



AFL JUNIOR COACHING MANUAL

FOR COACHES AND PLAYERS AGED 5-12



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4. Kidskills Australia – Kid Skills – Games & Activities Book, 1998.



USING THE MANUAL – DEVELOPING FUTURE STARS

The AFL Junior Coaching Manual provides the framework for managing and coaching junior football. It is an outstanding publication for both coaches and players, with its emphasis on the introductory years of young footballers and how they can develop their abilities and skill level.

For coaches it is an invaluable resource to assist them in achieving the core objectives of coaching, which are:

- Engaging the participants;
- Educating the participants across all elements of the game;
- Better understanding participants' abilities, skills and motivations, and
- Inspiring participants to learn and improve.

In essence the manual provides a best practice approach through a sequential learning program appropriate to each participant's age and skill level.

The manual covers a range of issues for coordinators and coaches including the junior football philosophy, the role of the coach, planning a NAB AFL Auskick or junior club season, safety issues and teaching techniques to help coaches when assisting children to develop their skills at an appropriate rate.

Establishing sound technique in the skills of the game is essential and coaches play a significant role in ensuring this happens, so I recommend you make use of the many skill development activities in this manual

An extensive compendium of games that provides warm-up activities, drills and skill games for a variety of age levels is included. The skills of the game are demonstrated by top AFL players.

The Junior Football Match Program section at the end of the manual provides the key guidelines for proper conduct of matches for children of various age and skill levels. This has been driven by on-going research and consultation with many of those involved in the conduct of junior football.

There are also 40 lesson plans that provide detailed outlines of NAB AFL Auskick and junior club sessions from the warm-up activity through to the game time.

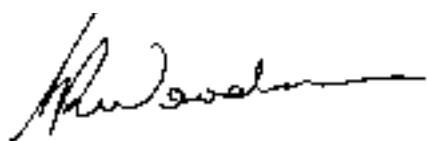
I would particularly draw your attention to Section Two of the manual, Sport and Children, which is critical for anyone who coaches children. Understanding children and why they play sport is essential to keeping them involved and imparting activity through playing sport.

The AFL Junior Coaching Manual is an important resource and we wish to continually improve it. We welcome your feedback to lawrie.woodman@afl.com.au.

I encourage all NAB AFL Auskick centre and junior football club coordinators and coaches to visit the AFL Community Website aflcommunityclub.com.au to keep up to date with the latest NAB AFL Auskick and junior club coaching information on the site and via the development section of afl.com.au.

Finally enjoy the great satisfaction you are certain to gain from coaching children, many of whom are learning the game for the very first time and will be looking to you for guidance and encouragement.

Best wishes for your coaching this season.



Lawrie Woodman
Coaching Development Manager
Australian Football League



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SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION



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INTRODUCTION

The AFL Junior Football March Guide refers to the philosophy, guidelines and requirements for the conduct football for children aged 5-12 years with the aim of recruiting parents and children to Australian Football through the delivery of quality programs. The Junior Football March Guide is broadly underpinned by two components:

1. THE NAB AFL AUSKICK PROGRAM



The key introductory program for boys, girls and parents consisting of 8-12 weekly sessions conducted for 60-75 minutes. The AFL Auskick program has been segmented to include appropriate activities for children aged 5-8 years and older children where appropriate. Children progress through a sequential program of warm-up games, skill activities, skill games and matches utilising appropriate modified rules. Small-sided matches between groups within the centre are a vital part of NAB AFL Auskick, occasional social matches (gala days) against other centres are appropriate and where possible should be played at half-time of senior matches.

To participate in the AFL Auskick program, children must turn five years of age in the calendar year that they register.

The core philosophy of the program is to provide an introduction to Australian Football for children aged 5-12 with the following qualities:

- **Fun and safety:** football needs to be fun for all, but especially for this age group. Research has established that a sequential developmental program for children is extremely safe, particularly when involving appropriately accredited coaches. The activity for this age group must emphasise skill development as a priority and provide challenging match programs and a logical transition from introductory level through to competitions at clubs and schools.
- **For children and parents:** to further ensure the progression from one level of involvement to the next is smooth and based on rules and procedures appropriate to the children involved. The rules and procedures are simple to follow and supported by resources and coach education. The importance of community ownership and management must not be underestimated.
- **Managed by the community:** the environments at centres, clubs and schools are managed and controlled by the community, utilising AFL developed procedures as outlined in this policy.

