designated kicker's name to create confusion, waving arms, punch ball back to goals if ball is kicked into your area, and don't let the ball get over the last line of the zone.
3. Allow short possession to 30m and then play man-on-man or a zone, particularly focusing on shutting down or stopping the second-phase kick. Quite often the first kick is well protected by a majority of coaches using either man-on-man or a zone, however, if there is a clear possession within this structure for the opposition, then the next kick (second kick or phase) can be very damaging.

Basic 3 4 5 Zone (12 players)





Your team kick-ins

There are basically two approaches or types of set plays the team needs to know:

1. Kick-ins against an opposition zone.
2. Kick-ins against an opposition playing man-on-man.

1. Kick-ins against an opposition zone

Points to consider:

- Designated kicker – who? Are they there because they kick the ball long or because they are very accurate and able to pinpoint a target over a shorter distance? And are they the best decision makers?
- Will your team run screens and if so where?
- How do you want to structure your second-phase (pre-second kick)?
- Can your team score quickly from your kick-in? If so, what roles do the forwards play? They must have a role in all kick-in set-ups.
- What assets does your team have which can be used as a set play to the team's advantage – e.g a player with explosive speed may be the receiver against a man-on-man set-up, a strong-marking ruckman may be the preferred option for a long kick in the corridor.
- Will you rotate the kicker? Will the kicker play on and carry the ball?
- If using a screen, how can you ensure players are acting within the rules and not penalised by the umpires? Infringements inside 30m could be costly.

2. Kick-ins against opposition playing man-on-man

Points to consider:

- Will your team play a huddle or other method?
- If playing a huddle, which players will break and present as options and which players will block and act as screens?
- Who will be the second-phase receivers and where?
- Will you create space and where?
- What do your players do if the opposition surrounds your huddle with a ring and picks off breakers?
- Do you have a player who is explosively quick who can be used to your team's advantage?
- How will your forward line set up and are the players familiar with their roles?

Listed below are two examples of set plays against a man-on-man configuration. Training is the best place to practise all set plays and often it is beneficial to play a game of 12-on-12, where teams have 10 kick-ins each and have to maintain possession into their forward line. Players in their teams have the opportunity to design their own play and decide who breaks as receivers, who blocks or screens and who will run hard as a second phase option or crumber.

Forward line set-ups

As a coach, your forward line set-up and structure will depend on a number of conditions including personnel, opposition defenders, any mismatches which can be created to your team's advantage, area guidelines and principles and ground size. This will include how your forward line is set up at centre bounces as well as in general play.

Many times forward line set-ups will be left to the forwards following basic guidelines such as:

- When leading, make leads 30-50m to create and recreate space and quickly move out of areas if you are not used so other forwards can lead into them. Try not to lead too short as this can create congestion.
- Be prepared to work in team plays by employing different leading patterns and working into different areas. It creates more options and more confusion for the defending team."
- Be prepared to work hard in high-reward areas such as front and square of all pack contests which might emerge inside 50m.
- Treat the 50m arc like a basketball key, by constantly moving in and out of space.

Centre bounce tactics

Similar to kick-ins and forward line set-ups, centre bounce tactics must be carefully developed and frequently practised. All midfield players must know each set play and their roles within the square to enable effective execution in a game situation. All players outside square have a vital role to play.

- Clear instruction as to what play is to be used (can be the ruckman's call).
- Early nomination of player receiving, players blocking and protecting and area ball is to be hit (knocked or tapped).
- Process for a bad bounce favouring opposition.
- Process for a bad bounce favouring your team.

This process should be adopted at all stoppages around the ground and at boundary throw-ins where clear communication and nomination is important.

Examples of set plays:

1. Ruck hits ball to 2 or 10 o'clock where one midfielder is a receiver and other midfielder can play a protecting role.
2. Ruck hits ball directly over opposing ruckman's head, midfielder collects and either gets a quick kick or feeds a handball back to another midfielder.
3. Ruck hits ball long to space at centre half-forward, midfielders run on to the ball."
4. Midfielder plays a sweeping role and if ruck grabs ball, he is in a position to handball back to a midfielder playing the defensive sweeper role.

These are only a few examples of centre-bounce set plays. Other tactics play a role, such as if one of your players is being tagged or all players inside the centre square have been told to play with man-on-man accountability.

If opposition plays man-on-man inside the centre square

As coach, this can be a chance to break open a game, particularly if all players know their roles and practise this at training. Process:

1. Opposition has decided to be fully accountable, hence forwards create space at centre half-forward by adopting a horseshoe shape set up to allow a clear run from centre bounce.
2. All midfielders start behind the ruckman with their opponents who have been instructed to play man-on-man. This opens up space to run on to the ball, provided the forwards maintain their horseshoe shape set-up for the centre bounce.

Tactics summary

Most importantly, tactics need to be well planned and constantly practised by the team. Generally, a handful of set plays is enough for players to focus on, along with the team guidelines and themes. Tactics are exciting and provide coaches with the opportunity to be innovative and creative, but tactics can't substitute for a sound game-plan with team rules and guidelines.

OPTIMAL TEAM PERFORMANCE IN ADOLESCENT FOOTBALL

Coaches of adolescent teams strive to find that elusive combination of individual playing talent that will produce the perfect team performance. Consequently, some of the variables that coaches choose to manipulate as part of their search for optimal team performance include:

The position of players in the team

Coaches usually organise teams so that the best players are in dominant roles and the other players in support roles. To also nullify a strength in the opposition or to counter an opposition strategy, coaches often choose to match their players against specific players from opposing teams (see end of this chapter for a description of player positions).

The selection of team leaders

Team leaders are usually chosen for their ability to inspire teammates, make appropriate on-field decisions and to give concise on-field instructions. Occasionally leaders are chosen because coaches hope that the status associated with being a leader will encourage a player to take on more responsibility.

The style of play

It is normal practice for coaches to assess the physical attributes of their team before deciding what long-term style of play would make the best use of each player's attributes and maximise the team's strength. This style of play may need to be altered when the coach is confronted with some of the dramatic effects of adolescent growth spurts.



A team may incorporate a mixture of all the following styles of play.

• **Long kicking to key forward**

A team with high-marking mobile forwards will maximise scoring opportunities by moving the ball quickly out of the centre, kicking long into the forward line.

• **Running, possession game**

The coach of a small-sized team will adopt a running game, with short passing/handballing to maintain possession.

• **Defensive game**

A team which is strongly disciplined can assist each other in all situations, particularly when the opposition have possession.

Developing the individual within the team

A variable that can have a significant effect on overall team performance is the development of each player within the team. Coaches devote many hours of a total training program to improving individual physical and psychological abilities in players. The key is to have the player develop individually while still contributing to the team and following the team game-plan.

In this regard, some of the issues that concern coaches are:

1. It is more difficult to develop a player if the coach needs to assign the player to a support role with minimal participation rather than to a dominant role with maximum participation – e.g. player who sits on the interchange bench.
2. A team's style of play will be based on the qualities of the better players. A coach who has an abundance of small, fast and skilful players may opt for a quick-running style of play. In this situation, a bigger, slower player may not cope with the team's style of play and therefore lack opportunities.
3. Adolescent players may be small, fast players one season but become big, slow players the following season, or the reverse can happen whereby a big, slow athlete can become quick and agile. This adds to the complexity of team selection, program development and individual development.

Having taken this into consideration, there is one remaining quandary for coaches. Would the team perform better if the aim was to focus on improving lesser players rather than to focus on improving better players? Could a lesser player improve more significantly than a better player and would eliminating the lesser player's weakness have a greater impact on overall performance than trying to improve a better player's strengths or by biasing team strategy toward the individual strengths of the better players?

No doubt coaches have experimented with focusing their coaching on better and/or lesser players. While either approach could be deemed appropriate with adults, there is a major concern if this approach is adopted for adolescents. Adolescents have growth spurts which greatly affect their physical abilities and developmental theorists have argued for nurturing the less-capable adolescent because their natural abilities may be yet to mature.

While the argument for equal participation in children's sport is based on the understanding that children should play for fun, the argument in adolescent sport is that the team will perform better and players will be more likely not to drop out if players are given equal opportunities.

One of the best ways to achieve optimal performance in adolescent sport teams is to focus the attention of the coach towards the lesser players. Give them more dominant roles, assign them to leadership roles and include them in overall team strategies. The development of a lesser player should not only occur in the area of physical abilities but also in the area of confidence and self-worth. Teammates and coaches should ensure that all players feel equally important to the success of the team. This can manifest itself in the way team members speak to each other and encourage each other.

POSITIONAL DESCRIPTORS

GENERIC QUALITIES FOR ALL PLAYERS

TECHNICAL/PHYSICAL

- a) Good body player – strength.
- b) Effective kick.
- c) Effective handball.
- d) One touch player – doesn't fumble.
- e) Fitness to compete.
- f) Has speed and acceleration.
- g) Good defensive skills.
- h) Recovery & agility.

TACTICAL/MENTAL

- a) Competitive will – never beaten, won't concede, keeps going, wins own ball.
- b) Understands game-plan including structures, strategies and tactics.
- c) Good decision maker.
- d) Team-first player.
- e) Positional adaptability.
- f) Coachable.

DEFENDERS

Generic Defensive Qualities

- Number 1 – negate and beat opponent.
- Rebound.
- Intercept.
- Win contests.
- Absorb pressure.
- Be adaptable.
- Know when to play man-on-man, zone, cover dangerous opponents and come third man across to spoil.
- Understand space and be able to close down dangerous space, force opponents wide or into the least dangerous areas.
- A capacity to read the play.
- Understand defensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive and defensive kick-in strategies and tactics.
- Know their role in both offensive and defensive kick ins.
- Understand stoppage set-ups.

DEFENDERS

Medium Defender

This type of player has the capacity to play on forwards who play as a link (forward pockets), fifth or sixth (half-forwards). They can usually cover any player from 170-190cm.

If they are of average AFL height themselves (187cm), they should be able to cope with forwards as tall as 190cm, but this must be dependent on their capacity to spoil. In effect, they can play on any forward other than tall forwards (full-forward and centre half-forward) who are 190-200cm. Better kicks and decision-makers will usually take on the kick-in duties and be the option for switch kick or handball receives. Those with great leg speed will often be called upon to play on if used as the designated kicker for kick-ins. They will be called upon to play last line or further upfield on forwards whose role it is to play higher.

Tall Defender

This type of player must be able to play on any of the opposition's tall forwards or the second ruckman who tends to play forward. They must be able to defend well in the air and be able to run with those tall forwards who can push up the ground. They will play deep at times so they will need to be quick off the mark to cover leading forwards. If they are agile and quick, they may be able to play on smaller players.



MIDFIELD

Generic Midfield Qualities

- Speed.
- Speed endurance.
- Endurance combined with work rate.
- Provide link between defence and attack.
- Quick to spread and transition.
- High skill level.
- Win contested ball.
- Absorb pressure.
- Quick hands.
- One-touch players.
- Good communication.
- Understand defensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive and defensive kick-in strategies and tactics.
- Know their role in both offensive and defensive kick-ins.
- Understand stoppage set-ups.

MIDFIELD

Defensive Midfield – Stopper Role

Most teams will have a midfield role for a player who can negate the opposition's best or most dangerous midfield opponent. The player who fulfils this role will:

- Negate opponent's influence, particularly their offensive game.
- Negate opponent around stoppages without giving free kicks away.
- Have strength and can hold position in contests and around stoppages, and must be able to play inside role when required.
- Have the speed to negate opponent's spread and outside game.
- Get the balance right, but with a focus on defence before offence.
- Match opponent's strengths or have different strengths the opponent does not have.

Inside Midfield

Players in this role are usually the best stoppage and contested-ball players in the team. The players who fulfil this role will:

- Be very strong and able to absorb contact and pressure.
- Have strong hands and are one-touch players who can release handballs to advantage under pressure.
- Have a great understanding of stoppages and in particular their ruckman's preferred hit zones and rucking style as well as the opposing ruckman's.
- Be able to read the ball off hands, hold body position and block if that is their role.
- Be able to be quick to get ball to foot.
- Have vision to see options in heavy traffic.
- Inside midfielders tend to be slower in leg speed than outside midfielders so the quicker they are the better as it will assist them in the spread and transition and ground they can cover.

MIDFIELD

Outside Midfield

In many ways outside midfielders are primarily playing the wing role or can be the fifth and sixth (forward description) or one of the three midfielders.

Wings generally play in an on-side or off-side role depending on where ball is, particularly at stoppages.

Run and carry the ball and have a high skill level.

On-side wing at stoppages will provide two major roles:

1. Provide cover at back of stoppage should opponents get through.
2. Provide an option to receive a feedback handball from teammates.

Off-side wing at stoppages will position themselves in middle corridor for:

1. A switch kick option should team win possession from stoppage.
2. A cover in case opponents switch into corridor.

Both wings need to:

1. Have communication with both the forwards and defenders as they link between the two.
2. At centre bounce, both tend to run a defensive arc, depending on forward set-ups.
3. They need leg speed and endurance as they are critical players in spread and transition.

MIDFIELD

Ruckman

Rucking has altered slightly since the recent interchange rule changes. Most teams now select one main ruckman and a second ruckman/forward.

No.1 Ruck

They tend to be anywhere between 195-210cm. Attributes unique to ruckmen are as follows:

- Body strength to hold position at all stoppages and in marking contests.
- Vertical leap for hit-outs and marking.
- Tactically they need to understand opponent's strengths so they can negate them.
- Agility and athleticism.
- Read the bounce and throw-ins during flight.
- Have good control over their hit-outs and work the ball to hit zones.
- Provide follow up at stoppages to win contests or block and protect teammates or tackle opponents.
- Strong mark.
- Pivotal player in stoppages.
- Strong communication.

2nd Ruck (key forward)

The player who plays this role is primarily a key forward who plays in the ruck to provide relief for the No. 1 ruckman.

Their primary role is:

1. As a marking forward who plays majority of game as a forward.
2. The back-up ruckman.
3. Able to kick goals.
4. Is capable of taking on the main ruck role should injury require.

FORWARDS

Generic Forward Qualities

- Endurance combined with work rate.
- Quick to spread and transition.
- Lead and movement – either receiving kick or creating space for other forwards.
- Blocking for each other (legally).
- Kicking goals (convert opportunities).
- Creating scoring opportunities.
- Defensive skills.
- Understand defensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive structures, strategies and tactics.
- Understand offensive and defensive kick-in strategies and tactics.
- Know their role in offensive and defensive kick-ins.
- Understand stoppage set-ups.



FORWARDS

Medium Forwards (fifth and sixth role)

The traditional half-forward role is now referred to as the fifth or sixth role.

The player in this role is generally taller than the link forwards but not big enough to be a tall forward.

They play higher up the ground than the other forwards.

They have the capacity to push up-field and work back into the forward line.

At stoppages:

1. They push up to stoppages to place pressure on any opposition player (usually the wing) who sits off the contest and also be able to get back hard into the forward line if team wins possession. Either to crumb or find space to receive a pass.
2. They can also push up to cover the other wing on the off-side should the opposition win ball and try and switch into corridor.
3. They need to be aware of their direct opponent dropping off them and also if they continue to play high in general play they need to get dangerous to make their direct opponent accountable.
4. They need to keep taking positions which are dangerous and where they can work back into the forward line, but must be careful not to take other forwards' leading space or they should be in a position to crumb long kicks.

Link Forwards

Link forwards tend to be the smaller, mid-sized forwards with leg speed and agility.

They are genuine goalkickers through their ability to find space to lead or gather the ball; they crumb well and take their opportunities.

They are very good at applying defensive pressure because of their speed.

At stoppages:

- They fulfil a role where they are approximately 30-40m from stoppage. They usually work in a square formation with tall forwards and they take up the front two positions on square formation.
- They force their opponents to be accountable.
- They are quick to adjust to outcome of stoppage. They transition to defending or either crumb or mark quick kicks forward or find space forward.

FORWARDS

Tall Forwards

The tall forwards fulfil the traditional role that the centre half-forward and full-forward played. Their role is as follows:

- Most teams play with two tall forwards who are the key marking targets.
- Their leading patterns generally dictate the way the other forwards must position and lead.
- They are certainly required to take contested marks or at the very least bring the ball to the ground and to the front of marking contests.
- One of the tall forwards could fulfil the role of the second ruckman and take stoppages in forward line.
- They tend to work in tandem with each other and will take turns playing from deep in forward line to pushing up higher.
- As they are the pivotal players among the forwards, they need to communicate well and organise the forward structures.

At stoppages:

1. Will form a square with link forwards, taking up the back two positions on the square furthest from the stoppage (between 60-70m)
2. They will be the target for a quick kick from a stoppage, but a leading option should their team win possession and break from the stoppage with time and space to kick.

CONDITIONING YOUTH FOOTBALLERS



Chapter 9

Conditioning Youth Footballers

PRINCIPLES OF FITNESS TRAINING

Sports scientists and coach educators continuously stress the importance of using scientific training principles in training programs for players.

The training principles being referred to are:

1. Progressive overload.
2. Specificity.
3. Individual differences.
4. Variation.
5. Reversibility.

These principles form the backbone of any physical training program to achieve success. Too often, however, the training principles are not actually applied to training programs. Alternatively, coaches focus on only one of the principles without considering how the principles are related and affect the player's performance. A good example of this is the way some coaches use the term specificity to justify the type of training they are using with their team. Variety is a key to maintaining enthusiasm, yet many coaches continue to work on the same fitness qualities throughout the year because they believe that all training must be specific to sport.

ESTABLISHING NEEDS

To determine how best to use training principles to improve the fitness of the team, the coach needs to identify exactly what it is that the players are doing during the game and to understand the requirements of Australian Football.

Long-term performance improvement is best achieved through planned year-round training programs. With correct planning, the players are able to improve all physical attributes and skill performance while following the principles of progressive overload, specificity, regularity, variation and individual difference.

FITNESS FOR PLAYERS

The fitness demands of Australian Football have changed dramatically over the past 10 to 15 years as the nature of the game has changed. The intensity of the game, with its emphasis on running and play on at all costs, has necessitated that greater consideration be given to the physical conditioning of the players. Footballers today may cover over 15km a game, performing many short high-intensity sprint efforts over distances of between five to 30m and must also perform various physical activities such as kicking, marking, handballing, tackling, bumping, jumping and landing. The specific demands of the various playing positions require that one or more of the fitness components described below need to be developed for successful performance.

There are five guiding principles that a coach should follow in developing a fitness program. These training principles are:

1. Progressive overload

For gains to occur in any component of fitness, the player must be subjected to gradually increasing training loads. As the player's body adapts, progressive overload can be applied by monitoring the following variables:

- a) Frequency of training – number of training sessions a week.
- b) Duration of a training session – the length of time given to each session (volume).
- c) Intensity of training – the effort put into the session.



Whatever the details of the method used, the rate of work should be progressively increased. Weights are increased in weight training, new targets set in circuit training, harder demands are made on the respiratory cardiovascular system in endurance training etc. It is now understood that the greatest gains in physical conditioning occur during periods of recovery and rest between hard training sessions. It is the body's response to the stress of the training that leads to increased strength and endurance.

2. Specificity

All fitness training must be specific to the demands of the game. With running training, the intensity, the distance covered and the number of repetitions must be specific to the playing requirements. The demands of the various playing positions should also be considered.

To maintain the player's interest, it's important to vary the fitness program by using a variety of specific activities. Some of these can be adapted from other sports. For example, the running and jumping components of many team sports are similar, therefore a worthwhile addition to the footballer's fitness training program may be an occasional game of another team sport.

3. Individual differences

Individual differences exist between the levels of fitness and the response to training for players in all sports. A training program must cater for individual needs and preferences. In team sports such as Australian Football, a coach should have an overall plan and modify it for each player/group of players, as players will not respond identically to a method of exercise – e.g. some players respond to hard training better than others and some may require longer periods to recover from a heavy training session or game. Coaches should recognise these differences and adjust the program accordingly by either reducing the training load or lengthening the recovery periods. Do not individualise to the detriment of the overall team.

4. Variation

Variety can help maintain a player's interest in training. By varying the training venue or by applying different training methods, a coach can ensure his/her players are enthusiastic and willing to improve.

You may like to use the following ideas to add variety to conditioning programs:

- Change the practice venue.
- Change the mode of activity. Endurance can be improved using fartlek, continuous or interval training.
- If the sport requires several different physical capacities, change the emphasis from one to another when possible.
- Alternate between competitive and non-competitive practice regimes.
- Change the number of repetitions or sets, or the tempo or recovery between sets, or change the speed of repetitions and exercises.
- Include an occasional game of another team sport. The more closely related an alternative activity is to Australian Football, the more beneficial it will be.

5. Reversibility

Development of fitness is reversible. If a player stops training, either by ceasing the activity altogether or by reducing the training load, acquired fitness levels will diminish accordingly. Players who have been forced to become inactive due to an injury, will usually adapt quickly to a practice program when they restart activity. The longer the time a player has trained, the slower the loss of physical conditioning will be if training is halted.

COMPONENTS OF FITNESS FOR AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

The following section will assist the coach in planning and implementing a complete fitness program for his/her team. The running nature of the game and the various activities of kicking, marking, tackling, handballing, bumping and jumping demand players develop a number of important fitness components.

Success in physical conditioning will largely depend on how the basic components of fitness can be fitted into the training program and finding the most effective way of improving each component. To participate in football, a player should reach an adequate level in each of the following components of fitness:

<p>SPEED Speed has long been identified as a major fitness requirement in football. This characteristic is important for gaining and retaining possession, through leading, running at a loose ball and breaking clear of an opponent.</p> 	<p>The development of speed is best achieved by the following activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical training – the principles of basic sprinting technique include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Run on toes * High knee lift * Slight lean forward * Use arms to drive forward * Run in a straight line 2. Acceleration sprints A 150m run-through may be split into three sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The first 50m to gradually build up speed * The middle 50m to maximum speed and * The final 50m to gradual deceleration 3. Reaction drills This type of speed training involves the player reacting as quickly as possible to a call from the coach and to accelerate from a standing position, running on the spot or while striding out in a run through. <p>Testing for speed * 10/20/40m sprint</p>
<p>REPEATED SPRINT ABILITY Australian Football is a team sport that involves intermittent play periods, characterised by repeated high-intensity (fast running sprinting) efforts with brief recovery periods. This characteristic is important for regularly reproducing maximal sprint efforts to gain and retain possession of the ball or shut down an opponent's space.</p>	<p>The development of repeated sprint ability is best achieved by the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical training (as per speed section above) 2. Short sprint running training <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sprint distances ranging from 30 and 80m b. Sprint intensities ranging from 90 to 100 per cent c. Sets from 4 to 5 d. Reps from 4 to 6 e. Rest from 1:6 to 1:4 3. Football-specific training drills <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. This type of repeated sprint ability training involves generic Australian Football training drills with monitored and modified sprint distances, number of efforts and recovery breaks. <p>Testing for speed 6 x 30m sprint starting every 20 secs. Record total time for all efforts.</p>
<p>AGILITY Agility is closely related to speed and refers to the ability to change direction quickly. Players need to be able to twist and turn, get up from the ground and accelerate away from an opponent.</p>	<p>A coach can develop a simple agility run involving short sprints and sharp turns around a set of markers. The degree of difficulty can be varied according to the age and ability level of the team.</p>

ENDURANCE

The basic fitness requirement is an ability to run and keep on the move for the duration of the game. Endurance is a pre-requisite for all playing conditions and should, therefore, during early pre-season preparation, constitute a major element of the fitness program.



The development of endurance is best achieved by the following activities:

1. Continuous running

Running over relatively long distances up to about 8km at a steady pace.

2. Fartlek running

Varied bursts of faster running throughout a session of continuous running – e.g. a series of varied bursts of speed from 10 to 200m, interspersed with periods of jogging.

3. Longer, slower interval running

A series of repeated running efforts at a specific speed and over a specified distance is alternated with periods of recovery (usually worked on a work-to-rest ratio of 1:1 or 1:2. A work-to-rest ratio of 1:2 indicates the recovery period is twice the work period).

4. Shorter, faster interval running

As the season approaches and the players' endurance levels improve, the workload needs to become more specific. A shorter and faster running schedule should be introduced. The intensity of effort can be increased while the distance is reduced.

Testing for endurance:

- 20m shuttle run
- 3km time trial

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility refers to the range of movement possible in various joints. The more supple or flexible the joint, the greater the range over which the muscles surrounding that joint can operate and work more efficiently.



Flexibility exercises will:

- Maximise the muscle range of motion.
- Prevent injuries to muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- Improve speed and agility.

Flexibility is best developed through static stretching. Other sport specific methods include:

- PNF stretching.
- Ballistic – moving or dynamic stretching. Stretching must be strictly supervised and should be preceded by large muscle group warm-up activities such as jogging and easy striding.

Testing for flexibility

- Sit and reach.

STRENGTH

In football, strength is important to the player, particularly in the muscles of his legs, shoulders, hands and abdomen. Strength is the ability to exert maximum muscle tension (force) for a short period of time. Strength is important in football but power, of which strength is an ingredient, is even more essential. Power is best witnessed in a game when a player leaps for a mark, crashes through a pack, breaks a tackle or takes off quickly from different starting positions. Power is simply a combination of speed and strength.

Strength building

Basic strength-building methods include:

- Body weight exercises – players use own body weight for resistance.
- Partner exercises – players use partner for resistance by either adopting wrestling holds and working in opposition to a partner or by having the partner as a dead weight.
- Free weights – dumb-bells/barbells are used to perform a variety of resistance exercises.
- Fixed apparatus – e.g. specific exercise stations.
- Circuit training – a series of exercises performed in quick succession.

Testing for power

- Vertical jump.
- Standing long jump.

LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Balyi and Hamilton identified four important stages that outline long-term athletic development, and this model is outlined below. During the fundamental and training to train stage of the model, young players learn the basics of athleticism and how to train and compete. During the training to compete stage, players learn how to taper and compete under all kinds of conditions. During the training to win stage, when players are fully trained, they will peak and perform well consistently.

Characteristics of the Training to Compete Stage

The Training to Compete Stage is the third stage of long-term player development processes as outlined by Balyi and Hamilton, for those who are aspiring to participate in the talented player pathway. The stage relates specifically to adolescents aged 13 to 18.

The training to compete stage of a player's development can be described as the phase of preparation which aims to:

- Provide high intensity and specificity of training all year round.
- Optimise technical, tactical, mental and fitness preparation, taking into consideration maturation levels (physical, cognitive/mental and emotional).
- Teach players to perform under a variety of competitive conditions by exposing them to all competitive conditions during training and selected competitions.
- Maximise players' preparation by modelling competition activities, including taper.
- Ensure that the players' training and competition programs and sport-specific technical-tactical activities are fully integrated with sport science and sport medicine programs.

The following table provides an overview of long-term player development, with special reference to the Training to Compete Stage.

FUNdamental	Training to Train	Training to Compete	Training to Win
<p>Chronological/ biological age Male and female: 6-10</p>	<p>Biological age Male: 10-14 Female: 10-13</p>	<p>Chronological/ biological age Male: 14-18. Female: 13-17</p>	<p>Biological age Male: 18+ Female: 17+</p>
<p>Fun and participation. General overall development. Athleticism: ABCs of running, jumping and throwing. ABCs of movement agility, balance, co-ordination and speed. Speed, power and endurance through FUN and games. Proper running, jumping, and throwing technique. Medicine ball, Swiss ball and own body exercises for strength. Introduce to simple rules and ethics of sport.</p>	<p>Emphasis on general physical conditioning. Shoulder, elbow, core, spine and ankle stability. FUNdamental technical skills, progressively more specific skills towards the end of the stage. FUNdamentals of tactical preparation. Participation in complementary sports (similar energy systems and movement pattern requirements). Individualisation of fitness and technical training. Introduction to mental preparation. FUNdamentals of ancillary capacities.</p>	<p>Sport and individual specific physical conditioning. Shoulder, elbow, core, spine and ankle stability. Sport-specific technical and playing skills under competitive conditions. Advanced tactical preparation. Individualisation of technical/tactical skills. Advanced mental preparation. Sport and individual specific 'ancillary capacities'.</p>	<p>Maintenance (or possible improvement) of physical capacities. Shoulder, elbow, core, spine and ankle stability. Further development of technical, tactical and playing skills. Modelling all possible aspects of training and performance. Frequent prophylactic breaks. All aspects of training. Individualised. Develop further ancillary capacities (there is no ceiling limit).</p>
<p>Talent identification General sport participation 5-6 times per week.</p>	<p>Recruitment Sport-specific training two times a week, with participation in other sports.</p>	<p>Specialisation Sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness training up to six times a week.</p>	<p>High performance Sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness training 9-12 times a week.</p>

10

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF INJURIES



Chapter 10

Prevention and Management of Injuries

The role of the football coach covers a range of responsibilities. One of the most important roles is to provide an environment that does not predispose players to unnecessary injury. An effective coach must be concerned with the prevention, immediate care and rehabilitation of injuries. Coaches must be aware of warm-up routines and methods used to prepare the players for competition. Coaches should also ensure that all players have the appropriate gear, such as mouthguards, to avoid injury. Players must be taught the correct way to perform the body contact skills of the game and how to protect themselves from serious injury. Any player who is injured during a game must have their injury dealt with immediately and in a professional manner. It is important that qualified personnel make a diagnosis, and if there is any doubt about the seriousness of a player's injury then they should be kept off the ground.

