

AFL YOUTH FOOTBALL (YEARS 7 – 9)

15-a-side or 18-a-side: community club and school competitions

Key Principles

- Fun and safe,
- Play with mates,
- Focus on developing skills and tactics,
- Modified rules, playing area and equipment.

Purpose

Learning how to train and consolidate the basic skills is the focus at this age level. Advanced technical and tactical skills start to be introduced, including decision-making in games and training, positional skills (competency in a position), and basic performance enhancing techniques, e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery, goal-setting, pre and post-match routines.

It is important for players in this age group to feel an essential part of the team to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and a connection with the community, club and team. Commitment and loyalty to the club and team, and social responsibility on and off the field in line with adult standards should be engendered and acknowledged.

Spirit of the Game

Prior to the commencement of play: all players, coaches and umpires should shake hands; and the umpire and coaches should ensure players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the game.

The spirit and intention is to ensure all games are played in a competitive and fair manner, in an environment that:

- permits a player whose sole objective is to contest and gain possession of the ball, to do so in a safe and fair manner; rewards and acknowledges commitment and loyalty to the team, club and or school
- allows all players to feel an essential part of the team while enabling each individual to develop self-efficacy, self-worth and an identity within the community, their team, club or school
- fosters and reinforces community values and social responsibility.

The player whose sole objective is to contest the ball must be permitted to do so. Ethically it is the responsibility of coaches to provide the best possible teaching and learning conditions; therefore, the use of negative defensive tactics where the opposing player's sole objective is to prevent a player from gaining possession is strongly discouraged at this age level.

Tactics such as tagging and flooding are elements of the modern game; however, they are contrary to the philosophy of providing an environment that maximises the desired fairness, fun, speed, skill and competitive elements of the game at this level.

Umpires should at all times: endeavour to apply the laws of the game, awarding free kicks to players in preference to calling for ball-ups; understand the spirit and intention of the laws is to ensure a match is played in a fair manner and to protect players from injury. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon tackling in this age group. At the end of the game, all players and coaches should shake hands.

Laws of Australian Football

The Laws of Australian Football apply to the Year 8 & Year 9 year groups with the following modifications.

The Ball

A size 4 leather or synthetic football made specifically for this age group should be used. As many footballs as possible are required for training sessions. This may be maximised by players bringing their own football, support from a senior club, or fundraising.

It is recommended that teams have a minimum one ball per four players at training sessions.

Tackling

Tackling is permitted per the Laws of Australian Football, however: No player shall be deliberately slung, dumped or thrown to the ground in any tackle.

Order-off rule

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

Field

Refer to **Ground Size Summary**.

The ground size should be influenced by how many players are on the field. If teams are playing 15 a side then the oval should be shortened, however with 18 a side there is the option to play on a full-size oval. Junior Clubs should also consider that by utilising a full-size oval it will negatively impact the amount of scoring that occurs, particularly in the Year 7 & 8 Year groups.

Playing Positions

Community club and school competitions - 15-a-side or 18-a-side field plus interchange. Both may vary with regional agreements designed to ensure maximum participation. To ensure all players feel an essential part of the team regardless of their age, size, gender, ability or the competition they are playing in it is critical that they have an equal amount of time on the field over the course of the season.

Note: Country junior associations in some instances may have slight variations to age/year groups and the standard order off rule so please contact your Regional Development Manager for further clarification.

Year 7 Restrictions:

- Premiership points can be recorded,
- A finals series can be held (*although various options could include the top team after the season wins the 'premiership', the top two teams play off or a regular finals series*)
- The recording or publication of ladders is permitted,
- The recording or publication of match results is permitted,
- No Names published (i.e. No Best Players or Goal Scorers)
- No Fairest and Best player voting (*The focus is still on team development as opposed to individual awards*)

YOUTH FOOTBALL 15-A-SIDE COMPETITIONS:

On the back of the 2017 Youth Football Review Recommendations, a 15-a-side format of football will be implemented in Year 7 - 9 football across WA for the 2018 season. This format aims to keep teams together for longer, create more opportunities for players to get the ball, increase skill development and enable more divisions of evenly matched teams.

The 'Super 15's' concept was successfully trialled in the Central Conference in 2017 with positive feedback and the following rule parameters will be implemented as recommended by clubs involved:

- **Last Possession Rule:** As there are less players in each team, it is more difficult to attract volunteers. The last possession rule will mean clubs won't have to source boundary umpires whilst also leading to free-flowing games.
- **Field Size:** Maximum 155m
- **Player Structure:** The player structure will be the same as modified football where there are 5 lines of 3 players.

In 2018, the WAFC will implement the following structure in Junior Football across Perth:

- Year 7: All teams play in a 15-a-side competition
- Year 8 & 9: A 15-a-side division will be made available to clubs

Previous participation data shows that jumping from 15-a-side to 18-a-side has negative impacts on participation, with teams amalgamating earlier and players dropping out of the system as a result. There is also significant data to show that less players on smaller fields results in greater player development.