In line with this philosophy, programs and competitions must be planned around what children look for to make it a positive football experience. In their words:

- to have fun with their friends;
- to experience excitement and enjoyment;
- to experience challenge, achievement, and personal responsibility; and
- to use and improve their skills.

Taking this into account, organisations aiming to provide football for this age group need to offer:

- a program that enables all individuals to experience personal achievement, building competence, enhanced self-esteem, social cooperation, maximum participation and skill development in a FUN environment;
- appropriate warm-up activities;
- appropriate skill teaching in a sequential program;
- appropriate skill drills and games;
- appropriate AFL Junior (modified-rules) matches;
- appropriately trained and accredited coaches, umpires and officials; and
- support for learning and inexperienced umpires.



2. JUNIOR FOOTBALL

A GUIDE TO THE JUNIOR GAME

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

The young child that joins our game through the AFL Auskick program may make it all the way to the AFL competition or, just as importantly, become the next amateur player, umpire, coach or fan of the game.

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

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

AGE POLICY

A player must be 7 years old at January 1 in each year to be eligible to be registered with an affiliated body. That player's age group shall be based on the players age as at January 1.

COMPETITION AGE RANGE

Where player numbers do not permit conducting a competition in every age group, the AFL policy recommends that children participate in competitions with a two-year age span, e.g. staggered age groups 8, 10, 12 or 9, 11, 13.

The Junior Football Match Guide recognises that in regional and rural areas the opportunity to conduct competitions with a two-year age span is not always possible. Where leagues and clubs have trouble fielding teams, reducing player numbers is recommended (9-12 a side).

If a league has no alternative than to conduct competitions that involve players participating outside the recommended age span, they must firstly seek approval from their state football body.

In these instances, coaches should endeavour to match players by age and ability level.

PLAYING DOWN AN AGE LEVEL

Junior leagues may at their discretion grant a player permission to play down an age level where a legitimate reason exists, such as physical capacity or disability. Players seeking exemption need to provide relevant medical evidence for assessment by the controlling body. If no relevant medical evidence can be provided, the controlling body will determine the application for exemption as it sees fit on full consideration of the circumstances presented.

PLAYING UP AN AGE LEVEL

The Junior Football Match Guide acknowledges the principle role of the parent or guardian in determining that a player should play in a higher age competition than the one determined by the player's chronological age. Players should only be permitted to play up an age level when their physical capacity and social sense enable them to compete adequately at the higher age level. The decision whether a player should play up, should be based on the advantages to be gained by the player.

Development Phase: To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that further develops their basic football skills and introduces technical and tactical concepts.

The spirit of the game at this level is to give all players a game of football in which they have every opportunity to gain possession of the ball and safely dispose of it by kick or handball.

Competition Phase: To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that focuses on consolidating their basic football skills and knowledge of technical and tactical concepts while introducing new elements of competition.

The spirit of the game at this level is to ensure all games are played in a fair and safe environment that permits players to contest the ball.



PARTICIPATION AND TALENT PATHWAYS

AFL PLAYER PATHWAYS

The AFL player participation pathway has been developed to ensure it contains the following principles:

- Comprehensive (levels of participation that link);
- Inclusive and equitable (accommodates all young people);
- Sequential (progressive links between levels);
- Developmental (meets children's needs); and
- Informed (by research and practice).