A coach must ensure that a player undergoes the correct rehabilitation from injury before he/she returns. It is important that communication occurs between player, coach and a qualified medical personnel before a decision is made regarding the player's return.

PREVENTING INJURIES

Many football injuries can be prevented by players, coaches, officials and clubs. Giving priority attention to safety issues will also improve performance in Australian Football. Training programs should also be designed to maximise the player's capabilities and ensure that the long-term team objectives are achieved, while caring for the well-being of the individual player. The coach's emphasis should be on coaching the players to be preventative and aim to minimise injury wherever possible.

The following safety tips apply to all players, irrespective of the level at which they play.

Pre-season safety

- All competitive players should undertake appropriate pre-season conditioning. Advice about the content of the pre-season training program should be sought from a coach or fitness advisor.
- All players should develop football skills and good technique before playing in competitive games.
- New participants should undergo a pre-participation medical screening examination with a qualified and experienced practitioner.

Pre-game safety

- All players should warm up for about 20 minutes before each game. This should include active stretching to increase range of movement and slow jogging which progresses to more intense running activities, with and without a football.
- Players should have a balanced, nutritional diet.
- Players should ensure that they are adequately hydrated before a game.
- Players should seek professional advice about the most appropriate boots to wear for their playing conditions.
- Players should apply sunscreen and reapply it during breaks in play on sunny days.
- All players should make sure that they are fully aware of the rules of the game, particularly as they relate to safety.

Safety during the game

- All players should wear a mouthguard at all times during training and competition. If possible, players should wear custom-made mouthguards.
- Players with a history of head injury should seek professional advice about the appropriateness of headgear.
- Players with a history of ankle injury should wear some form of external ankle support, e.g. taping.
- High protectors may be useful for players who have suffered a recent cork thigh or those with a history of significant cork thighs.
- All players should ensure that they remain hydrated during the game by drinking water or a sports drink during every break.
- Officials should use the 'order off' rule to discourage and deter illegal and potentially injurious play.
- Umpires should strictly enforce the rules of the game at all levels.
- All bleeding players should be removed from the field until the risk of further bleeding is controlled.
- All clubs should have qualified trainers or first-aiders on-site to provide initial management of injuries that occur on the field.
- Injured players requiring further treatment should seek prompt medical attention for their injury.
- Advice from the injured player's treating health professional should always be sought before a decision about return to play is made.



PREVENTION OF INJURY IS BETTER THAN CURE

An injury to a player can be frustrating and occur even with all the appropriate training and coaching methods. 'Prevention is better than cure' is the golden rule and coaches must ensure training programs are properly planned and that facilities and equipment are adequate and properly maintained.

Warm-up

Warming up is very important as part of any competition or training session and is an essential part of minimising the risk of injury. The main benefit of a warm-up is that it is an excellent tool for injury prevention. Warming up results in improved flexibility and prepares the mind, heart, muscles and joints for the activity ahead.

General guidelines for a warm-up

- 10-15 mins in duration.
- Low-intensity activities first, building to higher-intensity movement.
- Activities should move from general to specific.
- Activities should be specific to the needs of the playing group and weather conditions.
- A good indication of a sound warm-up is a light sweat.

Always remember...

- **Modify the warm-up to suit the needs of the playing group.**

Cool-down – recommendations

An effective cool-down consists of a gradual reduction in activity levels for 10 to 15 minutes, while still putting the body through a full range of motion.

- A slow, easy jog or walk incorporating general stretching is normally adequate.
- It is more appropriate for static stretching after competition as the players' core temperatures are elevated and muscles are more elastic.
- Complete some active recovery immediately following a game (general body movement and static stretching) in addition to next day recovery session (a water-based recovery session is best as it is non weight-bearing and a full range of motion can be exercised).

STRETCHING FOR GAMES AND TRAINING

Stretching

The major purpose of stretching is to increase flexibility and maintain muscle balance on either side of a joint. Without stretching, muscles will gradually lose their flexibility and may fail to respond effectively during activity. An injury could be the result. Stretching enables both physical and mental preparation for upcoming training sessions and games. It can also reduce tension to relax the body, enhance body awareness, promote circulation and assist with co-ordination by allowing free movement.

Players generally perform stretches in three areas:

1. As part of a warm-up
2. As part of a cool-down
3. Flexibility training

- Before stretching, it is important for all players to have completed a warm-up sufficient to get enough blood flow to the areas being stretched. This can involve walking, riding an exercise bike, slow jogging or a fun warm-up activity.
- With each stretch, make sure your players know where they should feel the stretch.

Some stretching tips

- Stretch both before and after exercise.
- Stretch gently and slowly; never bounce or stretch rapidly.
- Do not hold your breath when stretching; breathing should be slow and easy.
- Hold each stretch for 10-20 seconds.
- Stretch alternative muscle groups.
- Stretch each muscle group two to three times.

Stretches make up only a part of a pre game/training warm-up. A complete warm-up should include stretching with an active warm-up.

- Bending for the ball.
- Kicking.
- Running.
- Changing direction.

All activities should start slowly and gradually move towards match speed. This will take your stretches and incorporate them into better movement flexibility.

When cooling down, the stretches performed in the warm-up can be repeated to aid in muscle recovery. Stretching following the training session helps to prevent areas tightening and removes waste products from the muscles produced by activity.

Examples



• Low back extension

Push head and shoulders up with arms. Back is relaxed and pelvis stays on the floor. There should be no pain associated with this stretch.

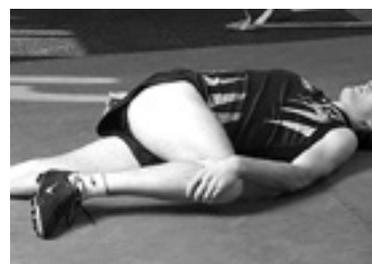
Stretch area: Abdominals, front of hip region and mobilising lower back.



• Low back flexion

Pull knees into chest and roll into a ball.

Stretch area: Lower back region.



• Low back rotation

Lie on your back, keeping the shoulders flat. Lift one leg across to other side. Gently push further with opposite hand.

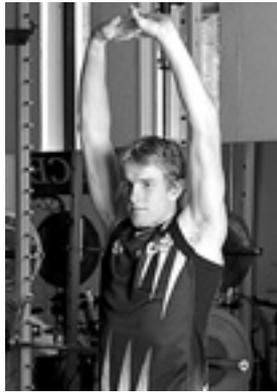
Stretch area: Side of back and the back of the moving hip.



• Side bends

Put one hand over your head and lean to opposite side. Other hand rests on the hip. Try not to twist.

Stretch area: On the side of the body, under the arm that is above you.



• Shoulder flexion

Hold hands together and reach them up above your head until your elbows are straight. Keep core on and back straight, not arched.

Stretch area: Shoulders/arms or between shoulder blades.



• Hip flexors

Set into a lunge position with one knee on the ground. Keep back straight and core on. Lean forward.

Stretch area: On the front of the hip of the rear leg.



• Gluteals (a)

Lay leg out in front of you with knee bent at 90 degrees. Lean your chest forward over your thigh, keeping back straight.

Stretch area: In butt of front leg.



• Gluteals (b)

Lay on back and pull knee and ankle of one leg across chest with both hands.

Stretch area: In butt of leg being pulled across.



• Adductors (a)

Sit with back straight and feet together, or just crossed. Gently push knees apart.

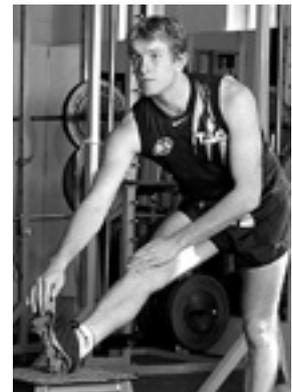
Stretch area: Inside of both thighs.



• Adductors (b)

Stand and lunge to the side. Keep core on and back straight.

Stretch area: Inside of thigh of straight leg.



• Hamstrings

Stand and place foot on chair, fence or partner's hand. Keep back and knee of front leg straight, and then lean chest forward over thigh. Repeat with knee of front leg slightly bent.

Stretch area: The back of the thigh of the front leg. Stretch area will be different when knee is bent.



• Quadriceps

Stand and grab one foot and pull toward butt. Keep back straight.

Stretch area: Front of thigh.



• Calf (a)

Stand, put hands on wall. Put one leg back, maintain a straight knee while leaning forward.

Stretch area: Back of lower leg.

• Calf (b)

Stand and put one foot forward. Bend the knee over this foot and keep heel on floor.

Stretch area: Back of lower leg and achilles.

Specific Safety Considerations

DEALING WITH EMERGENCIES

Planning what to do when an emergency occurs is an essential part of risk management. Youth leagues must be conversant with procedures and able to deal with emergencies so young players are well cared for.

Leagues should ensure a person with current first-aid qualifications is available at all games and seek medical opinion when:

- the health of a participant is questionable;
- recovery from illness/injury is uncertain; and
- a participant is injured during training/competition.

When medical advice cannot be obtained, the league and/or club should not allow the player to participate.

A first-aid kit must be available at training and competition venues. Sport-specific rescue equipment should also be accessible. Emergencies should be formally reported, discussed, and changes made to procedures if needed.

Trainers

Trainers are a key element of safety and player welfare in football clubs. In accordance with AFL policy, and in the interests of meeting community expectations for the provision of first aid and trainers services, all matches and training sessions involving youth players should be attended by a qualified person (preferably a Level 1 Trainer accreditation or, at a minimum, a sports first-aid or AFL emergency response coordinator). Clubs should always have an appropriately and adequately stocked first aid kit and appropriate emergency transport equipment on hand and someone qualified to use them.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Special medical conditions

Some medical conditions may create concern for coaches and parents. Generally, active sports are beneficial to most people with medical conditions. However, a medical certificate should be provided if there is potential for the condition interfering with participation, or playing football could adversely influence the condition.

Some conditions may require coaches to be informed if specific medical assistance could be necessary.

Common conditions such as asthma, epilepsy and diabetes require an emergency management plan to be provided. Players with heart problems or who have lost one of a paired organ system (e.g. eye, kidney, testicle) need a specific medical clearance to play.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Playing football, as with all team sports, involves players living and training in close contact with others. While this increases the risk of contracting common illnesses such as respiratory infections, skin infections or gastroenteritis. The following simple measures can reduce the chances of transmission of these infections:

- avoiding sharing drink bottles;
- washing hands regularly;
- avoiding spitting;
- a generally clean environment in change rooms.

These specific rules apply to players with acute bleeding during a game:

- they should be removed from the ground immediately and the bleeding controlled;
- they may require medical attention;
- all open wounds should be covered before returning to play;
- all clothing contaminated with blood should be removed and washed.

These measures reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne viruses.

ILLNESS AND PARTICIPATION

During times of illness, the player's body is particularly vulnerable, with an increased risk of damage to tissues or organs.

When ill or feverish, players should not participate.



Environmental Conditions

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants. Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training or competition. Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions considered extreme, due to their residents' acclimatisation to the local environment. When scheduling matches, leagues and schools must always consider the player's health, giving careful consideration to the following environmental conditions.

Heat

Vigorous exercise in sport places some people at risk of heat illness. Even in cool weather, heat illness may occur in people exercising at high intensity for more than 45 minutes.

The risk of heat illness is obviously greater in hot and humid weather because:

- during high-intensity exercise in hot weather people may not be able to produce enough perspiration to adequately cool themselves; and
- high humidity may prevent adequate evaporation of sweat.

Heat illness

It is important that players and coaches are aware and react quickly to the following symptoms of heat injury.

- Fatigue.
- Nausea.
- Headache.
- Confusion.
- Light headedness.

Beat-the-heat emergency plan

- Lie the player down.
- Loosen and remove excessive clothing – cool by fanning.
- Give cool water to drink if conscious.
- Apply wrapped ice packs to groins and armpits.
- SEEK MEDICAL ASSISTANCE.

In high temperatures and humid conditions, leagues and schools should consider postponing scheduled matches to a cooler part of the day or cancelling them. It is recommended youth football providers follow the Sports Medicine Australia guidelines available on their website sma.org.au.

Fluid balance

Substantial amounts of water are lost through perspiration when exercising vigorously in the heat, so fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Participants do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity. They must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

- Water is the most appropriate drink for re-hydration. However, diluted cordial or sports drinks may be supplied. Flavoured drinks may be more palatable to children who have consistently poor drinking habits during exercise.
- Players should be encouraged to have their own drink bottles. This ensures that each player has access to an adequate level of replacement fluids and reduces the risk of contamination and passing on of viruses.
- Where cups and a large container are supplied, cups should not be dipped into the container. Used cups should be washed or disposed of after use.
- Cups should not be shared.

Sun protection

Leagues and clubs have a responsibility to protect participants, to the greatest extent practical, from the dangers of sun exposure. Participants should be encouraged to protect themselves against sun exposure by applying a 30+ sunscreen.

Leagues and clubs should also maximise the provision of shaded areas at venues and events, and/or erect artificial shade.

Sports Medicine Australia has developed a policy related to preventing heat illness in sport. These general safety guidelines, which are specific to geographical locations, are available on the SMA website at sma.org.au.

Cold weather conditions

Cold weather conditions can increase the chance of injuries should muscles not remain warm and flexible. Because long breaks will cause the body to cool down, coaches should be vigilant in avoiding unnecessarily long pauses and be prepared to warm up players periodically throughout all training sessions.

In wet or cold conditions

- Avoid having players standing exposed for long periods.
- Ensure players change out of any wet clothing as soon as practicable.
- Ensure players wear appropriate clothing, suitable to the conditions.

In extremely cold temperatures, leagues and schools should consider postponing or cancelling scheduled matches.

The AFL recommends leagues and schools apply common sense guidelines to climatic conditions that exist within their respective regions. Sports Medicine Australia (SMA) has state and territory branches and should be consulted when developing appropriate local policies to manage environmental conditions.

Lightning

The AFL has produced a lightning policy for adoption by junior leagues and clubs. The policy provides a step-by-step process to assist volunteers when making the difficult decision to postpone matches and or remove participants from the playing surface.

The full policy can be found at afl.com.au/policies.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Boundary line

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, the distance between the boundary line and oval fencing should be a minimum of three metres.

Goal-post padding

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, all fixed goal and behind posts must be padded as follows:

- a minimum of 35 millimetres thick foam padding, covered in canvas or painted;
- a minimum height of 2.5 metres from the bottom of each goal and behind post;
- a suitable width to allow the padding to be fixed around each goal and behind post; and
- the padding must be securely attached around each goal and behind post.

Protective Devices

Unlike many other contact sports, football has evolved as a game played with a minimum of protective equipment.

Mouthguards

A mouthguard, however, is essential for all players for both training and games.

Mouthguards have a definite role in preventing injuries to the teeth and face and for this reason they are strongly recommended at all levels of football.

Dentally fitted laminated mouthguards offer the best protection. 'Boil and bite' type mouthguards are not recommended for any level of play as they can dislodge during play and block the airway.

There is no definitive scientific evidence that mouthguards prevent concussion or other brain injuries in Australian Football.

Helmets

There is no definitive scientific evidence that helmets prevent concussion or other brain injuries in Australian Football. They will however prevent soft tissue injuries. There is some evidence that younger players who wear a helmet may change their playing style, and receive more head impacts as a result. Accordingly, helmets are not recommended for the prevention of concussion. Helmets may have a role in the protection of players on return to play following specific injuries (e.g. face or skull fractures).

Spectacles

Players who wish to wear spectacles during matches and training sessions should wear spectacles with plastic frames and plastic lenses. A band must also hold the spectacles on securely. This will minimise the risk of injury to the player, teammates and opposition players.



FIRST-AID AND INJURY PREVENTION PRINCIPLES

A person appropriately trained in first-aid should be present at all training sessions and games as inadequate first-aid may aggravate the injury. The 'golden rule' in managing an injury is **'do no further damage'**.

FIRST-AID REQUIREMENTS

Ensure your team/venue has the following:

- A first-aid kit.
- Ice.
- Stretcher.
- A trained first-aid person who can use the above items (recommended accredited sports first-aider or sports trainer).
- Access to a phone.
- Transport.
- Knowledge of the location and contact details of doctor, clinic, nearest suitable hospital, ambulance.
- Accessibility to the playing area by ambulance.

ROLE OF THE COACH IN INJURY MANAGEMENT

Appropriate initial management of an injury can significantly reduce the overall recovery time for players. Coaches should therefore be well prepared for any eventuality and, in the absence of appropriate medical facilities, carry their own first-aid kits. This should include the following:

- Elastic bandages.
- Disposable gloves.
- Scissors.
- Alcohol swabs.
- Gauze pads.
- Rigid strapping tape.
- Ice/cold packs.
- Steri-strips.
- Skin disinfectant.

PREVENTION OF LOWER LIMB INJURIES – FOOTYFIRST

Lower limb injuries – particularly hamstring and groin muscle strains/tears and knee and ankle ligament sprains/tears – are the most common types of injuries in Australian football. They occur most frequently during competition and often cause players to be subbed out of games, miss training and be unavailable for selection.

What is FootyFirst?

FootyFirst is a Five level progressive exercise program specifically designed to replace the traditional warm up used at community football training. It takes about 20 minutes to complete and does not require any special equipment. FootyFirst is targeted at preventing common lower limb injuries in community Australian Football players. It includes a warm-up followed by exercises and drills to prevent groin, hamstring, knee and ankle injuries.

FootyFirst should be part of all training sessions. It should be completed at least twice a week. Performed correctly and frequently, FootyFirst will improve performance and reduce injury risk. It will improve players' leg strength and control.

The resources to support the FootyFirst program include a comprehensive coaches' manual, a series of posters and videos of how to do the exercises properly. These are available on the AFL Community website aflcommunityclub.com.au.

Why use FootyFirst

Every football coach knows that reducing injuries improves the chances of winning more games. Injury prevention isn't just luck.

A trial of the training program that underpinned many of the FootyFirst exercises halved the rate of knee injuries and reduced the rate of lower limb injuries by 22 per cent among community Australian Football players who participated in the program.

How to implement FootyFirst

Our experience shows that the keys to successfully implementing FootyFirst are:

1. Senior coach "buy-in" to the program. Unless the senior coach supports the program and cares whether it is done regularly and properly, it is unlikely to become a regular part of training.
2. Find someone with the interest, knowledge and skills needed to lead the program. It is crucial that a respected person at your club who knows what they are doing (or is willing to learn) leads the program and is responsible for the program.
3. Persist. It will take time to get any new program or change embedded in your club or team.
4. Establish FootyFirst as your 'standard' warm up. Set expectations that players will do the program consistently and properly – make it mandatory and enforce it for all players.
5. Explain to the players, coaches and support staff why FootyFirst is being introduced. Promote FootyFirst because it:
 - a) Has the potential to provide the team and club with a competitive advantage
 - b) Has the potential to also improve the football performance of individual players
 - c) Is better, more efficient and more effective than your current warm-up if you are not already doing FootyFirst
6. Get senior player support. Make sure a couple of respected players (e.g. the club captain) are on board.
7. Explain to the players what each FootyFirst exercise is designed to achieve. Players are more likely to do the FootyFirst exercises regularly and properly if they understand what the exercises are meant to be doing and how they will help them.
8. Get the playing group to take ownership of the program. Even if the FootyFirst 'leader' is not there, players should still do the exercises anyway.
9. Point out when players are improving. It is surprising how quickly players get better at all the FootyFirst exercises.
10. Be creative when introducing the FootyFirst exercises into your program. Build some of the FootyFirst exercises into other drills and activities. Set out stations with FootyFirst exercise instructions for players before they arrive for training. Provide feedback on jumping and landing, and change of direction technique during all football activities
11. Use the FootyFirst resources. Show the players the FootyFirst video. Put the FootyFirst posters up around the club. Leave a FootyFirst manual around the club room.
12. Develop a FootyFirst succession plan. Have a plan to ensure that, if your coach or the FootyFirst 'champion' or leader leaves the club, FootyFirst will continue. This plan could include:
 - a) Ensuring FootyFirst is an expectation for any new coach or fitness, strength and conditioning or high performance person.
 - b) Making sure the program's success does not depend only on one or two people – make it a whole club priority with multiple 'champions'.
 - c) Keeping injury records so you can show everyone that it works and is worth continuing at your club.



MANAGEMENT OF INJURIES

When injuries occur, there are many decisions that need to be made. The most important of these for the coach is whether the player should continue to participate or not. Coaches should always err on the side of caution as resuming participation may cause further injury.

Before allowing a player to return to training and competition, the player should be able to answer yes to the following questions:

- Can the player move the injured part easily through a full range of movement (as compared to the other side of the body that was not injured) without pain?
- Has the injury area fully gained its strength?

The following diagram outlines the effective procedure in the first-aid management of sports injuries.

SOFT TISSUE INJURY MANAGEMENT (RICER)

	HOW	WHY
R Rest	Place the player in a comfortable position, preferably lying down. The injured part should be immobilised and supported.	Activity will promote bleeding by increasing blood flow.
I Ice	The conventional methods are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crushed ice in a wet towel/plastic bag. • Immersion in icy water. • Commercial cold packs wrapped in wet towel. • Cold water from the tap is better than nothing. Apply for 20 minutes every two hours for the first 48 hours. CAUTION: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not apply ice directly to skin as ice burns can occur. • Do not apply ice to people who are sensitive to cold or have circulatory problems. • Children have a lower tolerance to ice. 	Ice reduces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling. • Pain. • Muscle spasm. • Secondary damage to the injured area.
C Compression	Apply a firm wide compression bandage over a large area covering the injured part, as well as above and below the injured part.	Compression: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces bleeding and swelling. • Provides support for the injured part.
E Elevation	Raise injured area above the level of the heart at all possible times.	Elevation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces bleeding and swelling. • Reduces pain.
R Referral	Refer to a suitably qualified professional such as a doctor or physiotherapist for a definitive diagnosis and ongoing care.	Early referral for a definitive diagnosis to ascertain the exact nature of the injury and to gain expert advice on the rehabilitation program required.

This regime should be used for all ligament sprains, muscle strains and bruises.

Remember with injuries of this kind, you should avoid:

Heat – increases bleeding.

Running – exercise too soon can make the injury worse.

Massage – increases swelling and bleeding in the first 48-72 hours.

WHEN AN INJURY OCCURS, REMEMBER S.T.O.P.

S

STOP

STOP the player from participating or moving.

STOP the game if necessary.

T

TALK

TALK to the injured player.

- What happened?
- How did it happen?
- What did you feel?
- Where does it hurt?
- Does it hurt anywhere else?
- Have you injured this part before?

O

OBSERVE

OBSERVE while talking to the player.

GENERAL

- Is the player distressed?
- Is the player lying in an unusual position/posture?

INJURY SITE

- Is there any swelling?
- Is there any difference when compared to the other side/limb?
- Is there tenderness when touched?
- Can the player move the injured part?

DO NOT TOUCH OR ASSIST THE PLAYER IN ANY WAY.

(Only move the injured part to the point of pain)

- If yes,
 - does it hurt to move?
 - is the range of movement restricted?
 - how does it feel, compared to normal?
 - how does it feel, compared to other side/limb?

P

PREVENT FURTHER INJURIES

3 OPTIONS

PROVIDE A FEW WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

PROVIDE A FEW WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

1 SEVERE INJURY

Suspected head, facial, spinal, chest, abdomen injuries, fractures or major bleeding.

GET HELP

GET PROFESSIONAL HELP
DON'T MOVE THE PLAYER.

- Keep onlookers away.
- Comfort the athlete until professional help arrives.
- Immobilise and support.

2 LESS SEVERE

Soft-tissue injuries such as sprains, strains and muscle bruises.

RICER REGIME

THE FIRST 48 HOURS ARE VITAL IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SOFT-TISSUE INJURIES.

- Rest.
- Ice.
- Compression.
- Elevation.
- Referral.

3 MINOR INJURY

Bumps and bruises which do not impair performance.

PLAY ON

A FEW WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT WILL HELP.

- Monitor any such injuries.
- Minor injuries should also be managed using the RICER regime.



UNCONSCIOUS PLAYER

If the player is unconscious it is a life threatening situation and the DRSABCD of first aid should be used by an accredited sports trainer.

DRSABCD

D

Danger

Check for danger to:

- You.
- Others.
- The injured player.

R

Response

Is the player conscious?:

- Can you hear me?
- Open your eyes.
- What is your name?

S

Send for Help

Call triple zero (000) for an ambulance.

A

Airway

Make sure the airway is:

- Clear of objects.
- Open.

B

Breathing

- Check if the player is breathing by observing chest movements and/or air passing in or out of the mouth.
- If not, give 2 initial breaths and begin CPR.

C

CPR

- CPR involves giving 30 compressions at a rate of around 100 per minute followed by two breaths.
- Continue CPR until the patient recovers or professional help arrives.
- Stop any bleeding by placing firm pressure over the injury site.

D

Defibrillation

- Attach a defibrillator. Clubs should have an automatic defibrillator as part of their medical kit.
- Follow voice prompts..



MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION IN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

- In the best practice management of concussion, player welfare is the critical element, both in the short and long-term.
- Concussion is a brain injury characterised by a disturbance in brain function that results from trauma to the brain. The changes are temporary and the majority of players recover spontaneously and completely if managed correctly. Complications can occur if the player is returned to play before they have recovered from concussion.
- **Any player who has suffered a concussion or is suspected of having concussion must be IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY and medically assessed as soon as possible after the injury. They must not be allowed to return to play in the same game or practice session.**
- There should be a trained first aider at every game and the principles of first aid, including management of the cervical spine, should be used when dealing with any player who is unconscious or injured.
- Management of a head injury is difficult for non-medical personnel. In the early stages it is often not clear whether you are dealing with concussion or there is a more severe underlying structural head injury.
- Therefore, ALL players with concussion or suspected concussion **need an urgent medical assessment.**
- A concussed player must not return to school or to training or playing **before having formal medical clearance.** A graduated return to training, limited by symptoms, should be followed.

The key components of management of concussion include:

- Recognising the injury: Suspecting concussion in any player with one or more of the symptoms or signs after a knock to the head;
- Immediately removing the player from the game
- Referring the player for medical evaluation; and
- Ensuring the player has received medical clearance before allowing them to return to a graded training program.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR A SUSPECTED CONCUSSION

An outline of the overall management approach is summarised in the figure below.

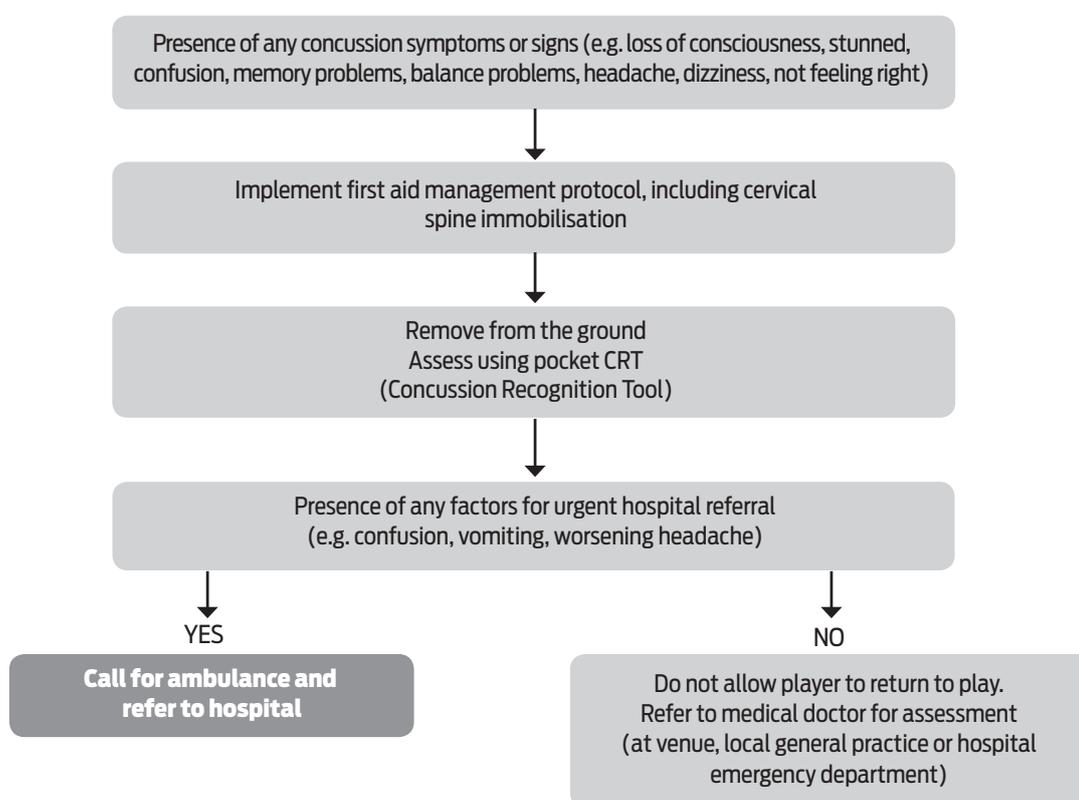


Figure 1. Summary of the management of concussion in Australian football.