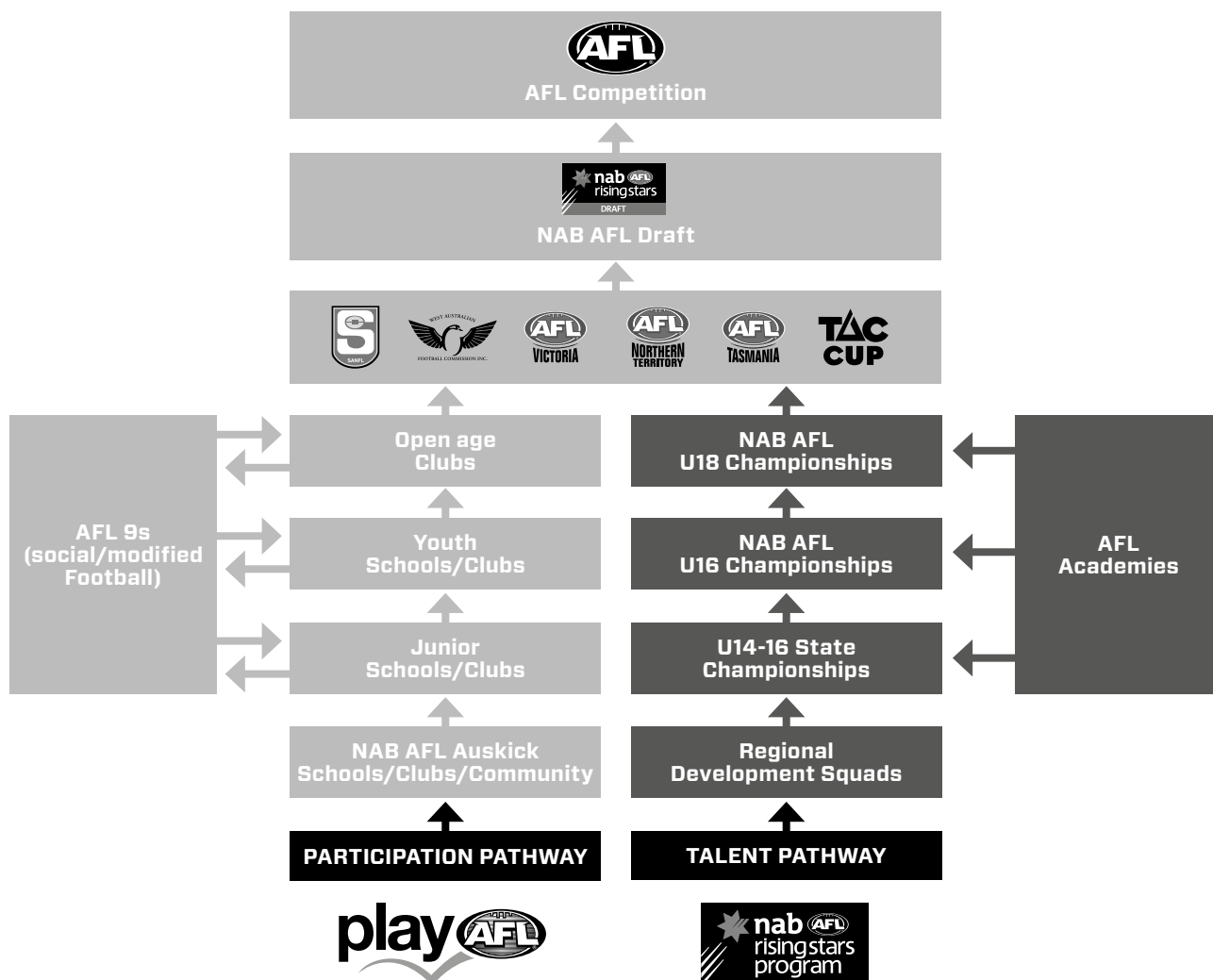
This pathway provides a quality environment where young players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of learning and ability.

At the youth level, the talent pathway to becoming an AFL player begins to emerge through regional development squads that have the dual purpose of developing

individual player's abilities and preparing teams to participate in state championships at under-14 level 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.

The AFL Rising Stars section of this policy includes elements of the evaluation process that are integral to the talent pathway and coaches may wish to use some of them, perhaps in modified forms, in their coaching programs.



NOTES



SECTION TWO

SPORT AND CHILDREN



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WHY CHILDREN PLAY SPORT

Children play sport for a variety of reasons. Most commonly they do it because they enjoy it. Once enjoyment goes so does their interest in continuing the sport. However, enjoyment can come from a variety of sources. For example, it can come from:

- Learning new skills.
- Improving skills.
- Participating in a range of fun activities.
- Having a good relationship with a coach.
- Being recognised by being selected for competition or to demonstrate to others.
- Being involved in exciting and close contests.
- Being with friends.
- Being identified with a group whom they respect and whose company they like.
- Being able to do something well.
- Achieving challenging tasks and performing at one's personal best.
- The desire to be fit and healthy.
- Being involved in a well organised physical activity.
- Being given positive feedback, encouragement and/or awards.
- Being part of a friendly, good humoured and caring group of people.
- Feeling safe, secure and being treated with respect.

To maintain their interest in playing sport children need to be able to learn the skills required and do this in an environment that values them as an individual. Poor coaching generally leads to player frustration and self-doubt and can promote a sense of inadequacy or failure.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

All children are different. The AFL Junior program is structured as a three-phase program catering for boys and girls aged between five and 12 years. Coaches need to be aware of the physical, emotional, social and skill learning characteristics that differentiate children from one another, and the impact this has for their role as coaches.

The most fundamental fact to grasp is that children develop at different rates and that the range of difference can be very significant.

Being sensitive to and making appropriate allowances for individual differences is an essential part of coaching/teaching.

Physical differences in children

- Some children have delayed growth, some grow at an average rate and others have accelerated growth.
- Children of a younger age are generally less coordinated than older children.
- Children of the same age can differ significantly in physical characteristics (e.g. children can differ in height by 40% and be four years apart in physical development) and capabilities.
- Girls tend to develop physically at a faster rate than boys do.
- Early maturers are usually successful at sport in their younger years, but this success may not necessarily continue through adolescence with most late maturers catching them up.

As children mature their hand/foot/eye co-ordination improves. Younger children (possibly up to age eight) are starting to acquire appropriate co-ordination skills and generally will not be able to perform activities requiring well-developed hand/foot/eye co-ordination.

Emotional differences in children

Physical maturity does not necessarily produce emotional maturity. Children can be large and well built for their age and yet extremely self-conscious about themselves. Emotionally immature children may:

- Appear to be hyper-sensitive.
- Be easily distracted.
- Lack confidence.
- Demonstrate poor emotion control in a variety of situations.
- Be easily led by other children.
- Not know how to adjust to the different personalities they face in a group situation.

Children who are awkward, not good at motor skills or obese, may face a hard life with peers, and their estimation of self-worth may be seriously affected unless adult guidance is sensitive and wise. A good coach is aware of the different personalities and the differences in emotional maturity of the children in his/her charge.

A coach can build a child's emotional wellbeing by ensuring that as far as possible appropriate roles and activities are provided for children. This helps to build their confidence and avoids them being exposed to public failure or humiliation.

Catering for differences

In order to cater for individual difference:

- Coaching approaches and expectancies for skill learning must differ from individual to individual.
- Emphasis should be put on the child's own progress, and not on comparing achievements with those of others.
- Individualised instruction and individualised challenges should be provided.
- A broad array of activities should be planned and presented.
- Activities should be of an increasingly complex nature and be challenging but 'doable'.
- Where possible, children of approximately the same skill levels (e.g. beginning, developing, extending) should be grouped together for instructional purposes.

Children who are enthusiastic, learn quickly, get on with others and have a happy disposition are a delight to teach. Fortunately most children display several of these characteristics. But not all do and few do all of the time. A coach's job is not just to coach the easiest and best children; it is to engage all children in learning.

Look out for those who may need special help

Coaches should observe the children they are working with to detect those children:

- Who lose concentration most readily.
- Who always want to be first or have difficulty sharing.
- Who have difficulty remembering or following instructions.
- Who give up most readily.
- Who are picked on or are ignored by others.
- Who are quick to anger or to express dissatisfaction.
- Who express frustration or appear confused.
- Who bully or try to dominate others.
- Who become withdrawn and reluctant to participate.

These children especially should be assisted to overcome those behaviours that will impede their learning or the learning of others in the group. Ignoring these factors that can disrupt the group and impede learning can result in the teaching/coaching role becoming more and more difficult and children dropping out of Junior football.

WHY BE INCLUSIVE?

Including children from a range of backgrounds is important in creating a welcoming environment at Junior AFL clubs and NAB AFL Auskick Centres. The important thing to keep in mind is that every child, regardless of their gender, disability or cultural or religious background has the right to be involved in sport, especially a sport like Australian Football and the NAB AFL Auskick program.

Below are some of the benefits of inclusion:

- More members who can add a richness and diversity to the environment;
- Greater connection to the local community;
- Increase in volunteers, from either the 'new' person or their family and friends;
- Gain increased use of council facilities and grounds;
- Re-invigoration of 'new blood' with fresh ideas; opening up new possibilities.

Including children with disabilities is not hard, it just requires enthusiasm and understanding.