*Note: for any player with loss of consciousness, basic first aid principles should be used (i.e. Airways, Breathing, CPR...). Care must also be taken with the player's neck, which may have also been injured in the collision. An ambulance should be called, and these players transported to hospital immediately for further assessment and management.



A. GAME-DAY MANAGEMENT

The most important steps in the initial management of concussion include:

- Recognising the injury;
- Removing the player from the game.
- Referring the player to a medical doctor for assessment.

1. Recognising the injury

Visible clues of suspected concussion

Any one or more of the following visual clues can indicate a possible concussion:

- Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- Lying motionless on ground/Slow to get up
- Unsteady on feet/Balance problems or falling over/
Incoordination
- Loss of consciousness, confusion and memory disturbance are classical features of concussion. The problem with relying on these features is that they are not present in every case.
- Other symptoms that should raise suspicion of concussion include: headache, blurred vision, balance problems, dizziness, feeling “dinged” or “dazed”, “don’t feel right”, drowsiness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating or difficulty remembering.
- Grabbing/Clutching of head
- Dazed, blank or vacant look
- Confused/Not aware of plays or events

2. Removing the player from the game

- Initial management must adhere to the first aid rules, including airway, breathing, circulation, and spinal immobilisation.
- Any player with a suspected concussion must be removed from the game.

3. Referring the player to a medical doctor for assessment

- Management of head injury is difficult for non-medical personnel. In the early stages of injury, it is often not clear whether you are dealing with a concussion or there is a more severe underlying structural head injury.
- For this reason, ALL players with concussion or a suspected concussion need an urgent medical assessment (with a registered medical doctor). This assessment can be provided by a medical doctor present at the venue, local general practice or hospital emergency department.

MANAGEMENT OF AN UNCONSCIOUS PLAYER AND WHEN TO REFER TO HOSPITAL

- Basic first aid principles should be used when dealing with any unconscious player (i.e. Airway, Breathing, CPR...). Care must be taken with the player’s neck, which may have also been injured in the collision.
- In unconscious players, the player must only be moved (on to the stretcher) by qualified health professionals, trained in spinal immobilisation techniques. If no qualified health professional is on site, then do not move the player – await arrival of the ambulance. If the unconscious player is wearing a helmet, do not remove the helmet, unless trained to do so.
- Urgent hospital referral is necessary if there is any concern regarding the risk of a structural head or neck injury.
- Urgent transfer to hospital is required if the player displays any of the following:
 - a) Loss of consciousness or seizures
 - b) Confusion
 - c) Deterioration after their injury (e.g. increased drowsiness, headache or vomiting)
 - d) Neck pain or spinal cord symptoms (e.g. player reports numbness, tingling, weakness in arms or legs)
- Overall, if there is any doubt, the player should be referred to hospital.

B. FOLLOW-UP MANAGEMENT

- A concussed player must not be allowed to return to school or return to play before having a medical clearance.
- Return to learning and school take precedence over return to sport.
- In every case, the decision regarding the timing of return to training should be made by a medical doctor with experience in managing concussion.
- In general, a more conservative approach (i.e. longer time to return to sport) is used in cases where there is any uncertainty about the player's recovery. ("**If in doubt, sit them out**").

Return to play

Players should not return to play until they have returned to school/learning without worsening of symptoms.

Players should be returned to play in a graduated fashion.

The "concussion rehabilitation" program should be supervised by the treating medical practitioner and should follow a step-wise symptom limited progression, for example:

1. Rest until symptoms recover (includes physical and mental rest)
 2. Light aerobic activity (e.g. walking, swimming or stationary cycling) – can be commenced 24-48 hours after symptoms have recovered
 3. Light, non-contact training drills (e.g. running, ball work)
 4. Non-contact training drills (i.e. progression to more complex training drills, may start light resistance training. Resistance training should only be added in the later stages)
 5. Full contact training – only after medical clearance
 6. Return to competition (game play)
- There should be approximately 24 hours (or longer) for each stage.
 - Players should be symptom-free during their rehabilitation program. If they develop symptoms at any stage, then they should drop back to the previously symptom-free level and try to progress again after a further 24 hour period of rest.
 - If the player is symptomatic for more than 10 days, then review by a medical practitioner, expert in the management of concussion, is recommended.



THE MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION IN CHILDREN (players aged 5-17)

As part of the 2012 meeting, specific recommendations were made for the management of children. Children require a different approach from adults because their brains are developing, and they need to continue learning and acquiring knowledge. As such, the priority is not just player welfare and return to play, but a critical element is return to school and learning.

As well as all of the principles of management outlined above, the following advice must be followed in any instance of a child being concussed or suspected of concussion.

Concussion symptoms can cause problems with memory and information processing, which interferes with the child's ability to learn in the classroom. It is for this reason that a child is not to return to school until medically cleared to do so.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

- Concussion may impact on the child's cognitive ability to learn at school. This must be considered, and **medical clearance is required before the child may return to school.**
- **It is reasonable for a child to miss a day or two of school after concussion, but extended absence is uncommon.**
- In some children, a graduated return to school program will need to be developed for the child. Additional management by a paediatric neuropsychologist may assist in more difficult cases.
- Symptom assessment in the child often requires the addition of parent and/or teacher input
- The child will progress through the return to school program provided that there is no worsening of symptoms. If any particular activity worsens symptoms, the child will abstain from that activity until it no longer causes symptom worsening. Use of computers and internet should follow a similar graduated program, provided that it does not worsen symptoms. This program should include communication between the parents, teachers, and health professionals and will vary from child to child. The return to school program should consider:
 - Extra time to complete assignments and tests
 - Quiet room to complete assignments and tests
 - Avoidance of noisy areas such as cafeterias, assembly halls, sporting events, music classes
 - Frequent breaks during class, homework, tests
 - No more than one exam per day
 - Shorter assignments
 - Repetition/memory cues
 - Use of peer helper/tutor
 - Reassurance from teachers that the student will be supported through recovery through accommodations, workload reduction, alternate forms of testing
 - Later start times, half days, only certain classes
- **Children are not to return to play or sport until they have successfully returned to school/learning, without worsening of symptoms. Medical clearance should be given before return to play.**
- If there are any doubts, management should be referred to a qualified health practitioner, expert in the management of concussion in children.
- Children should return to play in the same graduated fashion as adult players (see page 119)

Pocket CONCUSSION RECOGNITION TOOL™

TO HELP IDENTIFY CONCUSSION IN CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS



RECOGNISE & REMOVE

Concussion should be suspected if one or more of the following visible clues, signs, symptoms or errors in memory questions are present.

1. Visible clues of suspected concussion

Any one or more of the following visual clues can indicate a possible concussion:

- Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- Lying motionless on ground / Slow to get up
- Unsteady on feet / Balance problems or falling over / Incoordination
- Grabbing / Clutching of head
- Dazed, blank or vacant look
- Confused / Not aware of plays or events

2. Signs and symptoms of suspected concussion

Presence of any one or more of the following signs and symptoms may suggest a concussion:

- Loss of consciousness
- Balance problems
- Drowsiness
- Irritability
- Fatigue or low energy
- "Don't feel right"
- Headache
- Confusion
- "Pressure in head"
- Sensitivity to light
- Feeling like "in a fog"
- Sensitivity to noise
- Seizure or convulsion
- Nausea or vomiting
- More emotional
- Sadness
- Nervous or anxious
- Difficulty remembering
- Dizziness
- Feeling slowed down
- Blurred vision
- Amnesia
- Neck Pain
- Difficulty concentrating

3. Memory function

Failure to answer any of these questions correctly may suggest a concussion.

"What venue are we at today?"

"Who scored last in this game?"

"Did your team win the last game?"

"Which half is it now?"

"What team did you play last week / game?"

Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY, and should not be returned to activity until they are assessed medically. Athletes with a suspected concussion should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.

It is recommended that, in all cases of suspected concussion, the player is referred to a medical professional for diagnosis and guidance as well as return to play decisions, even if the symptoms resolve.

RED FLAGS

If ANY of the following are reported then the player should be safely and immediately removed from the field. If no qualified medical professional is available, consider transporting by ambulance for urgent medical assessment:

- ▶ Athlete complains of neck pain
- ▶ Severe or increasing headache
- ▶ Seizure or convulsion
- ▶ Deteriorating conscious state
- ▶ Repeated vomiting
- ▶ Double vision
- ▶ Increasing confusion or irritability
- ▶ Unusual behaviour change
- ▶ Weakness or tingling / burning in arms or legs

REMEMBER:

- In all cases, the basic principles of first aid (danger, response, airway, breathing, circulation) should be followed.
- Do not attempt to move the player (other than required for airway support) unless trained to do so.
- Do not remove helmet (if present) unless trained to do so.

from McCrory et. al, Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport. Br J Sports Med 47 (5), 2013

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CONCUSSION

For further up-to-date and comprehensive information about concussion management, go to the AFL Community Club website at aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=66



BLOOD RULE – INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The meaning of active bleeding

The term 'active bleeding' means the existence of an injury or wound, which continues to bleed. Active bleeding does not include minor bleeding from a graze or scratch, which has abated and can be readily removed from a player or any part of his/her uniform.

Participation in matches when actively bleeding

A player must not remain on the playing surface for as long as he or she is actively bleeding. A club or team **must not allow** any of its players to remain on the playing surface for as long as the player is actively bleeding. Unless immediate treatment needs to be given, having due regard to a player's health and safety, a club or team must not allow any player who is actively bleeding to be treated on the playing surface.

Player to follow directions of field umpire

Where a player is directed by a field umpire to leave the playing surface because he or she is actively bleeding, the player must leave the playing surface immediately through the interchange area. The player must not re-enter the playing surface or take any further part in any match until and unless:

- a) The cause of such bleeding has been abated.
- b) The injury is securely bound to ensure that all blood is contained.
- c) Any blood-stained article of uniform has been removed and replaced.
- d) Any blood on any part of the player's body has been thoroughly cleansed and removed.

Replacement player

A player directed to leave the playing surface may be replaced by another player listed on the team sheet.

A replacement player may enter the playing surface while the player that he or she is replacing is leaving the playing surface.

Procedure when player not actively bleeding

Where the field umpire is of the opinion that a player is not actively bleeding, but the player has blood on any part of his or her body or uniform, the following procedure will apply:

At the first available opportunity, the field umpire must signal and direct the player to obtain treatment. After the signal is given, play will continue:

The player may remain on the playing surface after the signal is given by the field umpire, but must at the earliest opportunity:

- a) In the case of blood being on any part of the uniform, have the piece of uniform removed and replaced; and/or
- b) In the case of blood being on any part of the body, have the blood removed and the cause of any bleeding (if any) treated and covered so that all blood is contained.

Protective gloves

Each club or team must ensure that any doctor, trainer and any other person treating players wears protective gloves as may be approved from time to time by the relevant controlling body.

Disposal of bloodied clothing and other material

Each club or team must ensure that:

- Any bloodied item of uniform or clothing of a player is placed as soon as possible in a hygienic sealed container and laundered to ensure the removal of all blood.
- All towels, wipes, bandages, dressings and other materials used in the treatment of bleeding players must be placed in a hygienic sealed container and discarded or destroyed in a hygienic manner.



MAINTAINING INJURY RECORDS

Coaches should ensure all facts concerning an injury are properly recorded. The form on this page from the AFCA Coaches' Diary can be used to detail all aspects of injuries to your players.

INJURY REPORT SHEET

Tick boxes

Match or Training

Date:

ID number (give each form a unique identifying number):

Ground condition at time of injury: Very hard Firm Soft

Weather condition at time of injury: Fine Light rain Heavy rain

Activity of player just prior to injury event (e.g. going up for a mark, diving tackle)

What went wrong that led to the injury? (e.g. slipped on muddy ground while turning)

What actually caused the injury? (e.g. pushed in back, fell on to outstretched arm)

Nature of injury (e.g. sprain, fracture, bruise)

Was any protective gear being worn?

(e.g. strapping to knee, ankle, mouthguard)

Referred to:

Treatment received (describe)

Name of person filling out form:

Title:

Signature:

Body part affected (e.g. right knee)

Was the injury

new injury

re-injury

date of previous injury: _____

Further comments



NUTRITION



Chapter 11

Nutrition

A coach has the ability to strongly influence a player's eating habits and therefore impact development both on and off the football field. Maintaining adequate nutrition is of great importance to a developing football players overall health and growth, as well as their on-field performance. As such, it is important that as a coach you have an understanding of how nutrition can influence these factors and ways of incorporating good nutrition systems into your club.

Consumption of a wide variety of nutritious foods that meets the player's requirements for health and growth, as well as supporting other aspects of their training and competition program is vital. Provision of a training and game day environment that supports nutrition systems via provision of drink coolers, fridges, eskies etc., will help your players to implement strategies consistently throughout their football development. Ensuring your support staff are aware of the main nutrition principles associated with Australian Football performance and the ability to identify when specific players may need more specialised advice is key.

A football player's performance can be enhanced by implementing common sports nutrition strategies that have been individualised to meet their needs. These strategies aid in:

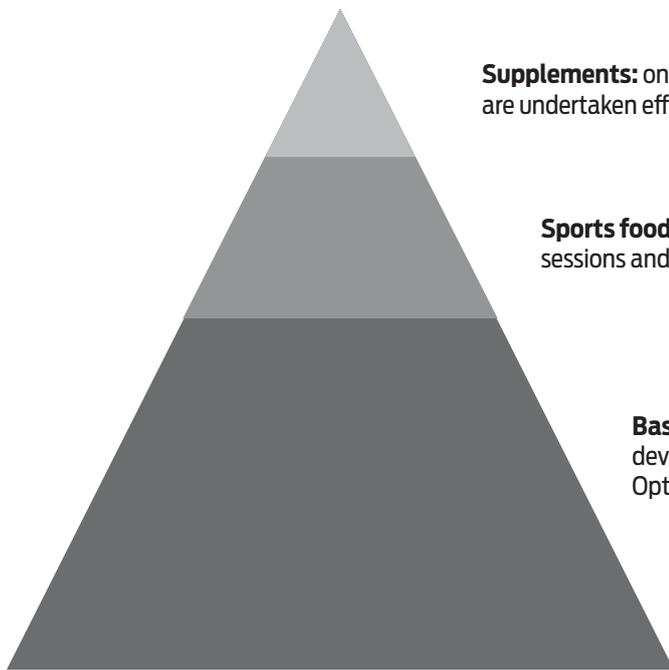
- Optimising training session performance and recovery
- Maximising game day performance and recovery
- Developing an appropriate body composition
- Maintaining hydration
- Maintaining health and minimising the risk of certain injuries

An additional strategy can be added to this list for development aged athletes, that of healthy bone development.

Building a Quality Foundation:

Good eating strategies are an important foundation through the development phase of any athlete. Several key strategies will provide a good base for performance improvement and health through this phase of a football player's life.

- Eating regularly: a nutrient-rich breakfast, lunch and dinner every day is essential. In some cases the addition of 2-3 between-meal snacks is appropriate. Skipping a meal or snack is like skipping a training session. It is worthwhile reminding your players that this also includes weekends
- Support training: strategic pre- and post-training snacks that include a combination of carbohydrate, protein and fluid will help a player get the most out of their sessions and ensure recovery in readiness for their next training session.
- Give it time: changes from being a developing athlete to a senior football player will not happen overnight, so it is important that both players and coaching staff have realistic expectations regarding the time it will take to achieve nutrition-related goals. Some changes like body composition are brought on through hard training and natural growth/development, and cannot be replicated by a pill or potion.



Supplements: only considered when the base nutrition plan and sports food plan are undertaken effectively and consistently. E.g. creatine, beta alanine.

Sports foods: help to meet special nutrient needs especially during training sessions and games. E.g. sports drink and protein bars.

Base Nutrition Plan: provides the majority of performance and development benefits. Appropriate meals, snacks and fluids. Optimising training improvements and recovery.

Two major nutrients form the basis of a football player's eating plan, carbohydrate and protein. Consuming these nutrients in foods at regular intervals throughout the day, and at specific times around training sessions and games, is key to providing optimal energy, strength gains, recovery and repair.

Fuelling Up Before Training and Games with Carbohydrate:

Eating carbohydrate foods in the hours before exercise will help improve performance by increasing the muscles' glycogen (energy) stores. Carbohydrate is the body's main fuel for high intensity exercise. Exercise intensity has to decrease, and fatigue occurs when carbohydrate stores in the body run low.

Most players' main meals should be based on carbohydrate foods. This is of particular importance in the meal consumed the evening before a big training day or game day (fuelling energy stores in the muscle and liver), and the meals consumed within hours of training or a game (topping up energy stores and keeping blood sugar levels steady). Options such as pasta with a tomato based sauce, a sandwich and fruit, or a liquid option such as a smoothie, are all good choices.

Experimenting with food and fluid options in the hours before training sessions is the best way to identify what will work best for a player in games. Encourage your players to do this and caution them never to experiment with new foods or ideas on game day. Training is the best time to work out what works and what doesn't.

Types of Carbohydrate Foods

Carbohydrate containing foods are no longer referred to as “complex” and “simple”. The lists below provide a more meaningful way of classifying carbohydrate options.

Category	Description	Examples	Use for athletes
Nutrient-dense carbohydrate	Foods and fluids that are rich sources of other nutrients including protein, vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants in addition to carbohydrate	Breads and cereals, grains (e.g. pasta, rice), fruit, starchy vegetables e.g. potato, corn), legumes and low-fat dairy products	Everyday food that should form the base of an athlete's diet. Helps to meet other nutrient targets.
Nutrient poor carbohydrate	Foods and fluids that contain carbohydrate but minimal or no other nutrients	Soft drink, energy drinks, lollies, carbohydrate gels, sports drink and cordial.	Shouldn't be a major part of the everyday diet but may provide a compact carbohydrate source around training.
High-fat carbohydrate	Foods that contain carbohydrate but are high in fat	Pastries, cakes, chips (hot and crisps) and chocolate	'Sometimes' foods – best not consumed around training sessions

Quality Protein:

Protein in foods and fluids is used to build, strengthen and repair a player's muscle tissue, along with aiding general growth and wellbeing. Quality protein foods (those that contain key amino acids) are required for these functions and include: lean meats, poultry, fish, seafood, dairy foods (milk, cheese, yoghurt) and eggs.

It is not necessary for players to consume massive amounts of quality protein to achieve benefits. The regularity of the protein intake however is the key to maximising strength, repair and growth improvements. Consuming ~20g of quality protein in foods at each main meal will help ensure a good base for these processes to occur. Examples of food quantities containing 20g of protein:

- 500ml milk
- 2 x 200g flavoured yoghurt
- 80g lean beef
- 100g chicken breast
- 1 small can tuna

Choosing snacks between meals that contain quality protein will also aid in ensuring the body has access to this important nutrient throughout the day (see snack section below).

Post Exercise Recovery Nutrition Strategies:

Nutrition recovery strategies are often referred to as the “3 R's”: Replace, Repair and Rehydrate. After finishing a training session or game players should consume carbohydrate (to replace used energy) and protein (for muscle repair and growth). Rehydration (fluid + sodium) is also an important part of the recovery process (see Hydration section below).

Examples of Appropriate Recovery Snacks (Carbohydrate + Protein containing foods) include:

- 300ml low fat milk
- 2 x 200g tubs of low fat flavoured yoghurt
- 300ml Milkshake or Smoothie
- Sandwich with 2 slices lean meat, chicken, low fat cheese and/or fish (e.g. tinned salmon)

Coaches can improve a player's adherence to recovery strategies by either assisting the club in organising recovery food options for players, or by provision of eskies or fridges in the dressing room areas where players can store their own recovery items to consume after training. Players should be encouraged to consume their recovery snack before doing other forms of recovery, or during other recovery procedures.



In addition to the recovery snack (consumed within 15 minutes of finishing a skills session, fitness session, weights session or game), a recovery meal should be consumed within the next two hours. Carbohydrate, protein and some antioxidants (fruit and vegetables) should be included in this meal. Examples of Recovery Meals include: stir fry chicken/beef and vegetables with rice or noodles, lean beef lasagne with salad or steak/chicken or fish with mashed potato and vegetables.

Snacks:

Snacks between main meals are an important part of a footballers eating plan. Players should be encouraged to choose items that contain some carbohydrate, quality protein and have a low-moderate fat content. Discussing these options with parents is useful to ensure access when players are away from the football environment. As players of this age often lead busy lives, planning ahead and packing a 'snack box' for the upcoming day is a way of ensuring they don't have to rely on less nutritious 'fast-food' options.

Examples include:

- Low fat flavoured or fruit yoghurt
- Creamed Rice
- Low fat custard and tinned fruit
- Low fat flavoured milk
- Sushi rolls
- Low fat cracker biscuits and cheese slices
- Fruit smoothie or milkshake
- Breakfast cereal and low fat milk
- Sandwiches with lean meat, ham, chicken, turkey, tuna etc.
- Tuna and Crackers snack kit

Hydration:

Maintaining hydration during training sessions and games is necessary to ensure performance is maintained. Dehydration will cause a decrease in performance before any risk to health occurs. Loss of body water and electrolytes can impair many functions in the body including cardiovascular process and heat regulation systems. A reduction in physical endurance capacity, strength and power, skill execution and various cognitive processes' (decision making, concentration etc.) are all risks of dehydration in training and games.

Fluid Choices and Monitoring Hydration:

Coaches should always ensure players have access to fluid during training sessions and during games. Scheduling regular drink breaks during training will help to ensure players are able to meet their hydration requirements. While significant dehydration should be avoided, players should never be encouraged to consume fluid in excess of their needs.

Sports drinks are a useful choice if the training session is of a high intensity and duration exceeds an hour. Sports drinks provide carbohydrate for fuelling working muscles and help replace the electrolytes and fluid lost in sweat. For shorter, lower intensity sessions water can usually provide adequate hydration.

Players need to pay attention to their hydration strategies throughout each day and evening, not just at training and games.

Failure to do so often results in players starting a training session or game dehydrated (i.e. with performance factors reduced from the start). Simple strategies such as carrying a drink bottle throughout the day, and consuming fluids with each meal and snack can help to ensure players arrive at training and games hydrated and ready to perform. Water is the best choice of fluid for most players at this time.

Players should be encouraged to become familiar with their own hydration needs, as each individual's sweat rate and fluid requirements will differ. Pre and post body weights (measured on body weight scales) around main training sessions and games is a simple yet effective tool in enabling a player to assess the mismatch between their sweat losses and fluid intake. Incorporating this system into your team's preparation and recovery routine will provide the tool necessary for players to be pro-active with their own hydration routine. When calculating rehydration needs players should consume 1½ times the fluid lost (i.e. 1.5 x (pre body weight-post body weight)). This fluid should be consumed slowly over the next few hours (especially if a large volume is required).

Sample Meal Plan:

Each player's meal plan will vary depending on their body composition goals, current training program and metabolism.

The following sample plan is a guide that incorporates the major football sports nutrition principles. It is based on providing nutrition for a full training schedule.

Breakfast: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

- 2 cups breakfast cereal and 1 cup low fat milk
- 1 piece fruit or 1 cup canned fruit
- 2 slices toast or 2 slices fruit loaf, or 1 English muffin or crumpet spread with honey or jam or fruit spread
- Fluid

During Training: (Carbohydrate + Fluid)

- Sports drink or water

Post Training: (Carbohydrate + Protein + Fluid)

- Flavoured milk drink
- Fluid

Lunch: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

▪ 2 rolls or 4 slices bread, or 1 large wrap with: chicken, ham, beef, turkey, tuna, salmon, egg and/or low fat cheese and chutney, pickles, avocado and salad

OR

- 2 cups pasta/rice with lean meat/chicken/fish with salad/vegetables
- 1 piece fruit
- Fluid

Pre Weights Nutrition: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

- Slice of bread with lean ham/chicken/tuna
- Fluid

During Weights (Carbohydrate + Fluid)

- Sports drink or water

Post Weights Snack: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

- Low fat flavoured yoghurt
- Fluid

Dinner: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

- 200g lean beef, pork, lamb, chicken or 250g fish
- 1 cup cooked rice or 2 cups pasta or 2-3 potatoes (this carbohydrate can be omitted if the following day is a rest day or a light training day)
- 2 cups vegetables or salad
- Low fat dessert, e.g. low fat ice cream, low fat custard, low fat rice pudding, low fat yoghurt and/or fruit
- Fluid

Snack: (Carbohydrate + Protein)

- Cup of low fat flavoured milk

Increasing Muscle in Development Players:

For most young football players increasing muscle mass represents an important part of their athletic development.

There are three components that are considered essential if a player is to achieve their strength related goals.

- A well designed resistance training program
- A high-energy diet that provides adequate protein
- Consistency

It is important to remind your players that muscle development takes time and a commitment to an appropriate training and nutrition plan. Just like missing a training session, skipping a meal and/or snack has the potential to slow down their progress. All players will respond differently to training and their progress will vary among individuals.

**Supplements:**

The 1-3% performance improvements that may be seen with proven supplements are likely to go unnoticed in young athletes who have not established optimal training and nutrition habits and who are still growing and developing. Specific supplements and sports food may help individual players in specific circumstances, however professional advice from an Accredited Sports Dietitian or Sports Physician is necessary to determine the use. A coach can help ensure players are not consuming products unnecessarily, or risking inadvertent doping outcomes by encouraging them to seek appropriate advice from accredited practitioners at all times.

Additional Information and Fact Sheets:

- The Australian Institute of Sport Nutrition website: ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition
- Sports Dietitians Australia website: sportsdietitians.com.au



TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT



Chapter 12

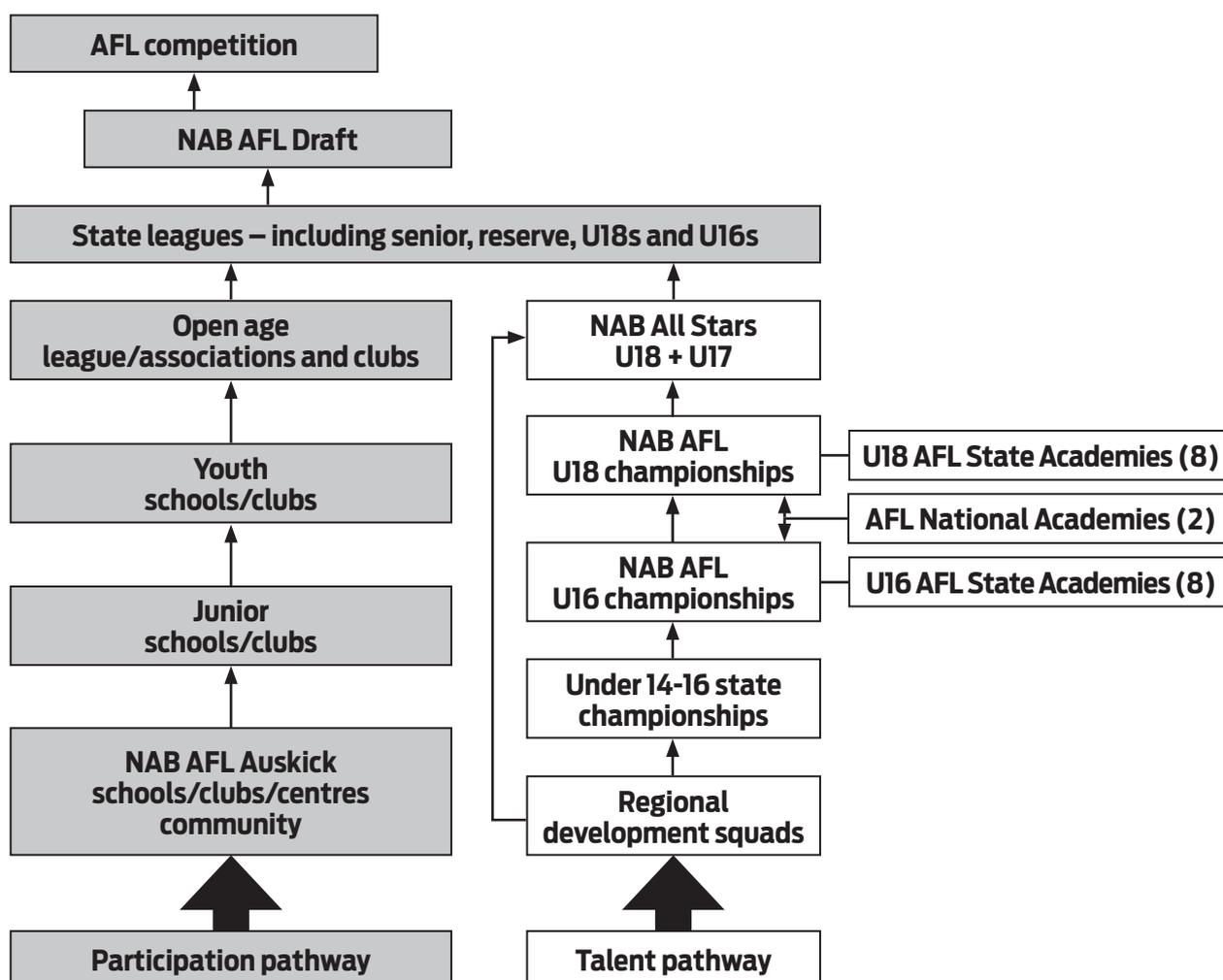
Talent Identification and Development

AFL PLAYER PATHWAYS

Junior and youth football are the life blood of the game. The total AFL participation pathway is illustrated below. The pathway conforms to the belief of the AFL and its state affiliates that anyone wishing to participate in Australian Football must be able to do so in a way that is appropriate to their skills, needs and aspirations. This is best achieved by providing a quality environment in which young players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of learning and ability.

At the youth level the talent pathway to becoming an AFL player begins to emerge through the avenue of regional development squads which have the dual purpose of developing individual player's abilities and preparing teams to participate in state championships at under 14 and above.

Australian Football coaches who are coaching at youth level should have a good understanding of the AFL Participation and Talent Pathways. All players with whom they are working are part of those pathways and many will be dreaming of becoming AFL players. An understanding of the workings of the pathway and the processes used to identify and develop talented players are important tools for all youth coaches. This chapter includes elements of the evaluation processes which are integral to the talent pathway and coaches may wish to use some of them, perhaps in modified forms, in their coaching programs.





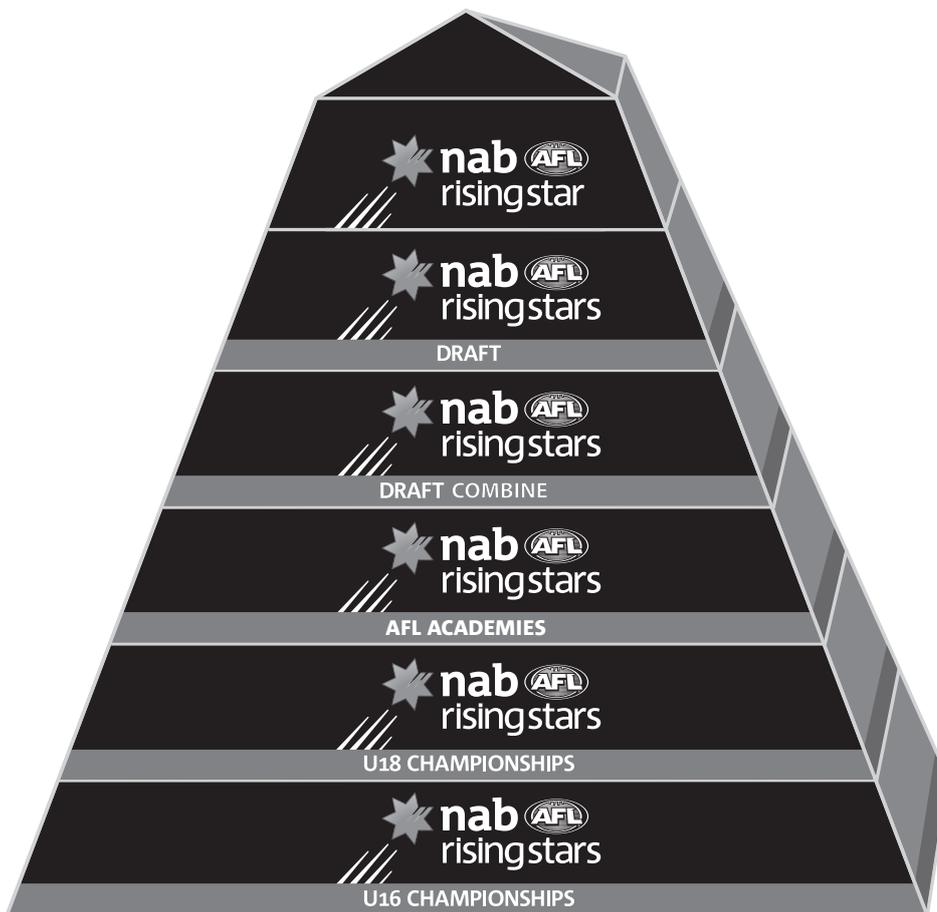
AFL Participation Pathway

The AFL talent identification and development program is formalised in the NAB AFL Rising Stars Program.

The development program operates from grass roots through to elite AFL level. It provides recognition and a clearly identifiable direction for a player's career. The program incorporates:

- NAB AFL Rising Star
- NAB AFL Draft
- NAB AFL Draft Combine
- NAB All Stars U18 + U17
- AFL Academies
- NAB AFL U18 Championships
- NAB AFL U16 Championships

NAB AFL RISING STARS PROGRAM





NAB AFL DRAFT

The NAB AFL Draft is the only process through which a footballer can become an AFL player. It is the most equitable way of distributing the available talent to AFL clubs. Players gain access to clubs by nominating for the Draft and can only move to other clubs through the drafting process. The Draft is critical to the AFL's objective of developing an even competition because:

- It gives lesser performed clubs in any season priority choice of available players.
- It gives clubs the option of exchanging draft choices, players or a combination.
- Uncontracted players can change clubs by nominating for the pre-season draft.

Clubs can also maintain a Rookie List of up to nine developing players. A separate Rookie Draft is conducted for this purpose. The following components of the NAB AFL Rising Stars Program lead directly to the Draft.

In 2016 the AFL introduced two All Stars matches in Toyota AFL Grand Final week for the best players nationally at under-18 and under-16 level to showcase the very best talent available for the current NAB AFL Draft as well as the follow year's draft.

NAB AFL U16 AND U18 CHAMPIONSHIPS

The NAB AFL Under-16 and Under-18 Championships are played annually between state and territory teams in two divisions. This incorporates teams from South Australia, Western Australia, Victorian Country, Victorian Metropolitan, and the Allies in Division 1 and with Tasmania, Northern Territory and the four AFL club academies (Sydney Swans, Gold Coast Suns, GWS Giants and Brisbane Lions) in Division 2. At under-16 level, the eight state and territories competed in two divisions.

NAB AFL ACADEMY

The NAB AFL Academy is a program to enhance the sporting, personal, educational and vocational opportunities for Australia's best young footballers.

The NAB AFL Academy model is two-tiered with around 30 players in each level made up of Level One (selected from the AFL Under-16 Championships) and Level Two (who are aged 17 years and eligible for the next AFL Draft).

Both Levels are 12-month scholarships for the young athletes. Scholarship holders remain in their home states or territories but gather for national camps and other training programs during the course of the year. Squad members at Level One are given the opportunity to represent Australia against New Zealand, while Level Two compete against a state league team before their high performance camp at the IMG Academy in Florida in January.

STATE ACADEMIES

AFL State Academies aim to develop the talented player pathway and enhance second-tier competitions to capture and develop talented players.

NAB AFL DRAFT COMBINE

The NAB AFL Draft Combine has become an integral part of the talent identification process for AFL clubs. The process has been refined and improved and the AFL invites approximately 80 players to the annual Combine at Etihad Stadium in Melbourne and a further 120-plus prospects to shorter state draft combines in Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

As an integral part of the lead-in and decision making process, the NAB AFL Draft Combine has been a vital fixture on the AFL landscape. The brand "Combine" refers to AFL clubs combining their resources to test talent, as well as a search for players who can combine their skills and mental toughness with the athleticism required to make AFL.

Information is the AFL club recruiting managers' greatest tool and insight gained through the Draft Combine process and the AFL Recruiting Reports is invaluable to clubs as they fine tune their views on players they are considering for the draft. Key elements of the draft combine include medical screening, physical and psychomotor testing, formal and informal interviews with AFL clubs and skills testing.



Players are organised into the following groups for Combine operations and testing:

1. Small midfielders, forwards and defenders
2. Medium defenders
3. Medium forwards
4. Medium midfielders
5. Tall defenders
6. Tall forwards
7. Ruckmen
8. Internationals

Some of the test protocols used for the Draft Combine, including speed, agility, vertical jumps and endurance tests, and sample results are provided here for the information of youth coaches. Coaches who wish to use formal testing with their youth players can obtain further information from AFL Regional Development Offices.

TEST PROTOCOLS

1. SPEED

20m sprint

1. The start line of the sprint is marked with masking tape between the first tripods. The player should place their leading foot up to the start line. The rear foot should be placed in a natural ready position for a standing start.
2. The player should be instructed to attempt to cut the beam with their torso and should avoid triggering the beam with a sudden movement from the leading arm.
3. Players will be instructed to avoid rocking back beyond what would take place in a “normal” standing start.
4. The player completes a maximum effort sprint over 20m cutting the beam at 0m, 5m, 10m and 20m. The player completes three maximum efforts and the splits for these should be recorded.

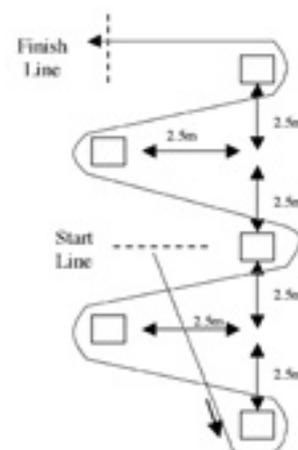
2. AGILITY RUN

AFL Agility Run

- The run is an AFL-specific agility test, used to indicate an athlete’s overall agility and ability to change direction with speed.
- Two sets of electronic light gates are required, one at the start and one at the finish. The five obstacles made of PVC piping (10-12 cm diameter) have a 25cm base and are approximately 1.1m high. Obstacles are weighted at the bottom of the piping (internally) to increase stability. Plastic masking tape should be placed on the floor at two corners of the obstacle so it can be accurately re-positioned if it is knocked over.

Protocol:

1. Players start from a stationary, upright position with a front foot on the 0m point, in line with the start gate. They weave in and out of the obstacles as per diagram below and should avoid touching or moving the cones in any way. If this occurs the test is stopped and restarted.
2. Players should complete a short warm-up of light running, stretching and some run throughs. After instruction, players should have a practice trial at 50 per cent effort to familiarise themselves with the course.
3. Two 100 per cent maximal effort trials are recorded and the best time (seconds reported to two decimal places) taken as the score. Allow 2-3 mins recovery between trials.
 - For set-up and operation of the light gate timing system refer to Lightgates User Manual.



3. VERTICAL JUMP

Standing Vertical Jump

1. The subject stands with their preferred side closest to the Vertec. The subject reaches overhead with their inside hand, extending the arm and reaching as high as possible while the feet remain flat on the ground. The zero point is adjusted to meet the middle fingertip of the outstretched hand. Record the distance from the zero point to the ground.

NB: The easiest way to record the distance from zero point to ground is to fix a tape measure to the horizontal arm of the Vertec and read off the height from the ground each time.

2. The subject is instructed to jump as high as possible, displacing the rotating fingers of the Vertec with their outstretched hand at the top of the jump. The jump is performed without a step, however, a counter movement of the legs (i.e. initial deep squat) and swing of the arms should be used to maximise jump height.
3. The best two trials, with a suitable rest in between should be recorded. Record the height of the jump from the number written on the last unmoved finger.

There is also a running vertical jump off both right and left legs with a five-metre run up.



4. SPEED ENDURANCE

6 x 30m repeat sprint

Protocol:

1. The over-ground, repeated-sprint test requires the players to perform six maximal 30m sprints, departing every 20 seconds.
2. Timing gates at the 0-30m marks for the number of lanes being used (typically one to three depending on the number of players to be tested, available equipment and staff). Place a cone marker for the turnaround point at both ends exactly 10m from the 0m and 30m timing gates. At each running lane position a starting line exactly 1m behind the 0m line of the timing gates.
3. All players should be given appropriate instruction and a short warm-up of light running and stretching should be undertaken prior to the test. The start position for each sprint in both directions is at the line marked 1m from each timing gate.
4. The test starts with a 30m sprint. The player gradually decelerates through to a jog/walk by the 10m cone, turns and commences the return journey back to the 1m starting line. As a five-second warning is given, the player should be at the starting line in a relaxed position, and only assumes the ready position immediately before the 'go' command to commence the next sprint.
5. The total time (seconds) is used as the criterion score. Other possible outcome measures to include are the comparison of the fastest time against the primary 20m sprint test time, and the percentage decrement in velocity (time) over the test.

5. ENDURANCE

20m Shuttle Run

Protocol:

1. Players line up at the start line of the 20 shuttle run.
2. Players are instructed to continue until they can no longer keep up with the progressively increasing running pace determined by the beep signal from the tape. At every beep the runners foot must be on or over the red line.
3. The test is complete when the player can not maintain the running speed for two successive beeps. After the first miss the player is cautioned and told they must make the line by the next beep. If the player's foot is then not on, or over the line by the next beep, the test is terminated and the score given is the last level attained, not the current level they are attempting.

3km Time Trial

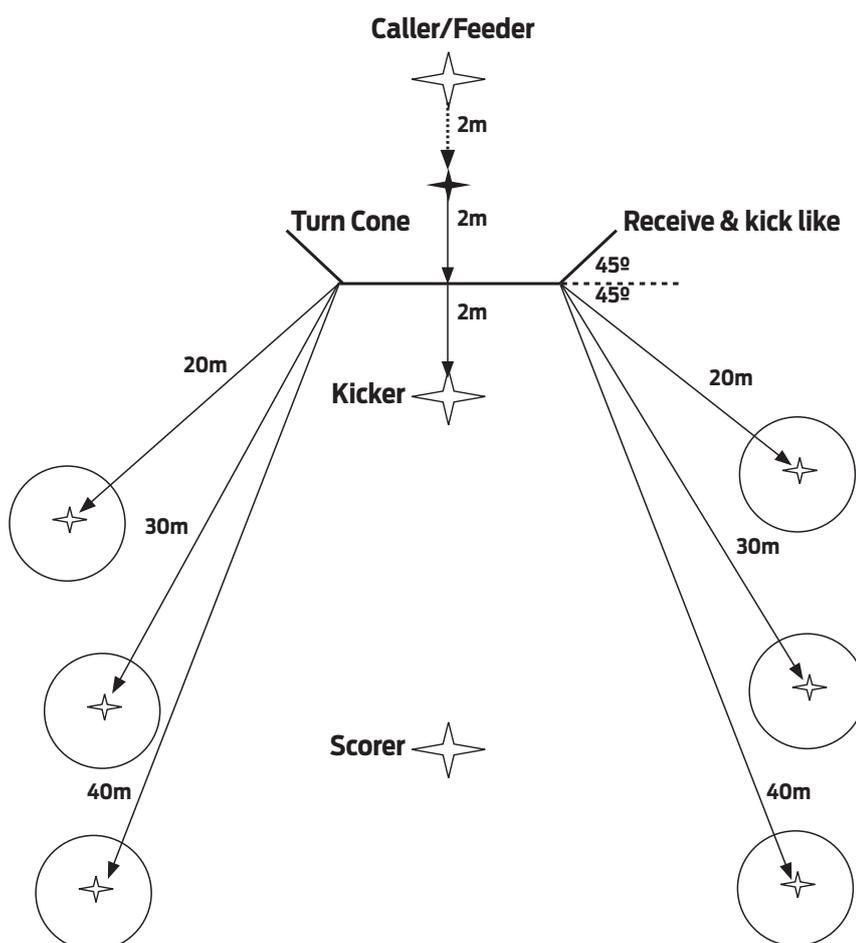
Groups of 15-25 players, on a synthetic athletics track, participate in each trial under strict supervision with individual times recorded.

6. SKILLS TESTS

Nathan Buckley Kicking Test

Setting up the test

- The test should be conducted on a grassed oval and in boots.
- Record the ambient temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction in relation to the kick test.
- The receive and kick line is 2m across the front and two lines extend a further 2m at 45 degrees (as shown below).
- The kicker starts at a cone 2m from the kick line.
- The turn cone is 2m from the kick line.
- The caller/feeder, who feeds and calls the kicks, is a further 2m from the turn cone.
- The distances should be measured from the corner of the kick line:
 - 20m is measured at a 45-degree angle from corner to cone;
 - 30m is measured from corner to cone;
 - 40m is measured from corner to cone; and
 - the 30 and 40m cones should line up as shown in the diagram.
- The target circles are 4m in diameter.
- The scorer should stand at 35m to best assess the result of each kick.



Running the test

- The test comprises six kicks per player.
- Each player kicks to each of the respective targets to complete the test.
- The caller feeds the ball with the aim of the player receiving the ball on the kick line.
- The six calls are Short Left or Right (20m), Middle Left or Right (30m) and Long Left or Right (40m).
- Each kick is called randomly as they receive the football.
- The kicker must receive the ball, hear the call, circle the turn cone and kick to the appropriate target.
- Each kick is timed from the moment the player leaves the starting cone to the point of contact for the kick. Each kick to be executed under three seconds.
- There is little need for rest and each test should take around 90 seconds.

Scoring the test

- A target player stands in the centre of each of the target areas
- Each kick will be judged on the following criteria

5 points..... Excellent..... Target didn't move and ball travelled quickly with low trajectory and perfect spin.
 4 points Very good Target receives within one step of the cone, low trajectory and good spin.
 3 points..... Effective..... Target receives with a foot inside circle, good trajectory and spin.
 2 points..... Ineffective Target had to leave circle to mark ball, good trajectory and spin.
 1 point Poor Target unable to mark football, poor trajectory and spin.

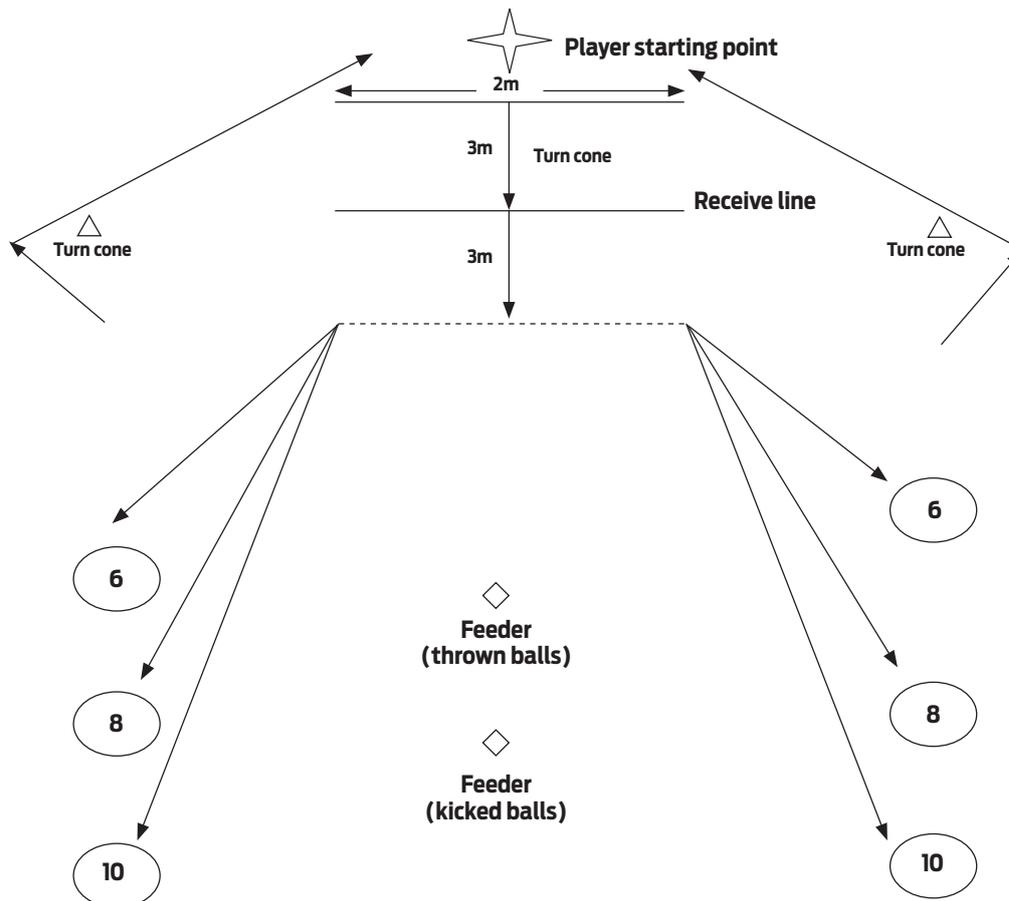
- Any kick executed beyond the three-second timeframe will incur a one-point penalty.
- A floater that hits the mark should be docked one point.
- The scorer will be the sole judge of the ranking of each kick.
- The recorder of the scores will assist the caller as the test takes place.



Matthew Lloyd Clean Hands Test

Setting up the test

- The test should be conducted on a grass oval and in boots.
 - The receive line for the take is 2m in front of the starting line.
 - The release line is a further 3m in front of the receive line.
 - The turn cones in between handballs are 3m back from the ends of the receive line.
 - The caller/feeder, who feeds and calls where the handballs need to be executed, is 8m from the receive line for ground balls and 10m for balls kicked.
 - The distances should be measured from the release line:
 - 6m handball is measured at a 45 degree angle from corner to cone.
 - 8m handball is measured from corner to cone.
 - 10m handball is measured from corner to cone.
 - The player must release the ball and execute the handball by the release line, which is 3m from the receive line.
 - The target player will be on a cone at 6m, 8m and 10m from the receive line.
- The scorer should stand about 5m behind the feeder/caller, to best assess the result of each take and handball.



Running the test

1. The test comprises of six takes and six handballs.
2. Each player receives the ball and handballs to any of the respective targets at the call of the feeder to complete the test.
3. Every distance must be covered in the test.
4. The caller/feeder feeds the ball in with the aim of the player taking the ball cleanly, whether it be below the knees or at chest level, at the receive line.
5. The six calls will comprise of Short Left or Right (6m) Middle Left or Right (8m) and Long Left or Right (10m).
6. Each take and handball is called randomly by the feeder/caller as the ball is released from the feeder/caller.
7. The player must concentrate on the call, take the ball cleanly and release it in the release zone, to the appropriate target with the appropriate hand.
8. Once the handball is executed, the player will jog back to the initial starting cone, 5m back from the receive line.
9. There is little need for rest and each test should take around 90 seconds.

Scoring the test

1. A target player stands on each cone at 6m, 8m and 10m.
2. Each take and handball will be judged on the following criteria:

5 points Excellent Clean take, quick execution with perfect spin and target not moving receives ball at chest height.
4 points Very Good Clean take, quick execution and good spin with target moving slightly to receive.
3 points Good Clean take, satisfactory execution with target able to take the ball after moving.
2 points Marginal Fumble but recovers to reach target with good technique.
1 point Poor Fumbles and gets ball to target with poor technique.
0 points Fail Fumbles and misses target completely.

Brad Johnson Goalkicking Test

Setting up the test

- The test should be conducted on a grass oval and in boots.
- Four imitation 'man on the mark' apparatus should be set up (stationary humans can be used as an alternative)
 - One located 35m out from goal on a 45 degree angle to the center of the goal line in the right pocket.
 - Two located 25m out from goal, 10m apart and located directly in front of and parallel to the goals.
 - One located 35m out from goal on a 45 degree angle to the center of the goal line in the left pocket.
- Two markers/cones 2m apart, located 40m out from and directly in front of the center of the goals.
- A length of rope or equivalent tied between the goal posts at 2.5 metres off the ground

Running the test

1. **SET SHOT** – A football is to be placed and sitting stationary in front of the man on the mark. Once the player takes possession of the ball they have 15 seconds to get back off the mark, commence their approach and complete the kick on their preferred foot. Once the kick is completed move to the next kick.
2. **RIGHT FOOT SNAP** – A football is to be placed on the spot marked on the ground in a stationary position, the player is to pick the ball up on the run and snap on their right foot over the "man on the mark". Once the kick is complete the player will complete a u-turn in preparation for kick 3.
3. **LEFT FOOT SNAP** – A football is to be placed on the spot marked on the ground in a stationary position, the player is to pick the ball up on the run and snap on their left foot over the "man on the mark". Once the kick is complete the player will move on to complete kick 4.
4. **KICK ON THE RUN** – The player will receive a handball from within 5 metres of the feeder, they will then round the back of the feeder on their preferred foot, run up to 10 metres with the ball before executing the kick on their preferred foot, between the markers and prior to the line marked at 40 metres. Once the kick is completed move to the next kick.
5. **SET SHOT** – A football is to be placed and sitting stationary in front of the man on the mark. Once the player takes possession of the ball they have 15 seconds to get back off the mark, commence their approach and complete the kick on their preferred foot. Once the kick is completed the test is finished.



TIME TO COMPLETE THE TEST

The clock will begin once the player takes possession of the ball at Kick 1 (Set Shot) and will continue to count throughout the duration of the test.

The maximum allowable time to complete the test is 50 seconds, should the player fail to complete the 5 kicks within the time allocated, the remaining kickas shall be deemed invalid and will not count towards the players overall score.

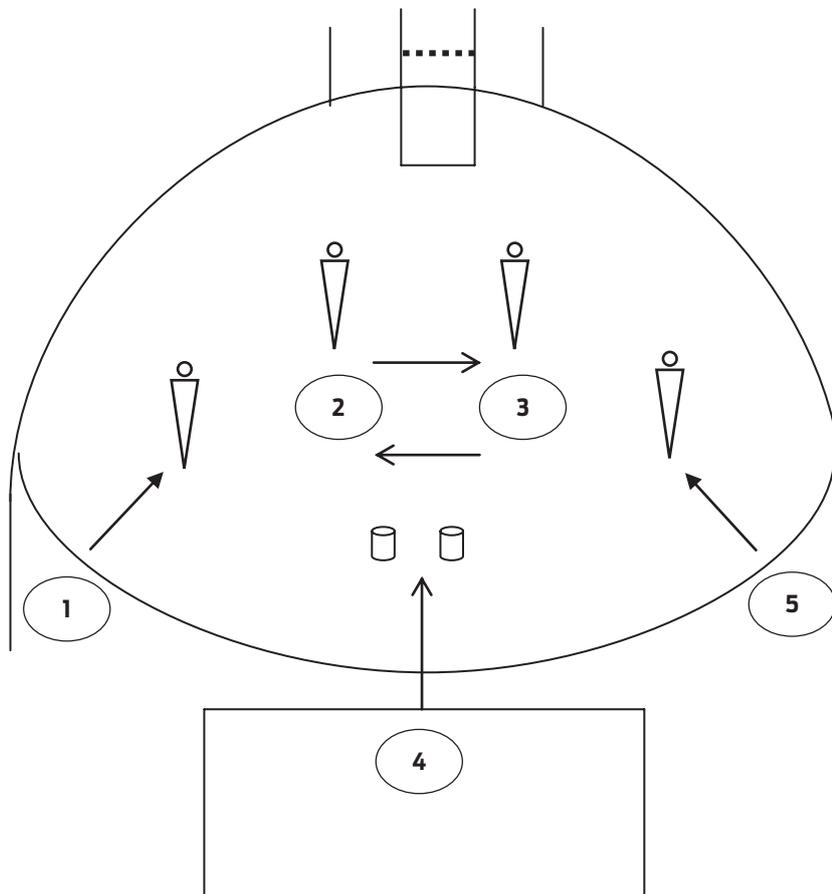
Scoring the test

The total of goals and points scored across the five kicks will be the score achieved for this test.