Below are a few suggestions when working with people from a variety of backgrounds with differing levels of ability to encourage inclusion.

- Encourage people from a range of backgrounds.
- Think ability, not disability, race or gender – work with what the person can do. Everyone has their own unique skills and abilities, find out what they are and focus on them to get people from a range of backgrounds involved. If appropriate, encourage parents of any child experiencing difficulty to assist.
- Modify for all (using the TREE acronym) – any activity or skill drill can be modified to better cater for all participants. Using the TREE acronym helps people remember ways to modify an activity or skill drill to allow all participants to improve their skill level and enjoyment.

T – teaching/coaching style

R – rules

E – equipment

E – environment (such as playing surface)

Consider asking the children what modifications could be made.

See page 31 of the 'Coaches' planning' section for more information on using the TREE acronym to modify activities.

- Simple adaptations or modifications of activities will allow greater participation by all. Every effort should be made to keep the activities as true to form as possible and any changes should be viewed as temporary, working towards, where possible the original activity. If changes do not work, try another.
- Provide activities where children can succeed and develop their self-esteem.

Above all coaching and the general inclusion of people from different abilities and backgrounds is nothing more than good coaching practice. Remember all children must be encouraged to participate in all activities.

PROVIDING FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The AFL has an inclusive approach to participation including a Disability Action Plan and supports the notion that every child has the right to be involved in sport, especially a sport like Australian Football. Including children with disabilities is not hard; it just requires enthusiasm and understanding.

Below are a few suggestions when working with children with disabilities:

- Check the needs and abilities of the children;
- Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the children;
- Every child is unique and should be provided with the same opportunities to participate;
- Work with what the child can do and if you are not sure ask them or their parents/carer;
- Children with disabilities, like all children, will improve considerably with continual exposure to skills. If the activity is the child's first exposure to a skill, have patience and give them time to improve;
- Introduce the child to a group;
- A youngster with a disability must be seen as a person first – the similarities to peers should be noted, not the differences;
- Activities can be modified to cater for all abilities. Children with a disability, like all children, may or may not require activities to be modified depending on their level of ability. Remember when modifying activities the integrity of the activity should be maintained;
- Any changes should be viewed as temporary, working towards, where possible, the original activity. If one change does not work, try another;
- Wherever possible have the child participate in all aspects of the day's activities; and
- Provide activities where children can succeed and develop self-esteem.

Remember all children must be encouraged to participate in all activities – People First Disability Second (Acknowledgment: Australian Sports Commission's Disability Program).

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD DISCIPLINE

Coaches should try to really get to know all of their players. The more that is known about a player, the easier it is to cater for his/her needs and the better equipped the coach is to select the most appropriate response to avoid a slight dissatisfaction developing into a behaviour problem.

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 well managed:

- Establish a code of behaviour at the first training session. Involve players in discussing the code and make expectations explicit.
- Explain the reasons for each rule and agree on the penalties for breaking them.
- Develop clear expectations regarding attendance, punctuality, behaviour, sportsmanship and training standards at the meeting.
- Inform the committee and parents of the codes and disciplinary measures that will be used.
- In dealing with unsatisfactory behaviour, focus on the behaviour not on the individual as a person. Do not insult or embarrass a player.
- Discipline the individual responsible, not the whole group.
- Intervene at the earliest signs of misbehaviour or disruption 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, discretely 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.
- Highlight and reward (praise) desired behaviour.
- Consult players and seek their opinions regarding training and training schedules.
- Talk the problem through with the player and establish a commitment to an agreed set of behaviours.
- If behaviour problems persist, involve the child and his/her parents in the discussion of solutions.

HANDLING MISBEHAVIOUR

Behavioural problems can destroy the coach's aim to provide enjoyable learning experiences. Most problems can be avoided if the sessions are well planned and a clear code of behaviour is established and reinforced from the outset.

NOTES



SECTION THREE

COACHING



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THE AFL JUNIOR COACH

At all levels of Australian Football, the coach has significantly more influence upon players than any other official or person connected with football.

The AFL Junior coach's primary role, given that safety and legal and ethical responsibilities apply to coaches at all levels, is to arrange the best possible teaching and learning conditions for children aged between five and 12 who want to learn to play Australian Football.