NOTE: for a goal to be scored, it must clear the 2.5 metre height as marked by the rope or equivalent tied between the goals.

No score is given if the ball passes under or makes contact with the height marker.

GOALKICKING TEST



EXAMPLE RESULTS

The example is Carlton's Jacob Weiting whose results we have recorded from the NAB AFL Draft Combine in 2015. Weiting was selected No. 1 in the 2015 NAB AFL Draft and had an outstanding first year in the AFL in 2016 playing 20 games predominately as a tall defender, winning Carlton's best first-year player award and running third in the NAB AFL Rising Star Award.

In analysing his fitness profile from the 2015 NAB AFL Draft Combine, Weiting presented as an imposing modern day AFL prospect suited for a key position. He stood 194.9cm and weighed 94kg with low skin folds of 46.1 (at 67th percentile in the group). His arm length of 87.4 cm (top 15 per cent) and huge hands measuring 25.5 cm (top one per cent) were complemented by his outstanding Absolute Running vertical jump of 344 cm (top three per cent) meaning he could play taller than his natural height suggested. Weiting was yet to turn 18 at the time of the combine.

Weiting's speed over the 20m was at the 51st percentile for the entire group but importantly he was quicker over the first five metres in relation to the group recording 1.07 seconds (65th percentile). His agility time of 8.28 seconds for the AFL agility run was elite for his size and in the top 20 per cent overall at the combine.

Weiting completed his physical profile with an outstanding level 15 shuttle 2 result in the beep test. This is rare for a player of his size. It must be remembered that fitness testing is only part of the overall picture used in analysing potential AFL players. In context, the industry regards it as around the last 15 per cent of the analysis with the playing of the game, work ethic and character all vitally important in assessing talent.

Weiting had an outstanding draft year winning All-Australian honours at under-18 level. He played for Vic Country as well as showcasing skill and composure for the Dandenong Stingrays in the TAC Cup and for the NAB AFL Academy in matches against VFL opponents.





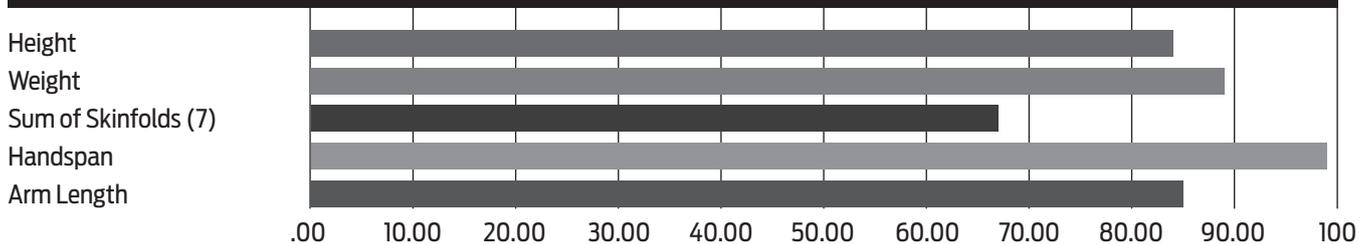
Table A: Fitness results

Name: JACOB WEITERING
Test Date: October 2015

BODY COMPOSITION – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	Height	Weight	Sum of Skinfolds	Handspan	Arm Length
UNITS	centimetre	kilograms	millimetre	centimetre	centimetre
SCORE	194.9	94	46.1	25.5	87.4
TEAM AVE	188	82.6	52.5	22.4	83.4
PERCENTILE	84	89	67	99	85

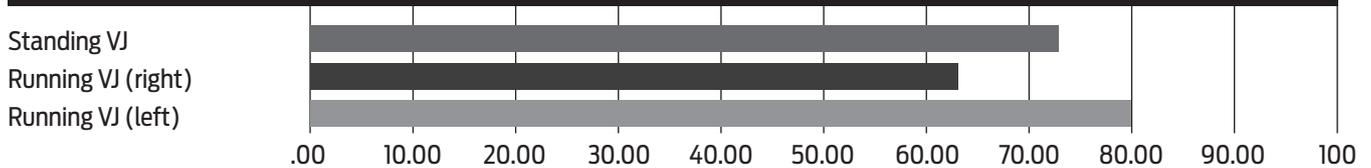
BODY COMPOSITION – PERCENTILE SCORES (GRAPH)



VERTICAL JUMP (VJ) – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	Standing VJ	Running VJ (right)	Running VJ (left)	5 Metre Sprint	10 Metre Sprint	20 Metre Sprint
UNITS	centimetre	centimetre	centimetre	seconds	seconds	seconds
SCORE	67	74	84	1.07	1.82	3.04
TEAM AVE	62	72	77	1.09	1.81	3.04
PERCENTILE	73	63	80	65	46	51

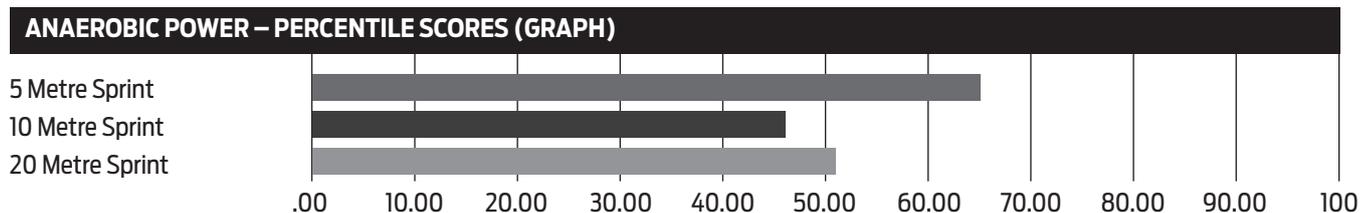
VERTICAL JUMP (VJ) – PERCENTILE SCORES (GRAPH)



ANAEROBIC POWER – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	5 Metre Sprint	10 Metre Sprint	20 Metre Sprint
UNITS	centimetre	seconds	seconds
SCORE	1.07	1.82	3.04
TEAM AVE	1.09	1.81	3.04
PERCENTILE	65	46	51

Table A continued



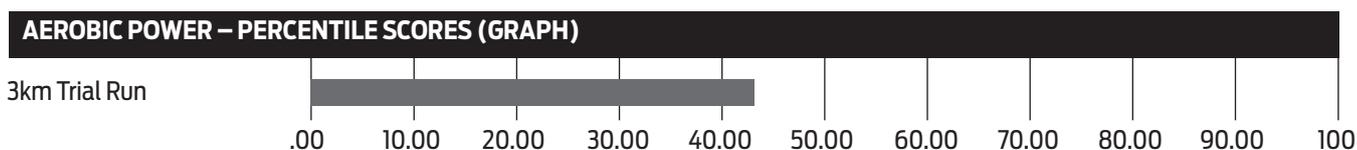
AEROBIC POWER – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	Agility Run	Shuttle Run	Shuttle Run	Shuttle Run	V02 max
UNITS	seconds	level	cone	decimal	ml.kg-1. min-1
SCORE	8.28	15	1	15.067	64.3
TEAM AVE	8.52	13	5	13.56	59.07
PERCENTILE	81				93



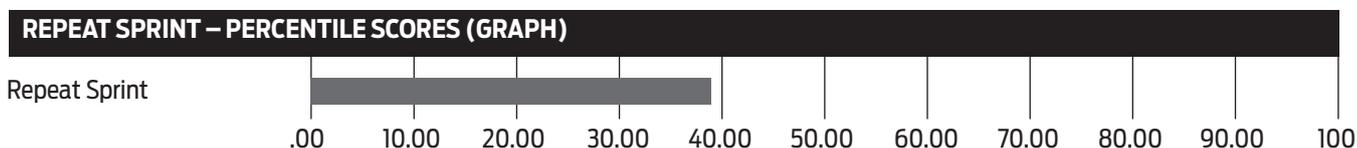
AEROBIC POWER – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	3km Time Trial	3km Time Trial
UNITS	seconds	mins. secs
SCORE	659	10.59
TEAM AVE	650	10.50
PERCENTILE		43



REPEAT SPRINT – PERCENTILE SCORES

TESTS	Repeat Sprint
UNITS	seconds
SCORE	25.92
TEAM AVE	24.75
PERCENTILE	39





AFL RECRUITING REPORTS

Another major element of the recruiting process is the confidential recruiting reports which are developed throughout the year by the AFL from information provided by state leagues on prospective players and made available to AFL clubs.

Fourteen key performance areas are rated by clubs twice per year on a scale from 1 up to 5. There are also sections for current strengths and weaknesses, injuries for the year and general comments.

Descriptors for each scale in each key performance area are provided to assist the club coach with this judgment.

The key performance areas are:

1. Kicking ability
2. Marking ability
3. Hand passing, Vision, Awareness
4. Clean hands
5. Ball-winning ability
6. Pace
7. Endurance
8. Recovery and Agility
9. Durability
10. Leadership and Self-discipline
11. Aggressiveness, Intensity and Second efforts
12. Football character
13. Competitiveness
14. Football smarts

The scales for making judgments, which will have a descriptor added, specific to the key performance area, are:

- 5 Rare
- 4 Excellent
- 3 Good
- 2 Marginal
- 1 Poor

PLAYING POSITIONS FOR RATINGS

Each player is rated against one of the following position/roles in our game.

POSITION	SIZE	HEIGHT
Defenders	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Key defenders	Tall	> 190 cm
Midfielders	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Ruckman	Specialist position	
Forwards	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Key forwards	Tall	> 190 cm

POSITION RATED

POSITION
(e.g. defender, midfielder)

SIZE
(e.g. small, medium, tall)

PLAYER TYPE

(mark INSIDE or OUTSIDE)*

- INSIDE players are in and under ball winners – predominantly handball, e.g. Sam Mitchell, Matt Priddis
- OUTSIDE players are the ball carriers – predominantly kick, e.g. Shaun Burgoyne, Matthew Suckling

KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
1. KICKING ABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Jack Gunston (Hawthorn), Scott Pendlebury (Collingwood)	5 Rare	Consistently kicks with accuracy over short and long distances and under pressure. Outstanding technician with great vision and awareness. Very good on non preferred side.
	4 Excellent	Kicking a real feature of his game, only occasionally makes a kicking error with preferred foot, normally under intense opposition pressure. Very capable on non preferred side, excellent decision maker.
	3 Good	Strong preferred foot kick, rarely misses short targets and is sound over distance, normally getting the ball to advantage. May struggle at times with opposite foot. Generally a good decision maker.
	2 Marginal	Not completely sound with technique so struggles under moderate pressure. Lacks real penetration & precision with his disposal, and at times lacks vision and awareness.
	1 Poor	Has flaws in technique and struggles to get the ball to teammate advantage with any consistency. At times lacks vision and awareness

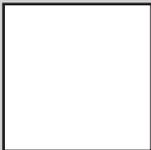


Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
2. MARKING ABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Todd Goldstein (North Melbourne), Jack Riewoldt (Richmond)	5 Rare	Outstanding overhead pack mark and in contests. Great low to ground and out in front. One grab player.
	4 Excellent	Strong in the air, holding his position when competing and very consistent overhead. Plays in front, good one on one. One grab player.
	3 Good	Clean out in front and generally takes the marks he should when in position, has good judgment. Competitive overhead in a contested situation.
	2 Marginal	Occasionally misses uncontested marks, and not strong in a contested situation. Often two grabs or allows ball to fall behind.
	1 Poor	Does not have natural soft hands, dropping marks that should be taken. Tendency to drop the head and fumbles regularly.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
3. HANDPASSING/ VISION/AWARENESS  AFL BENCHMARKS Scott Pendlebury (Collingwood), Jobe Watson (Essendon)	5 Rare	Outstanding peripheral vision, depth perception and skills on both sides, executing with speed and accuracy. Always chooses right option putting receiver into better position. Capacity to always get hands free in tackles.
	4 Excellent	Quick, strong and accurate on both sides, brings others into the game with excellent decision making. Very good in tight situations. Capacity to always get hands free in tackles.
	3 Good	Consistently accurate skills on both sides, regularly able to put the ball to advantage regardless of distance. Rarely makes fundamental errors.
	2 Marginal	Sound skills with preferred hand, but opposite hand lacks strength. Sometimes chooses wrong option in traffic.
	1 Poor	Regularly misses targets, has some technique problems on either hand and/or makes poor decisions.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
4. CLEAN HANDS  AFL BENCHMARKS Gary Ablett (Gold Coast Suns), Scott Thompson (Adelaide Crows)	5 Rare	Soft hands, doesn't fumble, quickly moving ball into disposal position. Collects difficult balls off hands, in air and ground level, first grab in all conditions.
	4 Excellent	Always in control, very effective with his ball handling, rarely double handles difficult balls in pressure situations or tough conditions.
	3 Good	Effective ball handler who is generally in control and maintains ball in front, with only the occasional fumble.
	2 Marginal	Inconsistent ball handler, at times struggles below the knees allowing the ball to get out of control and tends to overrun the ball.
	1 Poor	Struggles to get down and will regularly fumble the ball, even when in some space. Will leave the ball behind.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
5. BALL-WINNING ABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Nat Fyfe (Fremantle), Josh Kennedy (Sydney)	5 Rare	Reads play consistently well and wins crucial contests and/or positions himself to win uncontested possession. Great courage in attack on ball and displays the capacity to break tackles.
	4 Excellent	Wins vast majority of contests and has real courage in attack on the ball. Smart reader of the play, getting to the right position consistently.
	3 Good	Strong in contested situations. Is a good one-on-one player, winning the ball well in contests in most circumstances.
	2 Marginal	Not strong on winning contested balls, instead relying on running to receive, loose ball gathers in space and reading the ball off hands. Not a Centre Square player.
	1 Poor	Lacks presence around the ball. Fails to consistently display ball-winning ability attributes.

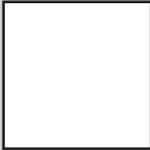
Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
6. PACE  AFL BENCHMARKS Patrick Dangerfield (Geelong), Brett Deledio (GWS Giants)	5 Rare	Outstanding reaction to play which maximizes his pace. Breaks up the game with his ability to take the opposition on. Can apply tremendous defensive pressure. Nearly always the quickest player on the ground and transfers quickly from defence to attack and vice versa. Sub 2.92sec for 20m.*
	4 Excellent	Reacts quicker than opponents. Usually one of the quickest players on the ground and uses it to influence the game. Transfers quickly from defence to attack and vice versa. 2.93-3.00sec for 20m.*
	3 Good	Rarely caught with the ball and can apply strong pressure, able to run down opponents from behind. 3.01-3.07sec for 20m.*
	2 Marginal	Pace and reaction time questionable, has average pace in the game and does not have a leg speed influence with or without the ball. 3.08-3.14sec for 20m.*
	1 Poor	Is often caught. Rarely runs with the ball. Cannot apply pressure on the opposition. Over 3.15sec for 20m.*

*Note: Guideline Only. Can make subjective judgments

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
7. ENDURANCE  AFL BENCHMARKS Bradley Hill (Fremantle), Matt Priddis (West Coast)	5 Rare	Beep test of 16 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 14.5 plus. Tremendous ability to keep running up & down the ground all day
	4 Excellent	Beep test of 15 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 13.5 plus. Will keep running and presenting himself to contests for much of the day
	3 Good	Beep test of 13.5 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 12.5 plus. Not been officially tested but regarded as very good with an ability to keep going.
	2 Marginal	Beep test of 12 plus except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines, 11 plus. Not been officially tested but regarded as okay.
	1 Poor	Beep test of below 12, except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines – below 11. Really struggles to play out a quarter in a midfield position, does not have good endurance.

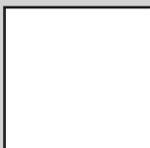


Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
8. RECOVERY AND AGILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Gary Ablett (Gold Coast), Cyril Rioli (Hawthorn)	5 Rare	Outstanding physical ability to accelerate, change direction and recover. Great balance and co-ordination as well as evasive ability.
	4 Excellent	Has excellent agility and great change of direction. Is well balanced, “light” on his feet and stays in the contest.
	3 Good	Good physical ability and recovery which enables him to keep his feet and get back into the contest.
	2 Marginal	Can change direction but hasn’t evasive ability or balance to handle tight situations. Often falls over.
	1 Poor	Only moves in straight line and unable to react when change of direction required. Loses feet.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
9. DURABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Sam Mitchell (West Coast), Harry Taylor (Geelong)	5 Rare	Never misses a game or training session and continues running and performing. Rarely suffers any injury.
	4 Excellent	Only occasionally misses any training or match through injury. Recovers quickly from soft tissue injuries and is extremely diligent in managing his recovery.
	3 Good	Recovers quickly from injuries and works well on his recovery. Misses less than 4 games per year over the last couple of seasons. Only misses through severe bone/ligament injury.
	2 Marginal	Has had a few soft tissue injuries missing training/matches. Style of play/body type can lead to injuries.
	1 Poor	Had consistent run of injuries missing matches and training including pre-season. Rarely strings games together.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
10. LEADERSHIP AND SELF DISCIPLINE  AFL BENCHMARKS Scott Pendlebury (Collingwood), Joel Selwood (Geelong)	5 Rare	Leads through example on field and on track, instills confidence in team mates. Gives positive feedback to players, role model at club and stays in control at all times.
	4 Excellent	Enjoys the leadership role and is a positive “centre of influence”. Only occasionally below rare standard with only the odd transgression.
	3 Good	Leads from the front and can positively influence others, but may go into his shell under pressure. Generally remains disciplined
	2 Marginal	Naturally quiet person who is still learning and does not lead at this stage. May lack in self discipline at times.
	1 Poor	Transgresses self discipline, has a poor attitude and has a negative influence, not showing any leadership.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
11. AGGRESSION, TACKLING, INTENSITY AND 2ND EFFORTS  AFL BENCHMARKS Joel Selwood (Geelong), Josh Kennedy (Sydney)	5 Rare	Enjoys physical contact, bumps, tackles, and intimidates opposition. Bounces back after being dumped. Fearless in attack on ball and opponent at all times. 2nd efforts and recovery outstanding.
	4 Excellent	Great attack on ball and strong on opposition when they are in position. Makes 2nd efforts.
	3 Good	No weaknesses in level of aggression/intensity or 2nd efforts.
	2 Marginal	Occasionally takes eye off ball or allows opponent to push past. 2nd efforts missing at times. Assesses risks when approaching contest.
	1 Poor	Inconsistent in attack on the ball and 2nd efforts.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
12. FOOTBALL CHARACTER  AFL BENCHMARKS Luke Hodge (Hawthorn), Nick Riewoldt (St Kilda)	5 Rare	Has outstanding work ethic and is extremely coachable with a genuine love of the game. Plays at his best against the best opposition. Responds strongly when challenged, has a great desire to improve.
	4 Excellent	Plays and trains at a high level of mental and physical intensity, very pro-active looking to better himself at every opportunity. Thrives in the club and team environment
	3 Good	Prepares well and desires to improve, works hard for his team. May become slightly reactive under pressure or when challenged. Rarely missing training.
	2 Marginal	Works hard in games but could improve on the track. Might only do what he has to do.
	1 Poor	Has ability but does not prepare on the track well enough which reflects in match day work ethic.in match work ethic.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
13. COMPETITIVENESS  AFL BENCHMARKS Jordan Lewis (Melbourne), Matt Priddis (West Coast)	5 Rare	Fiercely competitive in every aspect on and off the field. Does not accept anything but victory in any competition. Hard, aggressive and spirited. Shows true grit if initially beaten.
	4 Excellent	Fiercely competitive. Doesn't accept being beaten in any contest and always remains competitive.
	3 Good	A strong competitor who enjoys the contest, with no real weaknesses in the competitive area.
	2 Marginal	Generally competes at a satisfactory level, but can lower his competitiveness when confidence is down and pressure is applied.
	1 Poor	Not very competitive by nature.



Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
14. FOOTBALL SMARTS	5 Rare	Outstanding decision-maker. Always chooses right option with or without the ball and when competing, e.g. when to spoil/mark. Outstanding at the 1%ers. Has great understanding of the game.
 AFL BENCHMARKS Marcus Bontempelli (W Bulldogs), Sam Mitchell (West Coast)	4 Excellent	Excellent decision maker with or without the ball and reads the game very well. Has a strong “feel for the game” when the pressure is on.
	3 Good	Generally understands the game and normally chooses correct options. Contributes in team meetings
	2 Marginal	Handles the basics of the game well, but has too many decision making errors across the course of games & training.
	1 Poor	Lacks smartness out on the ground, struggles with game play comprehension.

EVALUATION OF YOUTH PLAYERS

Evaluating player performance is perhaps the most difficult part of the coach's job. Yet it is one part that the coach must do frequently, with accuracy, and with fairness. The rating process used by the AFL clubs can also be applied by coaches at other levels to evaluate their players and design better individual coaching programs and practices. In doing so there are a few important things which can introduce bias into the system which coaches should watch out for.

COACHES' EVALUATION GUIDE

Evaluation/rating errors occur in a systematic manner when a coach observes and evaluates a player or recruit. Correction of these errors is difficult because coaches are usually unaware they are making them and even when aware of errors, they are often unable to correct them themselves. The result is that a player may be inappropriately selected to join the team, be given a scholarship, to start a game, etc. The most common rating errors that coaches make and suggestions for controlling them are outlined below. If these suggestions are followed coaches should be able to provide more consistent, and in the long run, more accurate evaluations of their players.

COMMON ERRORS IN RATING PLAYERS

Contrast Effects

The contrast effects error is the tendency for a coach to evaluate a player relative to other players rather than on the requirements of the playing position. Similarly, players should be rated on the degree to which they fulfil pre-determined playing position requirements, not on how they compare with others.

Contrast effects occur most frequently when a coach talks with or observes one or more highly qualified players for a certain position. The coach then interviews one who is only average. This can also occur when a coach talks with or observes one or more very unqualified players followed by a look at an average player. In the first case, the average player may be rejected only for looking bad compared to the two previous ones. The player may very well have done a good job for the team. The rejection may come back to haunt the coach as the player may go on to perform well for an opposing team. Conversely, in the second example, the average player may get a higher evaluation and be added to a team list simply due to the favourable comparison to much weaker players.

Controlling Contrast Effects Errors

1. Evaluate a large number of players at the same time; the error is more frequent when only a few players are observed or evaluated.
2. Base performance evaluations on specific “predetermined” job requirements for the position (ensure you have a valid position description).
3. Do not rate players in any particular order (i.e. don’t rate the best of the worst players first).
4. Rate players on the extent to which they fulfill the requirements of the position; compare players for the same position after, rather than before, an evaluation.

First Impression

First impression error refers to the tendency for a coach to make an initial favourable or unfavourable judgment about a player, and then ignore (or distort) subsequent information, so as to support the initial impression. For example, the first game of the season the new half-back flanker did an outstanding job, marking strongly and setting up numerous forward moves. For the next three games the half-back flanker performed at best average. The coach committed first impression error by continuing to give the half-back flanker a high evaluation despite the fact that once the half-back flanker knew that he/she would start in the side, the player decided to coast in on-field performance. Conversely, another half-back flank recruit initially experienced difficulties in performance for a number of personal reasons (e.g. bad family relationships, academic problems, etc). After three weeks of practice, the player was doing extremely well, but the coach continued to assign mediocre ratings. The unfortunate result was that the first half-back flanker continued to start, even though not giving his/her best to the team, while the second player was assigned to the bench.

Controlling First Impression Errors

1. Reserve all judgments about a player until the end of the observation period.
2. Be a note taker rather than an evaluator during the interval between making recruiting or starting line-up decisions.
Ideally, coaches should record daily a player’s behaviour that they observed which may lead to a starting line-up decision. The incidents should be reviewed later by the coach when it is time to make that final decision. Read the incidents in an order other than the recorded sequence. For example, first read the incidents that occurred midweek during preparation for Saturday’s game, then read those that occurred toward the beginning of the week during practice.

Halo Effect

The halo effect refers to an inappropriate generalisation from one aspect of a player’s performance to all aspects of playing ability. For example, a centre half-forward who is outstanding on only one area (eg. kicking for goal) may be rated inaccurately as outstanding in all areas of tall forward performance (e.g. physical size and strength, movement, team attitude, football knowledge, etc). Conversely, if a centre half-forward is rated as deficient in one area, that player may be rated incorrectly as doing poorly on all aspects of centre half-forward ability. Players have both strengths and weaknesses and each need to be evaluated independently.

Controlling Halo Effect Errors

1. Do not listen to comments about a player until you have made your own evaluation.
2. If a player is to be evaluated by several coaches, each must assign their rating or make their evaluations independently.
Group discussion about the player should come after everyone has had an opportunity to observe and evaluate the player. The discussion should not take place before some sort of evaluation, such as ratings, has been completed.
3. Rate the player solely on areas that are linked to playing performance. Recognise that different areas of playing performance are not always related.



Similar To Me Effect

This error is a tendency on the part of the coach to judge more favourably those players whom they perceive as similar to themselves. That is, the more closely the player resembles the coach in terms of attitudes, background (e.g. school attended, previous coach, etc), the stronger the tendency of the coach to judge that player favourably. We tend to like them because it is flattering and reinforcing. This effect may be acceptable in social situations, but is an error when making appraisals about playing ability.

Controlling Similar To Me Effect Errors

1. Establish the standards of performance expected for each position before evaluating players.
2. Make certain that all standards which will be used to evaluate players are indeed related to playing performance.
3. Rate players solely in relation to the position requirements, not in terms of how similar they are to oneself.
4. Have players evaluated by several coaches with different backgrounds and attitudes.

Central Tendency

Central tendency error is committed by the coach who wants to play it safe. This error refers to coaches who consistently rate a player or recruit as average when their performance clearly warrants a substantially higher or lower rating. If the coach rates the player as average and the player subsequently performs extremely well, the coach can say, "See I told you that player wasn't bad". On the other hand, if the player does poorly, the coach can say "What did you expect? I told you that player wasn't all that good".

Negative and Positive Leniency

Negative and positive leniency errors are committed by the coach who is either too hard or too easy in rating players. In the performance appraisal process, positive leniency may raise unwarranted expectations of a player for a starting position. With negative leniency or toughness, the player may get tired of constantly having a go, because no matter how hard the player tries, the coach cannot be satisfied. In both cases, the result can be the same, the players stop putting in their best effort. It is interesting to note that players generally do not like coaches who are too lenient in their evaluations. In the latter case it is demotivating to see a player who is lazy and unskilled get the same high evaluation, or perhaps start a game, as a player who is a hard worker and good performer.

Controlling Central Tendency and Positive and Negative Leniency Errors

1. Record observations of exactly what is observed in practice or on match videos. Compare these observations with the standards set for being a good performer in a certain position.
2. For most players, there will be good and poor areas of performance. Take notice when a player receives similar ratings across all areas (halo effect) and all of the evaluations are extreme at either end, or middle of the road. There should be a range of ratings on different areas for each player.



COACH, PLAYER, UMPIRE RELATIONSHIPS



Chapter 13

Coach, Player, Umpire Relationships

UMPIRING

Coaches have a key role to play in the development of umpiring, particularly in the way they act towards umpires. Umpiring Australian Football is an exciting sporting activity which can, and does, provide a great deal of self satisfaction and enjoyment. Good umpiring can enhance the game as a spectacle and contributes to the enjoyment of players, officials and spectators. It is, therefore, in the best interests of the game and the participants for everyone to promote and enhance the image of umpiring as an attractive sporting option. Coaches have an important role in this regard and are a powerful centre of influence within the club. Potentially, they are the most influential role models for the players. Their behaviour towards umpires will often be reflected in their players' conduct.

UMPIRING IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

The Umpiring is Everyone's Business campaign focuses on using influential people within Australian Football to advocate positively about umpiring and for all participants within our game to take responsibility for their behaviour on match day.

The AFL's Umpiring is Everyone's Business campaign aims to communicate the following key messages.

1. Umpiring is everyone's business – whether you are a coach, player, parent, administrator, supporter, we all have a role to play in creating positive match day environments. Your attitude and behaviour has a direct impact on an umpire's enjoyment of their role.
2. Umpiring is a significant issue for our game – the demand for umpires at community level continues to grow. There is an annual umpiring turnover of 20-25 per cent. Recruitment is difficult, but retention is the more significant challenge.
3. One of the reasons for this turnover and the challenge to recruit is the existence of poor match day environments that are generated by players, coaches, administrators and supporters (including parents). These environments consist of abuse and intimidation towards umpires.
4. Umpiring can often be a very difficult and challenging task and umpires do the job because of their enjoyment and love for the game – when the match day environment is poor their enjoyment deteriorates and this leads to eventual drop-out.

The coach, as the most influential person in the club, plays a significant role in the sport's ability to encourage positive match day environments. The campaign encourages coaches at community level to understand the role they play and that they should –

- Be role models in relation to behaving correctly on match day
- Advocate positively about umpiring to players, parents, supporters and club administrators
- Support and build good relationships with their local umpiring group

Umpire abuse remains one of the most significant reasons why umpires stop officiating in Australian Football. It is unlikely that abusing an umpire, at any level, has ever improved their performance. It is, however, likely that it caused them to question the reason why they are involved in the sport and for many it has caused them to quit.

Particularly through the junior club system, the education of spectators, players, coaches and administrators about the role of the umpire is vital in order to change negative community attitudes and football culture to create a positive match day environment for umpires.





THE BIG PICTURE – WHERE DO WE ALL FIT IN?

Coach comparisons

AFL coach	State league coach	Community coach
Full-time employed	Part-time employed	Volunteer
8-10 sessions per week	Train 3-4 times per week	Trains 2-3 times per week
Six full-time support staff	Three part-time support staff	Two volunteer support staff
Level 3	Level 2 minimum	Level 1 minimum
Paid \$300,000 plus/year	Paid \$20,000 plus/year	Volunteer
Huge expectations	High expectations	Expectations?

Umpire comparisons

AFL umpire	State league umpire	Community umpire
\$1500 per game	\$225 per game	\$50 per game average
4-5 sessions per week	2-3 sessions per week	One night per week
Observed and coached weekly	Observed and coached weekly	Seldom observed or coached
Average age 30	Average age 26	13-55 years
Level 3	Level 3	Level 1-2
Huge expectations	High expectations	Expectations?

Umpires/coaches

- Like coaches, not all umpires are the same.
- Coaches, umpires, players, trainers and administrators all require time to develop.
- At the local level, coaches and umpires are essentially volunteers who are happy to support the game in various capacities. The standard of a game is enhanced by quality coaches and umpires.

As a coach, remember...

- Keep your coaching thoughts relevant to the level of competition you are involved in.
- The coach is the most influential person at a game and your behaviour at all community game levels is crucial.
- That community football is not the AFL, and you should be mindful of and respect the differences.

As a coach you are an influential role model and your players will more often than not emulate your behaviour. Complete the following assessment by ticking either yes or no for each question. Your answers to these questions will give you an indication of how to behave towards umpires.

	YES	NO
1. Knowledge of the laws Do you read the law book? Do you encourage your players to read the law book? Are you familiar with the 'spirit of the laws'? Do you discuss the 'spirit of the laws' with your players? Do you invite umpires to training to assist in developing better understanding of the laws? Do you raise your concerns with the umpires' adviser? Do you actively teach and encourage players to play within the laws?		
2. At the match Are umpires made welcome by your club? Do you seek input as to how your club looks after umpires? Does your club appoint someone to look after umpires? Does your club provide escorts for the umpires leaving the ground at half-time and after the match? Do you welcome the umpires when they visit your rooms before the match?		
3. During the match Do you shout at the umpires? Do you shout comments about decisions in earshot of your players or the umpires? Do you refer to the umpires so as they can hear during your address to the players? Do you permit your players to dispute decisions or back chat umpires?		
4. After the match Does your club look after the umpires after the match? Do you discuss the match with the umpires? Do you tend to ignore the umpires after the match? Do you encourage your players to talk to the umpires socially?		

KNOWING THE LAWS OF THE GAME

Players and teams who have a thorough knowledge of the laws of the game will usually make fewer errors in regard to the rules, be less distracted by decisions, and therefore perform at a more consistent level. The following spirit of the laws section outlines how umpires make decisions in the seven key areas of the game. A thorough knowledge of the rules and umpiring signals by players and coaches can also provide tactical and performance advantages to a team.

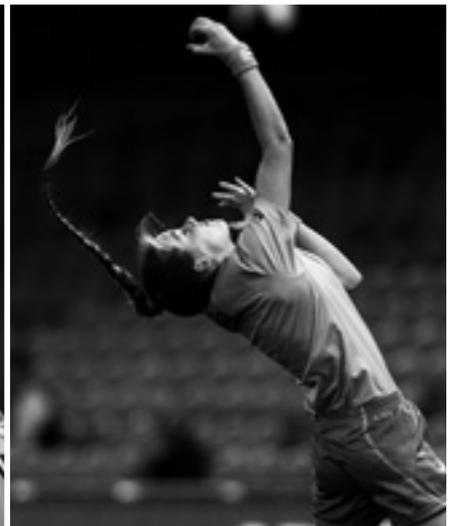
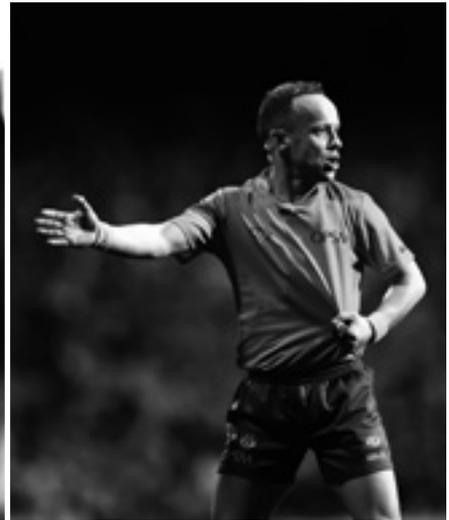
"My son is 14 and he umpires locally. He was walking off after umpiring an under-12s game and had parents screaming abuse in his face. Why would he stick with it when he could just play with his mates and no one would care how many mistakes he made?"

Interview – AFL Youth Participation Research Report: Deakin University.

"I started up umpiring due to the monetary incentive but soon started to appreciate it for more than that. I now love umpiring. It is a great challenge because you deal with slightly different scenarios every week. It also keeps me fit, which increases my self confidence and enables me to do well in other aspects of life, not just umpiring. I have developed great friendships since taking up umpiring, both within the umpires group and with football players and clubs. I look forward to the football season now. I am still making money although this is not the reason I umpire. I have gained so much out of umpiring."

Andrew, 16-year-old umpire, AFL Capricornia

Successful coaches of the future will be those who educate players to develop their individual and team skills in accordance with the laws. It is important that coaches and umpires develop a responsible and professional relationship for the benefit of the game and all those involved.



SPIRIT OF THE LAWS

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LAWS:

A. to ensure the game is played in a fair manner and a spirit of true sportsmanship and

B. to where possible in a contact sport, prevent injuries to players participating in the match

In an effort to achieve consistency and accuracy in decision making, there is an emphasis on understanding the “spirit of the laws” (i.e. the philosophies underlying the laws) and officiating according to the spirit of the laws.

SPIRIT OF THE LAWS

For coaching purposes, five main areas (spirit of the laws) have been identified.

1. Contest for the ball

“The player who is making the ball their sole objective will be protected against any form of illegal contact”, such as:

- Contact to the head
- Contact below the knees
- Held when not in possession of the ball
- Push in the back
- Kicking in a manner likely to cause injury
- Or any conduct which is deemed unreasonable or unnecessary in the circumstances

2. Marking contests

“The player whose sole objective is to contest a mark shall be permitted to do so.”

- Illegal contact includes players who push, bump, block, hold, interfere with the arms or make high contact
- Where there is incidental contact in a marking contest when the ball is the sole objective (eyes on the ball), play on will result
- When a player leaps early, the attempt must be realistic (i.e. they must be able to touch the ball)

3. Ruck contests

“The player whose sole objective is to contest the ruck shall be permitted to do so.”

- Illegal contact includes players who push, bump, block, hold or make high contact
- Where there is incidental contact in a ruck contest when the ball is the sole objective (eyes on the ball), play on will result

4. Tackling – HOLDING THE BALL

“For a holding the ball free kick to be awarded, the tackle must be legal.”

Diving on the ball

“The ball shall be kept in motion.”

- Where a player elects to dive on the ball or elects to drag the ball underneath their body and is correctly tackled, the player is to be penalised for holding the ball if they fail to knock the ball clear or correctly dispose of it

No Prior Opportunity – Reasonable Opportunity

“The player who has possession of the ball and is tackled correctly by an opponent, shall be given a reasonable opportunity to make a genuine attempt to kick or handball the ball”.

- If the tackle pins the ball and a genuine attempt is made to dispose of the ball, a field bounce will result
- If a correct tackle or bump causes the player with the ball to lose possession, play on will result

Prior Opportunity – Must legally dispose immediately

“Where a player has had possession of the ball and has had a prior opportunity to dispose and is then correctly tackled by an opponent they must immediately and successfully kick or handball the ball.”

- If a correct tackle pins the ball or causes the player with the ball to lose possession, a free kick will result
- If a bump or knock to the arm causes the player with the ball to lose possession, play on will result

5. 50-metre penalty

“After a mark or free kick has been awarded, a 50-metre penalty will be awarded against the opposing team which unduly delays the play or abuses an umpire.”

An undue delay of the play includes:

- Cribbing the mark
- Not returning the ball directly to a player after they have been awarded a mark or free kick
- Unduly holding up an opponent after that player has marked the ball
- A player not involved in a marking contest holds a player who has marked the ball or has been awarded a free kick
- Remaining in or entering the protected area



ROLE OF UMPIRES

At some stage during the year, whether it is pre-season or during the season, there may be the need for coaches, players or other team staff to assist in umpiring a game of Australian Football.

While by no means exhaustive, the following section provides an outline on the role of the field, boundary and goal umpires, including umpiring signals likely to be performed by umpires throughout a game. Some tips have also been provided to get started, should the opportunity arise to umpire a game.

ROLE OF THE FIELD UMPIRE

The field umpire has a crucial role to play in Australian Football and people need to practise to become umpires.

The role of the field umpire on match-day is to:

- Apply the laws and their interpretations according to the spirit of the laws.
- Attend to the administrative requirements necessary for the successful staging of the game.

General play

Controlling the match is the major responsibility of the field umpire. While there are many factors that influence control, the way in which umpires go about their tasks is the most critical one.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Rules

- Ensure you understand the rules of the game.

Umpires are decision-makers

- They have to have the courage of their convictions to make decisions irrespective of where on the ground or at what time of the match the need arises.
- Pay the first free kick – do not allow scrimmages to go too long.

Umpires need to demonstrate confidence in their decisions.

Confidence is demonstrated by:

- A strong, long whistle – BLOW it hard.
- Communicate the decision verbally – e.g. “Push in the back, your free kick No. 7” Any message should be delivered in a strong, firm manner and voice.
- Visual indications being performed in the correct manner whenever possible. SHOW everybody what the free kick is for.
- Then GO. Once you have awarded the free kick, you should move promptly to take up position for the next act of play.

SIGNALS: FIELD UMPIRES



• Commencing play



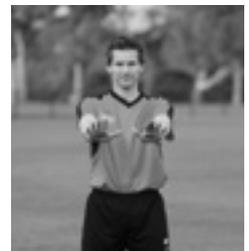
• Holding the ball



• High tackle



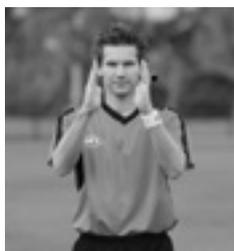
• Holding the man



• Push in the back



• Field throw-up



• All clear goal



• All clear behind



• End of play



• Blood rule

ROLE OF THE GOAL UMPIRE

It is the responsibility of the goal umpire to:

- Be the sole judge of the score.
- Keep record of all the goals and behinds scored in the match.
- Confirm score with the other goal umpire at each break.
- Complete scorecard and submit to football committee member/match manager.

SIGNALS: GOAL UMPIRES

TO OTHER GOAL UMPIRES AND SPECTATORS



- Goal – from here, flags come across once, back once and then back down.



- Behind – from here, flag comes across, back and then down.



- Score has been annulled.



- Out of bounds – to boundary umpire.



- Behind has been scored – to boundary umpire.

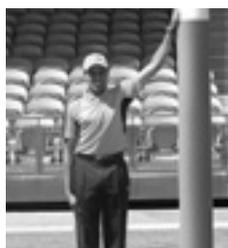


- On the full – to boundary umpire.



- Ball hits behind post on the full – tap three times.

TO FIELD UMPIRES



- Ball touched goalpost. Follow with behind signal.



- Ball touched leg above knee. Follow with a behind signal.



- Behind has been scored.



- Goal has been scored.

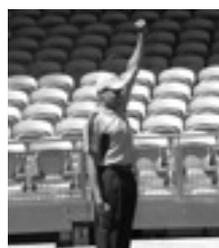


- Ball was touched. Follow with behind signal.



- Blood rule.

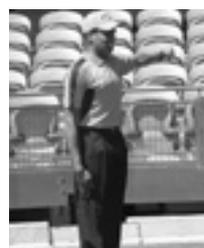
TO BOUNDARY UMPIRES



- Out of bounds – to boundary umpire.



- Behind has been scored – to boundary umpire.



- On the full – to boundary umpire.



- Ball hits behind post on the full – tap three times.



Judging the score

In order for a score to be registered, the football must be completely over the behind or goal lines, or have hit the goal post.

A goal is scored:

- When the ball completely crosses the goal line after being kicked by a player on the attacking team without touching a player or goal post.

A behind is scored:

- If the ball hits the goal post or travels over the goal post.
- Crosses the behind line.
- Is touched by a player.
- If the ball is taken over the goal or behind line by another player.

HOW TO COMPLETE A SCORECARD

Record progressively:

- Record the scores progressively, i.e. 123, rather than 111.

Confer each quarter/half:

- At the end of each quarter/half, the goal umpires confer to check each has the same score.
- If the scores are not the same, the goal umpires discuss the situation during the break and try to resolve the matter.

Total at the end of the match:

- Add up the goals and behinds scored by each team at the end of the match, and record the total scores.

SCORECARD				
LIONS			BOMBERS	
1st Half	Goals 1234	Behinds 12	Goals 12	Behinds 1234
	4	2	2	4
2nd Half	123	12	123	12
	3	2	3	2
TOTAL	7	4	5	6
TOTAL POINTS		46		36

ROLE OF THE BOUNDARY UMPIRE

It is the boundary umpire's responsibility to:

- Be the sole judge of when the ball is out of bounds.
- Apply the laws relating to boundary umpiring in accordance with the spirit of the laws.

Main duties:

- Adjudicate when the ball has fully crossed the boundary line – out of bounds; out on the full.
- Throw the ball back into play when out of bounds.
- Return the ball to the field umpire after a goal is scored.
- Monitor the centre square for players entering or leaving during the centre bounce.

SIGNALS: BOUNDARY UMPIRES



• Out of bounds.



• Out of bounds on full.



• Indicating where the ball crossed the boundary line on the full.



SCORECARDS AND VOTE CARD

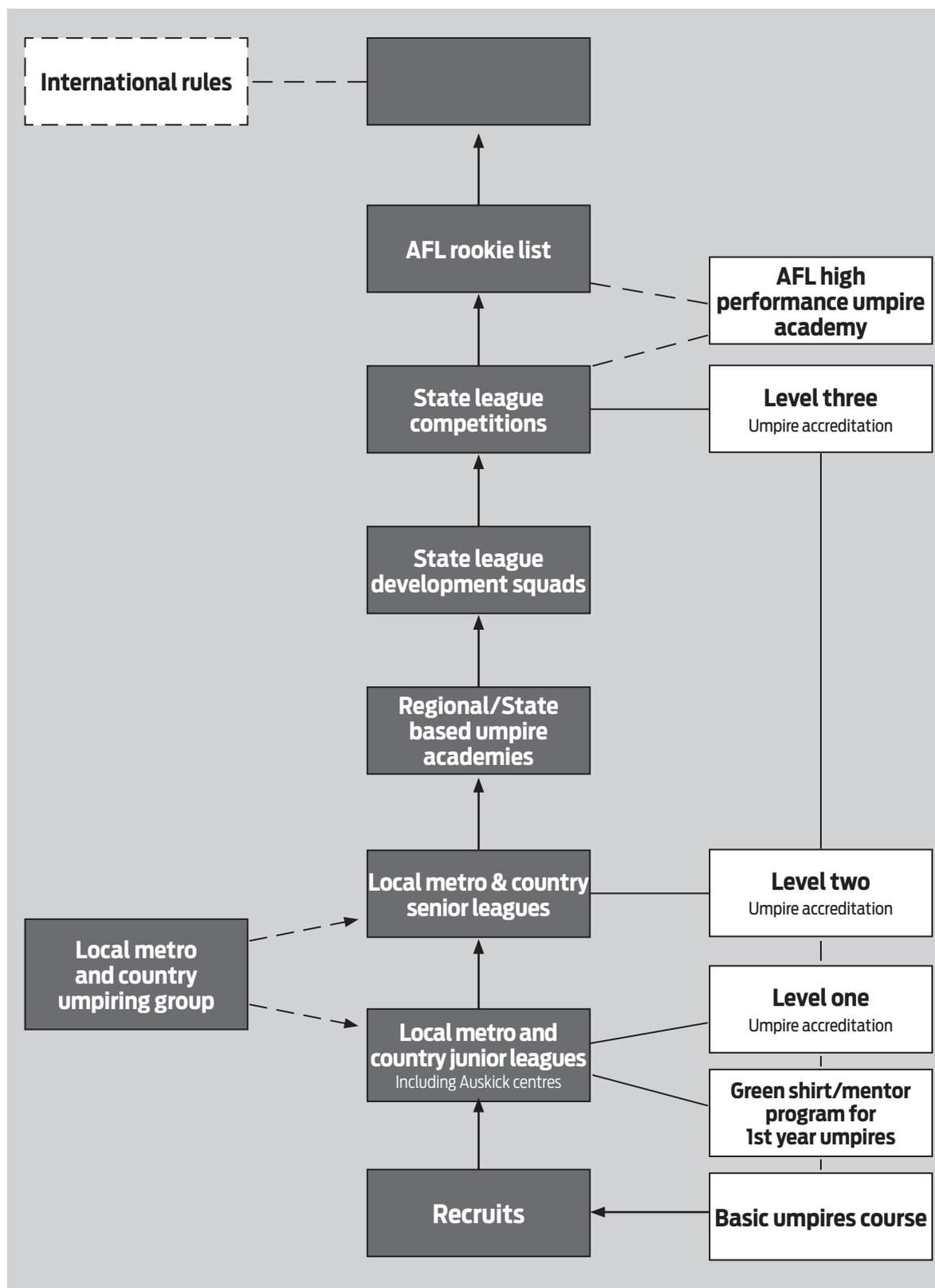
SCORECARD				
..... Club		 Club	
1st quarter	Goals	Behinds	Goals	Behinds
2nd quarter				
3rd quarter				
4th quarter				
TOTAL				
TOTAL POINTS				

SCORECARD				
..... Club		 Club	
1st half	Goals	Behinds	Goals	Behinds
2nd half				
TOTAL				
TOTAL POINTS				

BEST TEAM PLAYER VOTE CARD			
Vote	Player's number	Player's name (include initials)	Team
3			
2			
1			

AFL UMPIRING PATHWAY

Umpiring provides an excellent opportunity to maintain an active involvement in the AFL game. The AFL umpiring pathway provides a terrific sporting alternative and career path for those not wishing to play the AFL game.





AFL UMPIRING ACCREDITATION COURSES

Training is provided by accredited umpiring coaches in local umpiring groups.

Basic umpiring course

The Basic Umpiring course is available for secondary schools. It is the ideal way for students to understand what umpiring is all about. Accredited teachers or local umpiring groups can deliver this course as part of students' sport and physical education programs.



Umpire Green Shirt/Mentor Program

An umpire education and development program that aims to use experienced umpires to mentor new and inexperienced umpires.

The mentor program connects new and inexperienced umpires with an umpiring mentor to assist them with their early development. The mentor program entitles the new and inexperienced umpire to wear a green shirt to signify that they are learning their craft and are being supported by a mentor. Coaches, players and supporters are asked to consider this and play their part in helping the umpire develop their skills.



Level one: for local metropolitan and country field, boundary and goal umpires who are umpiring in a junior competition.

Participants trained in the basic fundamentals of umpiring Australian Football.
A prerequisite for field, boundary and goal umpires wishing to undertake level two.



Level two: for local metropolitan and country field, boundary and goal umpires who are umpiring in senior competition.

Participants trained in advanced skills. Prepares umpires to officiate in open-age football. A prerequisite for field umpires wishing to undertake level three.



Level three: for state league field umpires.

Once selected at state league level through the umpiring pathway, field umpires undertake intensive training to a level three standard. It prepares them for state league matches and is a prerequisite for trial to the AFL squad.

Further information on the role of the club in developing and supporting umpires can be found in the community partnerships module of the AFL club management program.

YOUTH WELFARE



Chapter 14

Youth Welfare

There are strong links between feelings of security and emotional well-being for young people. It is difficult for anyone to feel a sense of connectedness to an environment in which they do not feel safe and secure. Not feeling safe from physical harm or threats of physical harm, not being able to express a point of view without being put down or being deliberately left out or isolated can have significant ramifications for the well-being of adolescents. In the school and football environment, such experiences will impact on the young person's sense of connectedness, engagement in learning and wellbeing.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH TODAY

In order to understand young people today and the choices they make (either good or bad) we need to have an understanding how their social context shapes their choices and decisions.

The social construction of growing up now is centred around a number of changing factors including consumption (globalisation), production (young people as workers), education and training (life-long learning, requiring more/higher level credentials) and greatly varied lifestyles ('choice').

This has resulted in new patterns of transitions for young people passing from childhood to adulthood – some objective and some subjective. These include:

Objective Factors

- Part-time labour markets.
- Contract work.
- Inequalities.
- Unemployment.
- Increasing education costs.
- Changes in the welfare state.

Subjective Factors

- Individual responsibility/blame.
- 'Choice'.
- Opportunities.

Australian Youth in the 2000s

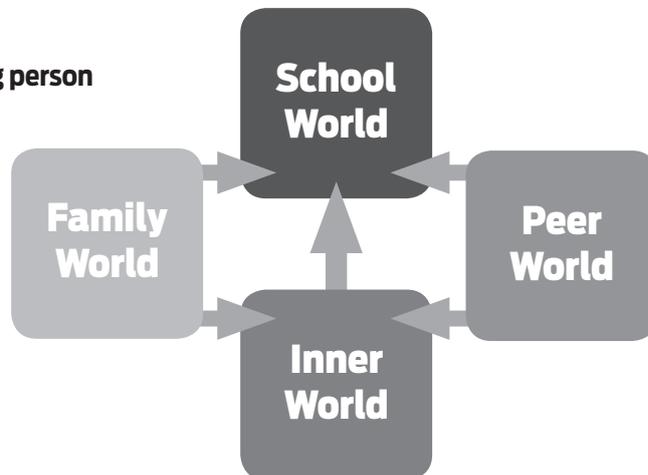
The Australian environment for young people is characterised by rising rates of:

- Homelessness.
- Poverty and unemployment.
- Crime.
- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- Mental health issues including depression and deliberate self-harm.
- Denial of access to educational opportunities.
- Increasingly experiencing more stress, uncertainty, confusion, self doubt and pressure to succeed.
- Problems compounded by financial uncertainty, unemployment, separation/divorce, moving to a new community, all of which can be unsettling and can intensify self doubt.
- Overall, young people live in a rapidly changing and unstable personal and social environment.
- They are confronted by more information about graver problems at an earlier age than previous generations.



Young people operate in four interconnected 'worlds' – the Family World, the School World, the Peer World and the Inner World (Self).

Four worlds of a young person



Emotional difficulties in adolescence – more than a passing phase

From being characterised as a time in which 'storm and stress' are inevitable and therefore to be 'grown out of', adolescence is increasingly viewed as a period through which most young people pass relatively unscathed, although encountering many 'first time' experiences which may be stressful. Nevertheless, community concerns about youth suicide, drug abuse, homelessness and unemployment have focused attention increasingly on the mental health and emotional well-being of young people.

THE NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN ADOLESCENCE

While most young people negotiate adolescence without upheaval, around one in five adolescents do experience periods of prolonged emotional difficulties and rates of adolescent-onset psychiatric disorders appear to be increasing.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, reporting on the mental health of young people in 2007 stated that:

- One in four young Australians aged 16–24 years had a mental disorder in 2007
- Anxiety disorders were the most common, affecting 15 per cent of young people
- Young people with a mental disorder were more than five times as likely as those without mental disorders to use illicit drugs or misuse legal drugs; twice as likely to be current smokers and around 1.5 times more likely to drink alcohol at least weekly. Those with a substance abuse disorder were least likely to use mental health services.

An approach aimed at preventing mental illness is clearly desirable. It is important to note, however, that many young people will experience 'mental health problems' which will never be clinically diagnosed but, which will cause considerable distress and impact adversely on their everyday enjoyment of life. Therefore, broad-based interventions aimed at promoting the emotional well-being of all young people – not just those at 'high risk' – are recommended and include an important role for families, schools and community organisations, including football clubs.

ADOLESCENT RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOUR

An important aspect of adolescent development is what is commonly referred to as 'risk-taking behaviour'.

Risk-taking is seen as encompassing a range of behaviours that characterise adolescents striving for independence, particularly in middle adolescence.

It is important to bear in mind that risk-taking is not a purely adolescent exploit – adults take risks, large and small, every day. Some risk-taking can also be considered in a positive light; to take a risk often means to try something different, and may be the only way we learn what 'works' for us and what doesn't.

In this respect, risk-taking can be seen as a continuum, ranging from high-risk to low-risk situations and activities. Behaviours such as debating, presenting in front of the class and playing sport can all be seen as risks at the lower end of the spectrum for young people. Unsafe sexual behaviour, injecting drug use and drink driving, on the other hand, may be considered high-risk behaviours that ring the 'alarm bells' in our work with young people.

Research shows that engaging in such behaviours is often associated with young people who have a lack of 'connectedness' to important people and places in their lives, for example, school, family and peers. It is important to point out that a certain amount of risk-taking behaviour by young people is considered developmentally normal, especially around middle adolescence (14-16 years). Adolescents have more opportunities to engage in risk-taking behaviour than children do, and engaging in something risky is often a new and exciting way to beat boredom or escape stress. While this is sometimes a concern, overall this behaviour is a normal part of the push for independence.

In this respect, risk-taking may also be considered as a 'rite of passage' for some adolescents. To some extent, western society is seen as offering less opportunity for a distinct 'rite of passage' into adulthood than some other cultures, for example, the initiation ceremonies of indigenous Australians. Engaging in certain risk-taking behaviours may be a way of the adolescent to show that they are now physically capable of adult 'behaviour' (if not cognitively mature enough yet to understand the consequences of such behaviours).

Research suggests that some young people, particularly those who are depressed or alienated, may take more risks than others and engage in higher-risk activities. Young people may also be unsure of rules and expectations. In this case they may just think of their behaviour as fun, challenging or exciting (e.g. alcohol use, illicit drugs etc).

It is uncommon, however, for adolescents to participate in behaviours specifically intended to cause injury and death. The challenge facing society is to equip young people with the skills and strategies to make healthy choices about their risk-taking. In this way, young people are able to take risks which help them learn and develop boundaries and self-concepts.

Risk-taking behaviour is most often used as a judgmental term by adults, who may fail to have an understanding of adolescent development, the balance of risk and protective factors, and the point of view of the young person involved. In this sense, risk-taking may mean very different things to adults and adolescents:



To the adolescent	To the adult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fun. ▪ Challenge. ▪ Excitement. ▪ Experience. ▪ Curiosity. ▪ Proof of adulthood. ▪ Proof of love. ▪ Proof of belonging to peers. ▪ Proof of attractiveness. ▪ Escape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stupid. ▪ Foolish. ▪ Rebellious. ▪ Immature. ▪ Ignorant. ▪ Anti-social. ▪ Irresponsible. ▪ Easily influenced. ▪ Promiscuous.

While the adult judgment may be more acceptable to us, it is important to understand the young person and try to mediate between the two viewpoints.

Consider the following quote from a young person who was interviewed about risk-taking and its relation to peer pressure in a US study:

“There’s all this crap about being accepted into a group and struggling and making an effort to make friends and not being comfortable about your own self-worth as a human being ... (But) the idea of peer pressure all the way through school is that someone is going to walk up to me and say, ‘Here, drink this and you’ll be cool.’ It wasn’t like that at all. You go somewhere and everyone else would be doing it and you’d think, ‘Hey, everyone else is doing it and they seem to be having a good time – now why wouldn’t I do this?’ In that sense, the preparation of the powers that be, the lessons that they tried to drill into me, they were completely off. They have no idea what we’re up against.”