As such, all coaches need to acquire basic coaching and communication techniques for instructing and managing the learning of children. They must have well-developed strategies for group organisation, discipline procedures, reward mechanisms and an understanding of the uniqueness of children when compared to adults.

The fundamental message of the junior AFL program is that children will only persevere with their learning if they enjoy it. Junior football programs must be fun to participate in and must be structured to enable youngsters to progressively develop and apply their sporting skills.

By following the advice and rules of the AFL Junior policies, coaches and teachers provide learning environments that develop the skills and attitudes children need to keep enjoying and progressing with their football.

Junior AFL aims to provide boys and girls with a fun teaching and playing program that offers them maximum opportunity to learn and play Australian Football.

To meet this aim, the program:

- Relies on the community to provide the coaches and other support.
- Provides advice and training for AFL Auskick coaches and other community helpers.
- Is structured around sequenced skill development sessions delivered in drills and games that engage and challenge children.
- Provides a set of playing rules and procedures that meet the needs of children.
- Provides match experiences that emphasis safety, learning and fun.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

The relationship between the coach, the child and parents has an important bearing on the outcome of a coaching program. Parents can have a positive or negative impact and to ensure that support for the program is secured, it is essential for the coach to effectively communicate with parents.

It is important that the program's aims and the coach's coaching philosophy, role and goals are communicated to parents. One of the most effective ways to do this is for the coach to conduct a parents' orientation meeting before the commencement of the season. A typical orientation program could cover the following topics:

- Welcome and introductions.
- Overview of the topics to be addressed.
- Major goals of the program.
- An outline of the coaching philosophy.
- Codes of behaviour.
- Behaviour expectations.
- Parent roles and responsibilities.
- Involvement with the team and in the club.
- Assisting with training and with other activities.
- Administrative arrangements (fees, season schedule, special events, transport, safety, fund raising).
- Questions and answers/group discussion (e.g. parent expectations)

To sustain communication, the season should include social activities involving parents, a parent feedback survey and opportunities to review the success of the program.

INVITATION TO PARENTS

Here is a sample letter to parents inviting them to an orientation meeting.

Dear Parent

I have been appointed coach of your child's team for the coming season.

I want to invite you to a Parents' Orientation Meeting at which I will have the opportunity to outline the club's coaching philosophy and provide you with other essential information.

I am currently an AFL Level 1 accredited coach. My coaching program will emphasise skill development, fun and working co-operatively.

My aims include enabling all children to learn the basic skills of our sport and to become as good as they can. I also believe that forming friendships, developing a feeling of belonging and learning to share experiences with others are important to children and our community.

All players will be given an equal opportunity to play or compete during the season. All will have a fair level of involvement in the various positions. We will ask of the players that they attend training regularly or at least inform us in advance of circumstances that prevent them attending.

At the meeting, in addition to outlining the club's coaching philosophy, we will also discuss:

1. Program details including game fixtures and practice times and venues.
2. Your hopes for what your child should get from their involvement with our team.
3. Transport to and from games and practice/training.
4. Safety, including club rules, injury management and first aid arrangements.
5. Parental duties – umpiring, canteen (on roster), team managers, etc.
6. Club social activities.
7. Fees and fund-raising.

The meeting will take no more than 1 hour and is to be held at (venue) commencing at (time). Tea and coffee will be provided.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

The Coach.

ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDED FOR COACHES

The following coaching standards are recommended for coaches in the NAB AFL Auskick program.

NAB AFL Auskick coaches are expected to complete a Level 1 course.

NAB AFL Auskick Helper coaches are expected to have completed an orientation course and are encouraged to complete a Level 1 course.

Under 8-12 coaches are expected to complete a Level 1 course.

Coaches are responsible for following the coaching program and engaging the assistance of others in teaching youngsters the skills of playing Australian Football and the value of sportsmanship.

This is critical because:

- These are the "golden years" of the development of fundamental motor skills and of skill learning specific to sport.
- This is the most rapid learning phase of their lives.
- Failure to develop such skills in pre-adolescence is a major factor influencing teenage dropout from sport.
- Skills will not be acquired unless they are taught in an ordered, sequential manner.

COACHING COURSES

Under the auspices of the Australian Coaching Council, the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme conducted by the AFL offers a development program for coaches/teachers with courses at various levels. While not mandatory, it is desirable that those coaching junior AFL are suitably qualified to provide appropriate instruction to children learning the game of Australian Football.

Courses are offered at three levels.

1. Orientation course

- All people supporting assisting with coaching at junior football should attend an orientation session.
- Assistant Coaches should be accredited at this level.

2. Level 1 Junior Course

- NAB AFL Auskick - Head coaches should be accredited at this level.
- Junior Clubs - coaches should be accredited at this level.

Courses are largely practical with the emphasis on planning, better organisation of training sessions, appropriate methods of teaching and correcting techniques.

Coaches are required to agree to the AFL coaches' code of conduct as part of gaining accreditation. For information about courses, updating accreditation and the Australian Football Coaches' Association, contact your local state co-ordinator.

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THE IDEAL AFL JUNIOR COACHING STRUCTURE

The ideal coaching structure consists of the following roles:

- Coaching coordinator (in charge).
- Leader coaches.
- Assistant coaches.

Coaching coordinator (in charge)

- The most experienced and highly qualified coach.
- Preferably holds Level 2 Accreditation, but at least Level 1.
- Takes charge and advises other adults on the coaching panel.
- Is responsible for the conduct of the program.
- Able to provide instruction to other coaches.
- Arranges the education and training of other coaches either at courses or on-the-job.
- Liaises with the state foundation regarding programs, resources and courses available.

Leader coaches (group coaches)

- Under the guidance of the coach coordinator coaches small groups and teams.
- Preferably holds Level 1 accreditation.
- Generally works with a group of up to 20 children.
- Players of similar ability grouped together for coaching.
- Able to provide instruction to assistant coaches.

Assistant coaches (parents)

- Under the guidance of a leader coach helps to supervise children for instruction.
- Draws on parenting skills to assist other coaches.
- Ideally works with a small group of up to five children.
- Has completed an AFL Auskick orientation course.
- Does not initially need to know skill instruction but will learn this on-the-job.

Coaches should complete an approved AFL coaching course to ensure that children are appropriately coached through these vital formative years.

Coaches should avoid dominating the whole proceedings at training. Over-involvement can:

- Cause stress and possibly burn-out.
- Lead to a stifling of suggestions and new ideas.
- Hamper the coach's ability to observe individual skill levels.
- Discourage coaching assistants and helpers from continuing their involvement.

ASSISTANT AND HELPER COACHES

A sensible use of helpers both assists the coaching process and engages the interest and enthusiasm of helpers. Working as a team, with the coach as leader or supervisor, builds the experience and skills of the helpers and potentially widens the pool of people from which future coaches can be drawn. Assistant coaches and helpers reduce the ratio of players to coaches and make it easier to:

- Facilitate activities at different levels with different groups.
- Introduce one-to-one remedial assistance.
- Determine the skill levels of players.
- Monitor potential behaviour problems.
- Speed up the transition between activities.
- Keep all players involved and active.
- Review the effectiveness of sessions.
- Vary and revise session plans and activities.

UMPIRES

Children not only need to learn the skills of football, they also need to know the rules and how they are applied in a game. Umpires are an important learning resource and could also be invited to training sessions to demonstrate and explain rules. AFL Auskick umpires also play a very important coaching role in NAB AFL Auskick matches.

Umpires should:

- Know the rules for the appropriate age group.
- Know why the rules are modified.
- Become more involved than umpires at other levels in helping children to learn the game.
- Keep the game flowing.
- Explain why decisions were made to penalise or reward players.
- Help the coach to make participation in the game an enjoyable learning experience.

COACHES AND UMPIRES

When the coaches and the umpires work together they increase the likelihood that the game experience will be a learning experience as well as fun.

Coaches should stress the importance of the umpire to players and show respect to umpires at all times.

The coach should help to develop a positive attitude in players towards umpires.

COACHES' CODE OF CONDUCT

An AFL Auskick coach is responsible for the smooth operation of an NAB AFL Auskick program. This program is a fun teaching and playing program, and has been constructed to provide all children participating the maximum opportunity to learn and play Australian Football. The coach's responsibilities should not be underestimated and are well encapsulated in the code of conduct, opposite.