DRUGS AND ADOLESCENCE

Geoff Munro, Director of for Youth Drug Studies at the Australian Drug Foundation has researched and written extensively on issues related to drug use in adolescents and provides the following insights.

Adolescent drug use is driven by a complex amalgam of social customs, traditions, expectations and the perception of personal well-being (relaxation, happiness, confidence, prestige, independence, social and sexual success, etc).

The experience of two decades demonstrates that experimentation with popular drugs is an entrenched adolescent behaviour not easily changed by programs conducted in schools and communities.

Recently developed guidelines state that abstinence is not a realistic goal, as the use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana is endemic among young people. The aim of abstinence implies that the school is the primary influence and can expect to shape the behaviour of adolescents. Many other agents, however, including family, friends, coaches and advertising, help to fashion adolescent values and can therefore also play an important role in drug education.

Research on adolescent drug use

Australian adolescents are growing up in a world in which a smorgasbord of legal and illegal drugs are available and accessible, a world in which drugs are used by a substantial proportion of the adult population. There is no sign that humans are about to relinquish the pleasures of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other favourite substances. There is in fact every sign that humans are about to expand their drug use as they seek better performances, more intelligent brains or longer sex lives through an ever-increasing variety of natural and artificial chemicals. It seems as though our major responsibility is to learn to manage drug use rather than pretend we can eliminate it and to limit the damage that harmful drugs cause to individuals and the broader society.

The first national survey of drug use among secondary school students was undertaken in Australia in 1996 and has been repeated at three yearly intervals. The 2008 survey of more than 24,000 students aged 12-17 shows that:

- Alcohol and tobacco remain a significant part of the experience of adolescence; however the percentage smoking in the week preceding the survey was the lowest since the survey began.
- The most common substance used by secondary students was analgesics (painkillers) – 90 per cent had used analgesics by the age of 12.

- The most common illicit substance used was cannabis – 14 per cent of secondary students had used it at some time in their life.

Analgesics, alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are the most prevalent substances used by secondary students. Since the statistics provided here are relevant only to those attending school at the time, it is likely the figures are higher for the overall population of young Australians.

It should be noted that much drug use by adolescents is experimental, fuelled by curiosity, and of limited duration. Some drug use can be characterised as functional and does not lead to ongoing problems. Only a minority of drug users graduate to regular or problematic use and they are likely to be adolescents already troubled.

Causes of serious problems

Research has shown a number of causes for young people engaging in high-risk behaviours. These causes or influences, also known as 'risk factors', are organised according to the different influences on young people's development such as family, school, friends and others in the community, as well as individual personality characteristics. Following are some examples of the risk factors which can influence young people's drug use.

- Family conflict, such as arguments or members of the family often insulting or yelling at each other.
- Family management problems, such as not having clear standards or rules for behaviour, and excessively severe or inconsistent punishment.
- Family living in poverty.
- Parents using drugs and having positive attitudes towards drug use.
- Family history of drug abuse.

- Academic failure and lack of attachment or commitment to school.
- Early and persistent problem behaviours, such as misbehaving in school or getting into fights with other students.

- Laws and regulations regarding drugs.
- Community attitudes towards drug use.
- Poor, deteriorating or crime-ridden neighbourhood.
- Availability of drugs in the community – e.g. if it's easy to get cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis etc.

- Aggressive or problem behaviours.
- Rebelliousness and not feeling like they are a part of their community or society.
- Association with friends who are using alcohol or other drugs (peer acceptance).

Although no single risk factor can be said to cause harmful drug use, the more risk factors a young person is exposed to, the greater the impact on their later development. Recent research in Australia indicates that the same risk factors which influence harmful drug use among young people can influence other problems such as delinquency, homelessness, mental health problems and sexual risk-taking.

Protective factors

Research has also shown that it is possible to reduce the risks of harmful drug use by building up certain protective factors in young people. In the broader community, some of these protective factors include:

- A sense of belonging or connectedness in the family.
- Having a sense of belonging and fitting in at school.
- Positive experiences and achievements at school.
- Having someone outside the family who believes in them (could be the coach).
- Having opportunities to be an active contributor in their family, school and community.
- A warm relationship with at least one parent or significant adult.
- Feeling loved and respected.
- Religious or spiritual connectedness.

Parents, families, schools, communities and government all have a role to play in preventing or reducing the risks and increasing the protective factors in young people.



Football clubs and alcohol use

Playing and watching sport is a traditional Australian activity. So, too, is drinking alcohol. In many sports, like Australian Football, the two traditions come together in a formidable partnership. Football clubs can be locations of hazardous drinking, particularly by younger people, with an array of personal, social and civil problems. Sports clubs, therefore, constitute an important, if challenging, site for interventions to reduce alcohol-related harms. Subsequently, coaches and other team staff can play an important role and make an important contribution in reducing alcohol consumption and use within clubs.

Strategies for coaches

To prevent players misusing social drugs, coaches should:

- Make players aware that the abuse of any substance is likely to injure their health and reduce their performance, and that drug abuse is simply incompatible with sport.
- Ensure that players are aware of the facts on alcohol and social drug misuse.
- Set guidelines and ensure a total commitment by all to these guidelines.
- Establish alternative methods of celebrating, or control celebrations with strategies such as meeting all post-match commitments before celebrating, organising a meal with the celebrations, or involving parents.
- Be available to discuss issues with players and know where to get help.

Performance enhancing drugs – the coach's role

Drugs in sport are now a significant issue at all levels of sport. It is important that all coaches are prepared to deal with this issue and have developed their own philosophy and strategies to address it appropriately.

The impact coaches have on players places them in a position to play a significant role with regard to drugs in sport. An effective coach can prevent drug misuse by players and help them deal with other issues related to drugs in sport. Coaches can influence the attitudes of players and should support and care for them as individuals.

There are actions a coach can take to minimise drug misuse, including:

- Communicating beliefs about health and fair play to players by reinforcing that the use of banned substances is cheating.
- Discouraging practices such as smoking, drinking and the over-use of anti-inflammatories.
- Encouraging players to abide by the AFL Drug Policy.
- Providing players with factual information about banned drugs.
- Being good role models.
- Alleviating pressures on players where possible.
- Helping players to develop skills such as decision making and assertiveness.

BULLYING AND VILIFICATION

Bullying is a form of deliberate aggressive and hurtful behaviour. Most bullying and victimisation is founded on an abuse of power and a desire to intimidate. It can be carried out against a victim by an individual or by a group. It is often an expression of prejudice based on issues such as race, culture, religion, sexual preference or perceived sexual preference.

There are many forms of bullying:

- Physical – e.g. hitting, kicking, taking and damaging belongings.
- Verbal – e.g. name-calling, insulting, repeated teasing and taunting, religious, racist or homophobic remarks.
- Indirect – e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone from groups, etc.

The AFL has clear guidelines and policies on racial and religious vilification (AFL Rule 30) which provide a strong message that vilification on these (or indeed any other) grounds is not acceptable on the field (see AFL info sheets. Racial and religious vilification at afl.com.au). These principles should carry over to all parts of the youth football environment including training, social and other activities and apply to all persons participating in that environment.

It is important that young players feel safe in football clubs and the wider football environment. Clubs and coaches should develop clear policies on bullying and vilification and methods of dealing with them appropriately.

RESILIENCY

The concept of resiliency has led to a range of studies identifying risk and protective factors which either diminish or increase the likelihood of negative health and social outcomes. It is important to build resiliency in all four worlds of young people (family, school, peer and inner self) to strengthen the inner sense of self and build relationships and connectedness.

What is Resiliency?

An individual's unusual or marked capacity to recover from, or successfully cope with, significant internal or external stresses (the ability to overcome adversity and obstacles).

Melbourne clinical psychologist and family therapist Andrew Fuller says: "Resilience is the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life. Even when hardship and adversity arise, it is as if the person has an elasticised rope around them that helps them to rebound when things get low and to maintain their sense of who they are as a person."

The characteristics of resilient youth

- Thinks for self and can solve problems creatively.
- Can tolerate frustration and manage emotions.
- Avoids making other people's problems their own.
- Shows optimism and persistence in the face of failure.
- Resists being put down and negative labels.
- Has a sense of humour and can forgive and forget.
- Builds friendships based on care and mutual support.

Building Resiliency

Resiliency is built by:

- Decreasing modifiable risk factors.
- Enhancing available protective factors.

Identify risk and protective factors at the family, school and individual levels as they relate to the four domains of young people's lives, e.g.

- Individual factors, such as temperament and personal disposition.
- Family factors, or a sense of connectedness to the family.
- External factors, such as support, care and nurturance of school and other social structures.

What are risk factors?

Hazards that make it more likely that someone will develop difficulties, e.g.

- Poverty.
- Low school connectedness/achievement.
- Role models for anti-social behaviour.
- Low self-esteem.
- No hope for the future.
- Family history of psychological disorders.
- Physical/mental illness.
- Family discord (including abuse).

What are protective factors?

Positive things that decrease the likelihood of negative health and social outcomes, e.g.

- Attachment to a caring adult.
- Independence and competency.
- High aspirations with adult support.
- Effective schooling, supportive, stimulating, caring teachers.
- Good health: physical, mental and spiritual.
- Motivated and knowledgeable about resources.



Personal factors

(Andrew Fuller)

- Having a pleasant temperament and reasonably calm level of activity.
- Reacting to social cues and responding to people's interaction.
- Having an age – appropriate level of autonomy.
- Having curiosity and zest for life.
- High intelligence (except) when paired with sensitive temperament.
- Success during adolescence.
- Having a special gift, ability or talent.

Family

- Having a sense of belonging or connectedness to family.
- Having some traits or characteristics valued by family members.
- Having a warm relationship with even one parent can protect young people even in situations where there is quite pronounced parental violence and disharmony.

Peer and Adult support

- Having a sense of belonging and connectedness to school. This doesn't always correspond with academic performance.
- Positive achievements and evaluations in a school setting, having someone who believes in you.
- Having a positive relationship with an adult outside the family.

Communities provide the setting for healthy growth

- Participation in sporting (e.g. football), recreational or other community groups is protective.
- A sense that adults in the local neighbourhood take an interest in the welfare and behaviour of young people is protective.
- Bored kids with nowhere to go are more likely to find risky lifestyles interesting.
- There is a need to create opportunities for communities engage more with young people.
- Participation in our local communities and with the young people in them has diminished for too many of us with busy work schedules and other agendas.

What is the research telling us?

Research tells us that youth who are involved and feel safe, valued and connected are less likely to participate in risky behaviours and that social competitiveness learnt through active involvement make relationships in all areas easier to negotiate.

Life skills build resiliency

- Communication skills.
- Decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- Coping skills (i.e.: reframing).
- Conflict resolution and stress management (options).
- Assertiveness.
- Leadership skills.
- Generic employability skills.
- Interpersonal relationship skills.
- Resisting peer pressure.
- Seeking adult support.

Most of these skills can be developed or enhanced in a football environment which delivers effective coaching.

For a young person, good coaches can change everything

- Listens to what you have to say.
- Respects you as a person.
- Is relaxed, enjoys their day, and is able to laugh, especially at mistakes.
- Is flexible.
- Explains the work, makes the work interesting.
- Doesn't humiliate you in front of the other kids.
- Doesn't favour other kids who do what they're told.
- Doesn't keep picking on people who have a reputation, pushing them to retaliate.
- Gives you a chance to muck up and learn from it.
- Doesn't keep telling you you're no good and should leave.

Source: *Malcolm Slade, Flinders University, Boys in Schools Bulletin, 2001*

RESILIENT LEARNERS

Andrew Fuller also relates resilience to learning. This has implications for coaching. As resilience includes the ability to overcome adversity and obstacles, during adolescent years, resilient learners are able to persist in the face of problems and have a higher tolerance for not knowing.

Learning is an emotional experience. We need to integrate what we know about supporting the youth emotionally with how we help them learn.

Creating resilient learners

People learn best in an environment that is clearly pro-learning, where the critical mass of people are interested in learning and the risk of humiliation for not working well and achieving is minimal. Getting ready to learn includes the development of a safe and positive learning environment as well as the skills of concentration and attention.

Students of today are a generation of choosers. They belong to the 'click and go' generation. They have vast options but short attention spans.

Young people grow up in a world that feeds them vast amounts of information but restricts their experiences. They are data rich and experience poor. The development of resilience in learning requires a shift away from 'rushing through the curriculum' to providing experiences that involve many of their senses and expand them.

Trying out new behaviours

Resilient learners are willing to have a go and utilise their knowledge to 'live by their wits'. Resilient learners not only try to solve problems, they actively find problems and challenges to overcome. Experiencing difficulties and then trying out different approaches to solving problems develops the habits of flexibly applying knowledge and actions to the solutions of novel situations.

People who believe they can solve problems, solve more problems. Some of the most effective learning does not involve teaching but rather setting problems that puzzle and interest students sufficiently that they persist. Coaches can incorporate many of the elements of a resilient learning environment into their training sessions.

SELF-ESTEEM

With sport comes the opportunity to be recognised by peers, coaches and parents. Within this context, it is essential that sport facilitates avenues of team play and individual recognition. Self-esteem in this age group is generated from external feedback and players aged 14 to 16 are driven by the promise of heroic individual accomplishment and the subsequent respect and admiration that will accompany it from their peers. Self-esteem is also the value a person places on themselves. It is expressed firstly in our self-image, that is, what we believe our abilities and looks to be, and secondly in the value we place on our abilities or looks. Self-esteem is linked to the expectations of society, family and friends. When adolescents are valued by those close to them, they learn to value themselves. This social aspect allows young players to make friends and cultivate a sense of belonging and community. Australian Football is a vehicle for young players to establish self-esteem, and the sport can provide this outcome.



The Whitehorse School Focused Youth Service provides the following insight into the tasks of adolescence and developing self-esteem.

Key factors in self-esteem

Connectedness – one of the most important factors in helping children grow into healthy adults is the quantity and quality of their relationships with others. Having a valued connection to at least one other adult is the rock by which adolescents maintain their faith in themselves and feel they are connected to something. Good relationships connect the adolescent to family, peers, school and society at large.

Uniqueness – adolescents can become obsessive about their looks. Their bodies are changing at an alarming rate, self-consciousness is at a peak and they are consequently very sensitive to comments about their appearance. Appearance is often the way a teenager expresses individuality and/or belonging. Clothing, haircuts and make-up are used as signals. They help to define the individual, often seeking to identify with someone outside the family. This is part of seeking an adult identity. Lack of interest in personal hygiene or appearance usually indicates low self-esteem. However, an unkempt look, dreadlocks or torn jeans may be just a part of the individual's search for identity.

Power – a person must have the resources, opportunities and capabilities to influence their world, to have a sense of control. It is important to include adolescents in decision-making and the responsibility of owning their choices.

Completing the tasks of adolescence – The tasks of adolescence include:

1. Successful separation from parents.
2. Completion of puberty, which is starting earlier with the current generation.
3. Establishing work identity and economic independence.
4. Establishment of self-identity.

Key factors for coaches in encouraging a positive self-esteem

- Build on strengths and be more accepting of mistakes.
- Learning is a process, emphasise the process. Acknowledge the amount of work that is put into achievements rather than just the finished product.
- Value appropriate risk-taking.
- Provide opportunities for responsibility to be practised.
- Have positive, realistic expectations of the adolescent.
- Maintain a positive outlook.

Maintaining the self-esteem of individual players

As players move through the age groups, it does not take long to realise that they lack ability when they are given less time in the game than others, are played in positions that have the least impact on the result and/or lose the majority of their contests. The increasing role of parents and the potential for placing undue pressure on players must also be carefully monitored. These outcomes are characteristic of competitive activities where the player is under the control of a coach.

In these situations some useful strategies for coaches include:

1. Providing opportunities and personally assisting lesser players to improve their skills.
2. Playing lesser players in prominent positions when playing against weaker opposition. The coach can then play better players in less prominent positions and encourage them to use their limited opportunities to have a positive impact on the game. This will eventually give the team greater flexibility against stronger teams.
3. Explaining to players that differences in ability are more the result of players being at different stages of development and having different natural abilities than being due to a lack of effort or worth.
4. Stressing the importance of players acknowledging the positives of their teammates' play rather than the mistakes, particularly in public.
5. Stressing to the player the value of being loyal to club, coach and teammates when discussing with others their involvement in the game.

PROMOTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

One of the most critical approaches to promoting emotional well-being is to provide adolescents with the opportunities and skills to genuinely participate in all aspects of community life. This sends a strong message to young people that what they say is valued and that their contributions are worthwhile. The most important traits that characterise resilient adolescents are social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose. Caring and support, high expectations and encouragement of participation are also important. Expecting too little will undermine young people's motivation more so than when too much is expected. Adolescents are frequently denied opportunities to take responsibility. They need to have opportunities to individually and collectively take responsibility for shaping their world.

Many opportunities exist for adults to notice adolescents and make them feel that they and their contributions are valued. Coaches and other significant adults should do this through encouraging them, helping them, putting yourself out for them, showing interest in their lives and generally conveying to them that you, as coach, like them and that you are genuinely interested in their well-being. The power of simple feedback like a smile, a verbal thank you or a note of thanks should not be underestimated.

Adolescent needs

Some of the things adolescents need that coaches should be mindful of includes:

- A chance to experiment.
- To be accepted for themselves.
- Security.
- People to take an interest.
- Praise.
- Understanding.
- To be trusted.
- To do adult things.
- Space of their own.
- To have friends.
- To make their own decisions.
- Independence.
- To feel useful.
- Appropriate affection.
- Reasonable rule limits.
- To test boundaries.
- Flexibility.
- Responsibility.
- Their own privacy.
- To be successful.
- To be taken seriously.
- Consistency.
- To be listened to.
- To choose their own friends.
- For it to be OK to fail.
- To be fashionable on their own terms.
- Not to be made to feel awkward.
- Not to be always criticised.
- Help and advice when asked.
- To try out new things.



REFERRING YOUNG PEOPLE

Situations may arise in which coaches believe it is appropriate to refer young people to other agencies who can help them in these matters. The Whitehorse School Focused Youth Service offers the following advice.

When to refer

Evidence of self-harming behaviour.

Which may include:

- Reckless activities.
- Problematic drug and alcohol use.
- Careless sexual activity.
- Eating disorders.
- Self-mutilation.

When referring try to avoid

- Panic.
- Preach.
- Challenge.
- Ignore.
- Name call.
- Criticise.
- Blame.
- Being appalled or offended.
- Dramatise.
- Get angry.
- Use a quick fix approach.
- Punish.

When referring

- Ask.
- Listen.
- Act.
- Identify the problem.
- Pay attention, don't judge.
- Seek support.

Involve others

Don't try to handle a crisis situation alone.

Resources

- kidshelpline.com.au
- education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/sfys.aspx
- lifeline.org.au
- reachout.com.au
- somazone.com.au

SKILLS GUIDE



Chapter 15

Skills Guide

INTRODUCTION TO SKILLS GUIDE

Fundamental to coaching adolescents in any sport is the need to know about the skills of the game. The following guide provides coaches with the key points for each of the skills of Australian Football. Although it is recognised that the ability of the coach to teach the fundamental skills (techniques) of Australian Football is paramount, equally important at the youth age group is the ability to analyse, correct and remediate common skill errors players have developed over their playing experiences. Only then will the coach of this age group truly improve the playing ability and enjoyment of the players and develop them into confident and competent senior players.

When referring to the various skills, coaches should:

- Identify the skill or combination of skills to be taught.
- Note the sequence of teaching points.
- Select only two or three points to start with (refer to Chapter 5, Teaching and Improving Skills)

Use the **SPiR** method to teach the skill. An essential starting point for this is to provide players with a good visual demonstration of the skill being taught. This may require selecting a player to perform the demonstration.

Also, when teaching the skills, be aware of how to increase intensity or difficulty. Start with static activity (player handballs to partner – both stationary). The skill is made more difficult by increasing the pace and reducing the time and space in which the skill is to be performed (it becomes more game based).

When teaching skills, remember to:

- Start with slow movement (players step towards each other).
- Then move slowly in a confined area (walking and handballing to each other).
- Increase to a jog (remain in pairs).
- Introduce lines of players – lane work (two at each end).
- Increase the pace.
- Have a relay: relays in lines.

Then introduce opposition:

- Have players play keepings off, but not three versus three (this is maximum opposition).
- Start with five keeping the ball off one.
- Then four versus two.
- Only when they are capable, move to three versus three.

Coaches should also be conscious of varying skill levels in the group. In some instances, it might be best to keep the 'better-skilled' players together and provide them with activities and teaching points to extend them. However, at other times, it might be best to pair a better player with a less-skilled player and work at the skill level of the latter. Such peer coaching is a valid activity for any age group and an effective means of improving skill levels.

Instructional videos (DVD and online) are available to assist coaches with skill teaching:

- AFL Skills Guide
- AFL Kicking Guide for Coaches
- AFL Kicking Guide for Players



KICKING

Kicking is the most important skill in Australian Football. The basic skill should be taught at a young age and major faults rectified.

The key to kicking well is to have a sound basic technique. While players' kicking techniques may be different, and each player will develop their own natural kicking style, there are some critical actions that should be consistent for all players.

Starting point – IMPACT

The best place to start when teaching kicking is at the point of 'impact'. The term impact refers to the point when the player's foot makes contact with the ball. If a coach has identified that a player's kicking performance is ineffective due to the ball not spinning backwards, or having a poor flight pattern, then the first point of the kick to examine is the point of impact.

The coach should then work backwards to evaluate other possible causes of the error. With every kicking technique and every kicking situation in a match being different, a focus on grip, approach, leg swing and follow-through is not as critical as what happens at impact.

Players will learn to adapt these elements of kicking to the game situation they find themselves in. Some kicking situations in a match may mean the player does not have time to grip the ball normally, has to kick off one step, or has to produce a low flat kick that results in little follow-through. However, one thing that doesn't change with kicking technique, regardless of the environment or pressure on the player, is impact.

A player's ability to make strong, precise impact with the ball will ultimately decide if the kick reaches its intended target.



Critical learning points

To ensure impact is effective, there are three critical learning points to follow:

Control of the ball onto the foot

A player must be able to control the ball into the impact zone and on to their foot, striking the bottom third of the ball to make it spin backwards (drop punt).

Making the ball spin backwards is the first priority when learning to kick. Once the player gains confidence and an understanding of what it feels like to get the ball to spin backwards, they can move on to other aspects of the kick.

Ideally, the player guides the ball down with the guiding hand (as the kicking foot leaves the ground). It is released from around hip level, with the guiding arm and hand controlling the path and orientation of the ball. The aim is to place the ball consistently in position.

As this process begins, the non-guiding hand comes off the front of the ball and swings up and back in an arc.



Acceleration of the lower leg

To kick the ball with penetration and distance, a player must generate a high level of lower leg speed. Lower leg speed is generated through a number of elements, including taking a steady and long last stride trailing the kicking foot behind. The kicking foot is driven forward in an explosive action to make contact with the ball.

A large wind-up is not needed to create an accelerated lower leg action; however, a quick knee extension is required. The kicking action is a very natural movement, with the lower leg accelerating around the knee joint.

The follow-through of a kick is not of great consequence to the effectiveness of the kick; it is a part of the kicking action that flows naturally from the actions prior to impact.



Firm foot

A firm foot refers to the player's foot at impact. For efficient impact, the player's foot and ankle must be fully extended and, when the foot makes contact with the ball, it presents the hardest and most stable platform to strike the ball.

Contact with the foot should be around the top of the laces. Any further down the foot will involve a less stable platform and less efficient contact, and may also damage the foot if consistently repeated. This is similar to punching a heavy bag. You would not strike a punching bag with a weak or sloppy wrist as it would be ineffective. Kicking a football is very similar – you need to strike the ball with a firm foot.

Look, feel and sound

Look

The way a kick looks, feels and sounds to a player is important in learning, as it provides vital information related to the kicking action and possible improvements.

There are two aspects of what a good kick should look like:

The flight of the ball

A quality kick will spin backwards and stay vertical, ensuring the ball's flight path remains consistent. A backward-spinning ball won't always ensure the ball goes straight but it will go further and its flight path will be predictable.

Often a player's natural kicking action, where the leg is swung slightly around the body, will cause the ball to drift right to left for a right-footer and left to right for a left-footer.

This is natural, and should not be changed as long as it is effective and players understand the way their kick will move in the air. However, players who have a straight leg swing may find it easier to consistently reproduce effective impact.

What a good kicking action looks like:

Encourage players to visualise an effective kicking action and, at various stages in the learning process, 'see' the appropriate grip, approach, the height at which the ball is dropped and other elements.

Feel

Feel is another important sensory factor relating to the kicking action. Players should be encouraged to feel the kicking action. For example, at the point of lower leg acceleration, players should feel the tension in the muscles around their thigh.

At the point of impact, the ball should feel light on the foot. The foot should be firm and absorb little shock. The kick shouldn't feel like you've had to kick it hard. Players should feel like they have 'middled' the ball. A firm foot will create a greater 'sweet spot' and players should remember what it feels like to middle the ball and make it spin backwards rapidly, and try to reproduce that feel every time they kick.

Sound

The sound at the point of impact should be a thud rather than a slapping sound. Players should be encouraged to listen for the sound on each kick and learn to associate the appropriate sound with good contact with the foot.

This information can assist in evaluating the effectiveness of a kick and making modifications for the next kick.

How a kick looks, feels and sounds are inherent characteristics of the kicking action. These are important learning tools that allow a player to practise on their own, while providing immediate feedback about each kick.

Model kicks

Players can emulate good kicks such as Sam Mitchell, Matthew Suckling, Daniel Rich, Trent Cotchin and Aaron Davey. While these players all have slightly different kicking techniques, the critical elements of kicking – controlling the ball onto the foot, lower leg acceleration and a firm foot at impact – are clearly displayed by all these players. Observing good players kicking is a great way to learn.



MAIN TEACHING POINTS

- Line up your body with your target. Have your head slightly bent over the ball. Hold the ball over the thigh of the kicking leg.
- Guide the ball down with one hand.
- Point your toes at your target (firm foot) – see the ball hit the foot.
- Follow through straight towards the target.

These four fundamentals apply to every kick. More information about each type of kick is given in the following pages.



DROP PUNT

• The grip

The fingers are spread evenly along each side of the ball, with thumbs extending to the lacing. The grip is the same for both left and right foot kicks.

• The release

The ball is guided down and is kicked on the bottom point, along the lower laces of the boot. It should spin in a backwards end-over-end fashion.



TORPEDO PUNT

• The grip

The ball is held on an angle across the body. For a right foot kick, the left hand is slightly forward and the right hand slightly behind the lacing. For a left foot kick, the hand positions are reversed.

• The release

The ball is guided down with one hand at a slight angle to the ground, and is also angled across the kicking leg. When the foot makes contact with the ball, the ball should spin in a spiral motion.

- Rotation causes the ball to 'cut' through the air, like a torpedo.



BANANA KICK

• The grip

The ball is held like a reverse torpedo punt, with the right hand forward for a right-foot kick and the opposite for the left-foot kick.

• The release

The ball is guided down so that it drops at an angle across the boot. The boot makes contact under the right side of the ball, producing a curved spin on the ball.

- The banana kick is generally used when shooting for goal from close to the boundary line and near the behind post.



HANDBALL

In today's modern game, handball is a major attacking weapon as players run the ball from defence into attack. It is a skill that needs to be practised regularly and by watching great handball exponents such as Matt Priddis (pictured left) and Sam Mitchell you can improve your game.

Main teaching points

1. The ball must be gripped lightly with the platform hand and hit with a clenched fist.
2. The punching fist is formed by placing the thumb outside, not inside the fingers.
3. The stance is nearly side on to allow the punching arm to swing through freely. Knees slightly bent to maintain balance.
 - For a right-handed handball, the left foot is forward and vice versa for a left-handed handball.
 - Punching arm also slightly bent.
 - After contact is made with the ball, the fist remains on the platform hand – 'catch the fist'.



MARKING

One of the most spectacular features of Australian Football is marking, particularly the high mark. However, it is just as important to be able to pull in a safe chest mark on a consistent basis without fumbling the ball. As with all skills, marking needs to be practised. No matter what your size, there will always be a situation in a game where you are in a position to mark the ball.

Main teaching points

1. Eyes must be focused on the ball all the way from the player's boot to your hands.
2. Position your body in line with the flight of the ball.
3. Move forward to meet the ball; never wait for it to come to you.
4. Skilful players should take the ball in both hands with fingers spread and thumbs close together. Beginners should use the chest mark.



ARM OR CHEST MARK

Main teaching points

1. Keep your eyes on the ball and line up your body with the flight of the ball.
2. The fingers and hands are extended – palms up. Tuck the elbows in to the side.
3. The ball is taken on the hands and arms and guided to the chest.
4. The ball is hugged tightly to the chest. This is an important marking style if the ball is wet or muddy.

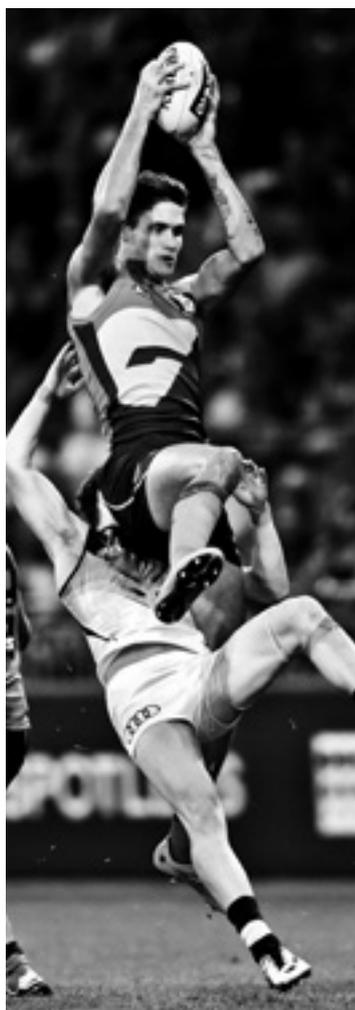


HAND MARK

Skilled players practise taking the ball in the hands at all times, in preference to letting it hit the chest. This will help quick disposal and prevent opponents from punching the ball from behind.

Main teaching points

1. Eyes on the flight of the ball.
2. The fingers outstretched, pointing towards the ball. The thumbs are positioned behind the ball.
3. The arms extended – 'long arms'.
4. The ball is firmly gripped in the fingers.
5. Ensure your body is behind the flight of the ball.



OVERHEAD MARK

This is the mark that fans love to see. It takes great skill and athleticism to launch yourself in the air, but a player who takes a consistent high mark can inspire teammates and bring other players into the game.

Main teaching points

1. Line body up with the flight of the ball. Keep 'eyes on the ball'.
2. Jump off one foot and swing the other knee up to gain maximum height and protect yourself.
3. Eyes are kept on the ball; fingers are outstretched and thumbs almost together.
4. The ball is met slightly in front of the head with arms extended – 'long arms'.
It is firmly gripped in the fingers.

The grip

- Ensure the fingers are outstretched and the thumbs are almost together.
- Keep your eyes on the ball with the arms outstretched.

General coaching hints

The ball should be pulled down quickly on to the chest when marking in front of an opponent. When the ball is wet, the hands are brought closer together; the fingers tap the ball down where it is gathered on the chest.

Beginners

- Have the beginner throw the ball in the air for himself.
- Progress to the ball being thrown overhead from a short distance.
- Practise overhead marking in a stationary position, gradually progressing to a run-up.

Advanced

- Meet the ball with a running approach and jump to mark the ball.
- Practise against an opponent to develop the skills required to use the body to get front position.



RUCKWORK

The role of the ruckman is a crucial one in Australian Football. A good ruckman sets up play from a variety of contests such as the centre bounce or boundary throw-in. To create opportunities for his smaller, running players, it is important that a ruckman has the skill to direct the ball to his teammates' best advantage. It is worth watching top-class ruckmen such as Todd Goldstein, Aaron Sandilands and Sam Jacobs to see how they use their various skills. The techniques involved in ruckwork are needed to move the ball towards goal or to get the ball to teammates from a ball-up or boundary throw-in.

Main teaching points

1. At first, practise in a standing position extending to a run-in and jump.
2. Practise without opposition and then extend the practice to include an opponent.
3. Hit with the palm and then use the fist.
4. Attempt two-handed hitting and then progress to one-handed palming.
5. Follow the ball to where you hit it, so you can then help your teammates.



PALMING: FRONT

Palming to the front – one hand

Watch the ball through the air and leap off one foot using the arms and other leg to gain lift. The arm is swung forward. The ball is hit with the open palm and fingers are directed with a straight follow-through.

Palming to the front – two hands

The hands are positioned behind the ball and the ball is hit simultaneously with both open hands.

The ball is directed with a follow-through towards the target.

Palming to the forehand

The player leaps and makes contact with the ball with the open palm.

In the hitting action, the arm should be straight with a follow-through in the desired direction across the body.



PALMING: BACK

Palming to the backhand

The player leaps (off one leg or two) and the arm is bent immediately before impact. The arm is straightened at the elbow and the ball directed to the backhand side with the open hand.

Palming over the back

The player leaps and with a straight arm reaches forward and overhead.

The ball is hit with an open hand over the shoulder towards the target.

Centre Bounce

- Jump off one leg.
- Turn body sideways to protect yourself.
- Hit with outstretched arm at highest point of jump.



PICKING UP: MOVING BALL

Many different situations occur during a game when the ball must be picked up off the ground. Young players need to become competent at meeting and handling a moving ball.

- The body is in line behind the path of the ball in a semi-crouched position. The arms and hands are extended with the fingers almost touching the ground, palms towards the ball.
- The ball is picked up cleanly in two hands. The elbows are kept close together.
- The ball is then brought into the hands for disposal. Keep eyes on the ball at all times.



PICKING UP: STATIONARY BALL

One-handed pick up

- The ball is approached to one side.
- The player runs slightly past the ball then swings one arm down with one hand scooping under the ball.
- The free arm can be used to steady the ball, once it is picked up.

Two-handed pick-up

- The ball is approached from the side. As a player draws level with the ball, bend down and pick up the ball cleanly with two hands.



BALL HANDLING

When learning skills, it is important to handle the ball as much as possible. A football is an odd shape and the more familiar you become with the ball, the easier it will be to master the skills. You won't always have someone to practise with, so these drills can be done before or after training or in your spare time.

Main teaching points

- Lie on your back and using both hands, tap or throw the ball from hand to hand. Vary the height and speed of the throws as you become more competent. This is great for hand-eye coordination and learning how to mark effectively.
- Pass the ball in a figure eight movement in and out of the legs. This will develop your grip strength, making it easier to mark, handball and guide the ball on to your foot when kicking.



RUNNING

Running has become a major skill in modern-day football with the emphasis now on running with the ball to maintain possession. Similarly, defensive and offensive players are required to run and chase. There is great value in teaching players how to run correctly in order to improve their running speed. Running speed and acceleration are the products of stride length and frequency. The distance covered with each stride taken and how quickly the legs move are key factors in sprinting.

Good running technique involves:

- Moving arms and legs in a straight line and not across the body.
- Slight forward body lean.
- Keeping head and trunk steady, eyes looking ahead.
- High knee lifts.



BOUNCING THE BALL

Players are required to bounce the ball every 15 metres when running.

Main teaching points

1. The ball is held slightly on top by the bouncing ball.
2. The ball is pushed down with one hand.
3. The ball strikes the ground at an angle of about 45 degrees.
4. The ball is bounced far enough in front so that it will bounce into the player's hand as he runs forward.

The distance at which the ball is thrown out in front is directly related to the player's speed – the faster he is running, the further out in front it must be thrown.

Wet weather bounce

On wet days, touched the ball on the ground using both hands otherwise the ball will skid away or fail to bounce back.



SIDESTEP

Main teaching points

1. Watch your opponent closely.
2. Hold the ball out to the side as the opponent approaches.
3. Push hard off the foot planted on the same side as the ball.
4. Pull the ball back quickly as you move around the opponent.
5. Ensure that you change direction and don't run in a straight line.



BLIND TURN

The blind turn is used to evade an opponent when the player is being chased from behind and you are heading away from the direction of your goal.

To turn on the right side:

As the opponent gets closer, hold the ball out to the left hand side. Dig the left foot into the ground and push hard to step to the right-hand side as in the side step. Pull the ball back 'inside' towards your team's goal and accelerate quickly away.



THE DUMMY

Some players have an amazing ability to change direction without greatly reducing their speed.

The dummy is a movement used to evade an opponent approaching head on.

Main teaching points

1. As the opponent approaches, shape to handball or kick in a forward direction. The player must look in that direction so as to give his opponent the impression of handballing or kicking in that direction.
2. As the opponent moves to smother the football, the player draws in the ball and moves around him by pushing off hard as in the side step.
3. The player is then in the clear and can accelerate away past the opponent. Again, changing direction is important.

Use this tactic when you are stationary and an opponent is running towards you quickly.



SPOILING

Spoiling is an effective method of preventing an opponent from marking or gaining possession of the ball. When spoiling, especially from behind, the spoiling player must not infringe by making contact with his opponent's back, head or shoulders. If performed correctly, spoiling can be an attacking skill, whereby the ball can be placed to the advantage of teammates.

Chest mark

- Approach the opponent from one side. Keep your eyes on the ball.
- Punch the ball with a clenched fist before it reaches the opponent's arm.

Overhead mark

- The spoil should be used when a player is not confident of marking.
- The fist should be clenched and arms outstretched ('long arms') at point of contact with the ball.
- As with marking, the spoiling player's run must be timed to gain maximum height with the arm following straight through the flight of the ball.
- Be careful not to put the other hand on the back of the opponent's neck as this is an infringement.



CONTACT SKILLS

Introduction

In a wide variety of sports, contact or impact with a surface or person is commonplace. In Australian Football, a player's ability to develop impact skills that enable them to perform more productively in a game situation is paramount to their enjoyment of the game. More importantly, developing impact skills will reduce fear and injury and assist with a player's ability to increase their worth to the team. It should be stressed that many of these activities need careful supervision and that every effort must be made to suit the activities with the age groups identified.

STAGE 1

The Starting Out stage has been designed to introduce young children up to the age of eight to basic fundamentals in:

- Landing on their feet.
- Keeping balance.
- Falling.
- Rolling.
- Recovery.
- Bracing.

We have drawn from jujitsu, gymnastics and fundamental motor skill activities to demonstrate these skills.



LANDING

The easiest landing technique to learn is the 'Motor Bike Landing'.

The coaching tips you will observe are:

1. Ball-heel transfer.
2. Ankles, knees-hips bend.
3. Feet shoulder-width apart.
4. Arms act as if riding a motorbike.
5. Knees over big toe.

After the learner has mastered the two-foot landing, challenge them with the one-foot landing. The same principles apply, but remember to outstretch arms to the side to assist with balance and tilt your torso slightly forward.



KEEPING YOUR FEET

Keeping your feet is an extension of landing, but depending at which angle the player has landed will impact on how they will be able to keep their feet.

Here are some tips:

1. Tighten muscles of the quadriceps (front thigh), gluteal (bottom) and abdominal area.
2. Lock heels into the ground.
3. Use the upper body to brace while outstretching the arms with tension.



FALLING FORWARD

Many players who fall incorrectly risk elbow, wrist or shoulder injuries because they have not been taught how to fall without injury. Impact with the ground is commonplace in Australian Football and therefore it is vital that it's taught correctly to reduce the fear of such an event and the prevention of injury.

Try these coaching tips:

1. Reach forward.
2. Bend at wrist, elbow and shoulders.
3. Remain tight through middle of body.
4. Turn head to the side prior to contact.



ROLLING

Rolling is a form of falling used to great effect by expert players when pushed forward from a mark or contest over the ball. Rolling correctly can actually help you recover from the ground more quickly and continue to be part of the play which can be a real asset!

Here are some basic tips on how to roll when falling to the ground:

1. Rounded back throughout movement.
2. Head tucked into neck.
3. One foot in front of the other to stand.

STAGE 2

The Preparing to Play stage has been designed to introduce players between seven and 12 to more game related contact skills such as:

- Bracing.
- Bumping.
- Shepherding.
- One-on-one tussle.
- Introduction to tackling – front and side.
- Extension of rolling.

Information has been drawn from sports such as jujitsu, rugby union, rugby league and Australian Football to demonstrate these skills.



BRACING

Bracing, or maintaining one's ground, is specifically vital to Australian Football. There are many occasions in game situations where assuming a 'bracing position' assists in winning the ball, e.g. ruck contests and marking contests. Reducing the impact of a bump or a tackle and therefore minimising injury is another advantage of this position. The brace position can be assumed in many game situations and will enable players to absorb impact from various directions and maintain their ground to win or protect the ball from the opposition.

As this skill is extremely important on many fronts, here are some tips for you to consider:

1. Feet apart, knees bent, similar to the motorcycle position.
2. Body weight more on balls of feet.
3. Tense your body muscle to form a strong rigid surface.
4. Arms apart and slightly bent at elbows.
5. Attempt to be side on to the impact.



BUMPING

Bumping is the classic impact skill. A player can legally bump an opponent when the ball is within five metres.

Whether a player is bumping or being bumped, assuming the brace position is vital for this skill.

Here are the tips for this effective skill:

1. Assume bracing position.
2. Tuck the arm bumping or being bumped to your side.
3. Do not jump off the ground.
4. Bump from the side.
5. Tuck your chin into your leading shoulder.
6. Only bump when an opponent does not have the ball. If he does have the ball, apply a tackle.



SHEPHERDING

Because football is a team game, there will be times when players will need to assist their teammates who have the ball. Shepherding is a fantastic team skill that is achieved by using the arms and body to form a barrier to protect a teammate. Many coaches regard shepherding and the other team skills such as tackling and bumping as more important than goals kicked or possessions gained.

Employ these tips as a starting point to good shepherding.

1. Assume brace position.
2. Be between your teammate and the opponent being shepherded – not too close.
3. The fingers are outstretched with the arms spread below shoulder level. An opponent can be legally shepherded by placing the body between the player and the ball, as long as the ball is not more than five metres away. Bend knees and be strong but do not hold or grab your opponent.
4. Talk to your teammates to tell them they have time.



ONE-ON-ONE TUSSLE

One on one tussles occur in many sports and are generally regarded as a player's ability to assume the 'front position' when contesting the ball with an opponent. This can occur when players contest a mark on the lead, contest for a ball which is rolling along the ground or simply disrupting an opponent's line to the ball.

The one-on-one tussle skill draws from many of the skills taught previously, including bracing and keeping balance.

Of course, if a player improves their acceleration, strength and anticipation, these will also help in gaining an advantage over their opponent. To assist players in gaining strength, activities related to improving trunk stability and body balance will enhance a player's ability to brace, tussle, tackle etc.



SHOULDER ROLL/BACKWARD SHOULDER ROLL

The shoulder and backward rolls have their place in contact sports like Australian Football but also in other non-contact activities. Primarily, shoulder rolls and backwards rolls should be seen as a method to reduce the impact of a fall, but also, as described previously, assist the player to recover to their feet.

When teaching to shoulder roll, note the following:

1. Deep lunge forward with dominant leg.
2. Reach out with corresponding arm and pull arm through under body.
3. Round back as much as possible and keep chin into chest.
4. Lower body to ground and roll diagonally over back.
5. Stand up with one foot in front of the other with momentum moving forward.

When teaching the backward shoulder roll, note the following:

1. Lower body to ground in tuck position (one foot slightly behind the other).
2. Keep back rounded and chin in.
3. Roll backwards over rounded back with head tilted to the side.
4. Maintain tuck while rolling and land on feet if possible.



TACKLING

Nothing excites a crowd more than a hard, fair tackle on a player with the ball. Many young players lack confidence in executing this skill because of poor body strength or a lack of knowledge on how to execute the tackle without injury or awarding a free kick for incorrect execution.

Tackling, like all the other skills in footy, takes practice, appropriate supervision and good coaching. When this occurs, more young players will learn to tackle well and receive the rewards of adding this skill to their repertoire.

The two tackles explained below are introductory tackles and are called the front/falling tackle and the side tackle. The front/falling tackle is a great introductory tackle for players who do not possess great body weight or strength.

The impact of the tackle is greatly reduced if players attempt the following:

1. Position the ball carrier to the side if possible.
2. Approach in brace position.
3. Sight the target at hips.
4. Dip late.
5. Head tucked against opposite shoulder.
6. Lead shoulder meets ball carrier.
7. Grapple around waist and pin arm(s).
8. Lead foot moves ball carrier's directions.
9. Turn ball carrier around slightly using his momentum.
10. Go to ground with ball carrier – tackler landing on top.

The side tackle has similar components to the front/falling tackle with a couple of minor changes.

- 1-7. As per the front tackle.
8. Drop all your body weight on to your knees.
9. Don't let go of his hips and arm(s).

STAGE 3

Stage 3 aims to target players between 12 and 17 and focuses on improving those ever-important skills that make Australian Football so spectacular.

1. Tackling from all angles (extended).
2. Being tackled – fending.
3. Smothering.
4. High marking and the subsequent landing.

Think of all the good tacklers in Australian Football and the first thing you realise is that they really want to tackle when they know they can't win the ball or an opponent has the ball. The essence to good tackling, like all team play, is to want to do it and know how to do it. Once players know how to tackle safely and effectively, with practice, they will want to tackle.

There are three angles from which players can tackle:

1. Front.
2. Side.
3. Behind.



FRONT 'DRIVE TACKLE'

The drive tackle enables the tackler to meet the player being tackled head on and should only be introduced when players have mastered the falling front tackle and other contact skills, such as bracing and landing.

The points to practise include:

1. Position ball carrier to the side if possible.
2. Approach in brace position.
3. Sight the target at hips.
4. Dip late.
5. Head tucked against opposite shoulder.
6. Lead shoulder meets ball carrier.
7. Drive at ball carrier from knees.
8. Grapple around waist and pin arm(s).
9. Continue to drive forward landing on top of tackled player.



SIDE IMPACT TACKLE

When players need to tackle from the side using a side impact tackle, they should practise the following points:

1. Position ball carrier to the side if possible.
2. Approach in brace position.
3. Sight the target at hips.
4. Dip late.
5. Head tucked against opposite shoulder.
6. Lead shoulder meets ball carrier.
7. Drive at ball carrier from knees.
8. Grapple around waist and pin arm(s).
9. Continue to drive forward landing on top of tackled player.

Beware the player does not turn his/her back on your advance. This will lead to a free kick against you for a push in the back.



BEHIND DROP TACKLE

Tackling from behind can be fraught with risk because players can easily give away a free kick if not done correctly.

Here we will revise the side drop tackle because it is the best form of tackle when tackling from behind:

1. Position the ball carrier to the side if possible.
2. Approach in brace position.
3. Sight the target at hips.
4. Dip late.
5. Head tucked against opposite shoulder.
6. Lead shoulder meets ball carrier.
7. Grapple around waist and pin arm(s).
8. Drop all your body weight on to your knees.
9. Don't let go of his hips and arm(s).
10. Go to ground with ball carrier – tackler landing on top.

Remember in all tackling situations the important result is that the tackler lands on top of the player being tackled and does not allow the ball to be handballed or kicked away. If you want to simplify the way players tackle, the drop tackle works very well from all angles and should be practised from all angles.



BEING TACKLED

It is well and good when players are applying a tackle, but how about the time in the game when players have worked hard to win the footy and they are now the object of the tackle? What should players do?

Following are some tips for your players:

1. If you have time, turn your body to the side to absorb impact.
2. Assume brace position.
3. Do not jump off the ground.
4. See if you can clear your hands away from the tackler's clutches (usually upwards above your shoulders) to release the ball.
5. If you cannot release the ball fairly, protect the ball by having it away from the point of impact.
6. Tuck your head into your chest.
7. Tighten your muscles and prepare for the impact of the tackle and the ground.
8. Do not resist being tackled to the ground once your arms and the ball are trapped.



FENDING

Fending is a great way to avoid being tackled.

1. Assume brace position.
2. Do not jump off the ground.
3. Extend arm closest to the tackler, or one not holding the ball, out rigid with a slight bend at the elbow. This is the 'halt position'.
4. Aim the halt position at the oncoming tackler's chest region (avoid head-high contact).
5. On impact between your hand and the tackler's chest, push off from tackler.



SMOTHERING

Smothering a ball that is about to be kicked or handballed can really lift your team's spirits. If executed correctly, this skill can be applied more often in a game to great turnover effect. Again, it must be emphasised that players need to want to do this activity whole-heartedly, and through correct practice, this skill will develop.

Following are some guidelines for your players when practising smothering:

1. Get as close as possible to the player disposing the ball.
2. One foot in front of the other and knees bent to assume a low position.
3. Raise hands from thigh/hip region at angle of the disposal. This is called 'the draw'.
Do not raise hands above your head and then come down on the smotherer.
4. Keep fingers spread and hands together.
5. Keep face behind spread hands.
6. The smotherer must keep his eyes on the ball at all times.



HIGH MARKING AND LANDING

Isn't it great to watch players jump high and look so much in control in the air and then land with grace?

Remember that in this section it is important that players have mastered the ability to land and have been given ample opportunities to practise landing from various angles.



Assessment form for Australian Football

NAME:

SCORE:

VHD = Very highly developed

HD = Highly developed

D = Developed

I = Improvement required

Tick appropriate score box

KICKING	VHD	HD	D	I
Drop punt accurately over short distance				
Control drop punt over 18 metres				
Demonstrate limited follow through in kick				
Obtain spin with a torpedo punt				
Can kick with non dominant foot				
Can kick against defending opponent				
Can kick three out of five goals from set distance				

HANDBALLING	VHD	HD	D	I
Can flat handball from stationary position				
Controls handball over short distance in game				
Uses non dominant hand if pressured				
Controls handball from a variety of positions				
Correct technique used in varying situations				

RECEIVING/MARKING/GATHERING	VHD	HD	D	I
Gather rolled ball when on the run				
Pick up stationary ball with one hand				
Gather bouncing ball in two hands				
Marks the ball on chest				
Can run, jump, overhead mark				
Can collect deflected balls clearly on the run				
Can mark the ball under pressure				
Can perform difficult marks, e.g. in packs				

BOUNCING	VHD	HD	D	I
Bounce ball while walking				
Bounce ball on the run				
Touch ball on the ground while running				
Bounce ball while evading opposition				

COMBINING SKILLS	VHD	HD	D	I
Uses appropriate types of passes in a game				
Can defend an opponent in a game				
Attempts to spoil				
Positions body to protect ball				
Can dodge and double back				
Anticipates player movements				
Demonstrates initiative under pressure				
Understands and follows basic rules				

TEAM PLAY	VHD	HD	D	I
Game sense				
Involvement in the use of basic team strategy				

EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT – LEADERSHIP/SPORTSMANSHIP	VHD	HD	D	I
Commitment to the team				
Demonstrates good sporting behaviour				
Peer tolerance				
Commitment to improvement				
Involvement in management process				

COGNITIVE ASSESSMENT	VHD	HD	D	I
Rules test .../10 marks				
Knowledge of umpiring signals				
Ability to use scoresheet				

Source: SPARC @ Edith Cowan University

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APPENDIX





THE AFL NATIONAL COACHING ACCREDITATION SCHEME

The AFL is a participant in the Australian Sports Commission's National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS).

AFL coaching courses provide participants with quality training and resources that will assist them to effectively fulfil the important role of a coach. Courses are largely practical with an emphasis on planning, organisation of training sessions, appropriate methods of teaching and correcting techniques, developing skills and preparing players for safe participation in the game.

Mandatory Accreditation

In line with AFL policy, accreditation is now mandatory for coaches in all affiliated leagues throughout Australia. Participating coaches MUST complete an AFL approved coaching accreditation course. On completion of an AFL coaching course, coaches will be recognised through registration on the AFL national coaching database and automatically become a member of the Australian Football Coaches Association (AFCA) for the first year.

The AFL Coaching Accreditation Courses:

The AFL, through its Game Development Department, develops, implements and conducts training programs for the development of coaches.

At all levels of football from AFL Auskick to senior, coaches have a significant influence on players' enjoyment and participation. Coaches are the primary reason why players either continue to participate or leave football. Therefore, it is crucial that coaches are accredited at an appropriate level and the AFL has developed different courses for coaches according to the playing group they are working with – AFL Auskick (under 12s), Youth (13-18) and Senior (open age). Brief descriptions of the available courses follow.

AFL COACHING ACCREDITATION COURSES

Level 1 AFL Junior Course

The coaching of children at AFL Auskick centres and junior clubs is the most important aspect of the program, in developing the basic skills that will determine their future participation in the sport.

The AFL Junior course is the minimum accreditation required for coaching children 5-12 years of age.

Level 1 Youth Course

The AFL Youth Course is suitable for coaching participants aged 13-18 years of age.

Level 1 Senior Course

The AFL Senior Course is suitable for coaching participants aged over 18 years.

Requirements: A minimum of 16 years of age.

Course duration: 14 hours.

Assessment: Participants are assessed practically either during the course or on the job.

Accreditation: Successful participants receive an AFL Level 1 (Auskick, Youth or Senior) Coaching Certificate, an AFL Coach ID card and are entered onto the national coaching database.

Level 2 Youth/Senior Course

The AFL Level 2 courses caters for those who wish to coach at a higher level or who have an aptitude or genuine interest in improving their coaching skills.



AFL High Performance Coaching Course (Level 3)

This course is designed for Level 2 coaches involved in or aspiring to coach in the AFL, state leagues, TAC Cup, AIS/AFL Academy or other elite programs. Coaches must apply to be invited to participate in the weeklong live-in program.

This is the highest accreditation offered by the AFL and covers in greater depth some of the competencies developed in Level 2, while also covering up-to-date issues such as emerging technology, media relations and coaches as program managers and mentors.

RE-ACCREDITATION

An AFL coach accreditation is valid for four years from the date that the accreditation was granted – usually December 31 in the year of completing the course.

Level 1

Application to re-accredit should be made direct to the coaches' local Regional Development Manager or State Coaching Manager.

To maintain accreditation, coaches must demonstrate that they:

- Continued to coach during the four years.
- Were a registered member of their Australian Football Coaches Association (AFCA) branch throughout the four years.
- Are prepared to sign the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct when seeking re-accreditation.
- Are prepared to submit to any screening procedures required at the time of re-accreditation.
- May have continued to undertake further education, formal or informal, to enhance their coaching abilities.

Levels 2 and 3

Application to re-accredit at Level 2 or 3 must be made direct to the State Director of Coaching or to the AFL National Coaching Development Manager.

To maintain Level 2 or 3 accreditation, coaches must demonstrate the same requirements as above and provide evidence of further coach development undertaken. In the form of:

- Courses undertaken, whether football specific or generic.
- Presentations made (e.g.: as part of a Level 1 or Level 2 coaching course).
- Articles written or submitted on coaching topics.
- Working with a mentor coach throughout the four-year period.
- Mentoring of other coaches.
- Any other evidence of coach development/improvement.

Note: Re-accreditation is not automatic.



AFL COACHES' CODE OF CONDUCT

The AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct is to be signed and conformed to as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. The AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct provides a process through which leagues, clubs and schools can expect that basic standards of behaviour by the coach are maintained at all times. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to this code, they may be obliged to sign a further Code of Conduct/Ethics with their club and/or league.

Coaches must also submit to police screening and have relevant working with children cards to ensure that the quality and integrity of the program and the well-being of players is assured.

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION (AFCA)

Membership of the AFCA is an automatic part of coach accreditation. The AFL produces a regular coaching newsletter to demonstrate the latest information about coaching.

The AFCA is operational in all states and territories of Australia, managed by the state coaching managers in each state.

The state and regional AFCA branches perform the following services for their members:

- Annual Coach of the Year Awards and recognition.
- Local coaching newsletters.
- Regional workshops and seminars conducted.
- Resourcing and maintaining coaches resource centres for coaches use.

For more information about the AFL coaching courses and resources, please log onto the AFL website at AFL.com.au and click on development on the home page and then the coaching section.

Further Information

For more information about courses, resources, updating accreditation and the AFCA, contact your local state coaching manager.





AFL Coaching Development

AFL AND STATE OFFICES

The Australian Football League, through its affiliated state and territory football organisations, has an extensive development staff network whose major focus is to provide consistent, reliable and professional service to the football community.

Development staff conduct quality programs that promote fun and enjoyment and achieve maximum participation. Clubs and schools are encouraged to utilise the professional expertise of this development network.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR STATE COACHING DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS 2017

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The resources listed below are available through state offices.

MANUALS

- The Coach – Official AFL Level 1 Senior Coaching Manual
- AFL Junior Coaching Manual
- Official AFL Laws of Australian Football
- The AFL's Spirit of the Laws brochure
- Drills and Skills in Australian Football

AFL GAME DEVELOPMENT COACHING VIDEOS

- AFL Skills Guide
- AFL Kicking Guides
- Game Day Coaching
- Style of Play
- Team Rules

CD-ROM PROGRAMS

- NAB AFL Auskick, Interactive coaching CD-ROM

WEBSITE

Visit the AFL Community football website aflcommunityclub.com.au for more information on coaching, umpiring, volunteering and club development.





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