THE UMPIRE

Expectations about the roles and responsibilities of umpires should vary according to their age and experience. An experienced umpire may also be able to take on the role of an on-field coach while they officiate. On the other hand, many umpires start their umpiring at junior level and, much like the players, are still developing their skills. Often these beginner or less-experienced umpires will be involved in the AFL's mentoring or Green Shirt program, which is a visual reminder that these umpires are just starting out and should be given time to develop. In order to perform their role, umpires need to:

- have a good knowledge of the rules of the game for each particular age group;
- be able to make clear explanations to players when decisions are made; and
- provide encouragement and feedback to the players during the game.

PHILOSOPHY OF UMPIRING AFL JUNIOR MATCHES

When umpiring children in this age group, it is important to understand the 6 most important things are to:

1. develop a respect for officials in children;
2. assist the development of each player's basic skills;
3. assist with shaping character;
4. build self-esteem through positive feedback;
5. develop sportsmanship; and
6. educate and try to modify inappropriate behaviour.

THE UMPIRE AS COACH

An experienced AFL junior umpire may be capable of providing on-field coaching. For umpires to do this, they need:

- a thorough knowledge of the skills of the game;
- an understanding of teaching methods;
- an understanding of how players develop; and
- an ability to provide clear explanations and feedback about decisions.

POSITIONING

Because of the size of the oval and the distances kicked by children in these age groups, positioning should not be a problem.

The umpire should be close enough (side-on to each contest is the best position) to talk to the players and not have to yell too loudly.

Some players will even be bewildered and unsure of which way to kick or that they need to move back after taking a mark. The umpire needs to reassure such children and give them time and guidance in learning what to do. In some cases, children will need to be guided into position (e.g. on the mark) or be given clear directions on what to do next.

PSYCHOLOGY

When rewarded for appropriate behaviour, children are far more likely to try to repeat such behaviour.

It has been shown this powerful method of controlling, modifying and developing behaviour is most effective when the reward is given immediately after the particular behaviour.

The umpire is in a position to give immediate rewards in 2 ways:

- by word of mouth ("terrific", "well done", "good pass" etc). If need be, and if time permits, by explaining what was good about it; and
- by awarding a free kick, or even granting a mark. Such decisions can be based upon the situation (courage, effort, determination or simply because the child had not had prior opportunities to fully participate) rather than a strict interpretation of the rules.

It is important that coaches, parents and spectators understand the role the umpires are attempting to perform during junior matches and support them, whether they are young umpires learning the game or experienced umpires helping to direct and coach on the field.

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 de-registration 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)

SEASON'S PLAN

The coaches should develop an annual season plan. This is an essential planning tool and lets everybody involved in the program – children, parents, coaches and other program helpers – know what commitments are required from them for the NAB AFL Auskick season.

This plan will outline the number of weeks the program will run, session times, dates of special events, program breaks (e.g. for school holidays) and so forth. The coach will need to contribute to this plan because it is the schedule of events that they will be responsible for implementing.

The coach is also responsible for planning each session. To gain a sense of where the program is going and how the various skills will be covered in the season, planning should cover the 10 or so sessions. Naturally, the planning for the first or next few sessions will be done in greater detail than will the planning for sessions that are several weeks away.

The coaching advice related to children of different ages and the suggested learning activities outlined later in this guide have been designed to enable the coach to quickly plan their sessions so that there is a strong fit between the planned teaching program with the learning needs of the players.

PLANNING A SESSION

When planning a session or a batch of sessions, coaches should consider:

- The present skill level of players.
- The resources and equipment available.
- What goals are achievable.
- When various skills need to be covered.
- What the coach will do and what assistants will do.

In each session it is important to plan for:

- Optimal activity.
- Appropriate progressions.
- Variety.
- Short and frequent drills for new skills.
- Competition-like practices.
- Individual differences.

If a coaching plan for a session is not working when put into practice, the coach should be flexible and change what is being done to make it a more effective learning experience for children. Delegation of tasks is part of good planning. Plan to use assistant and helper coaches effectively.

A plan is a guide to what to do. It should not restrict coaches from doing things that they see as necessary to make the session a fun learning experience for all. Without a plan, however, a coach may fail to teach the full scope of skills and to appropriately sequence skill learning opportunities.

Good planning underpins good coaching.

STRUCTURE OF THE SESSIONS

Sessions usually last between 60 minutes (for younger children aged 5-8) to 90 minutes for (children aged 9-12).

There are four components to a session.

Session component	Activity
1. Warm up (10 minutes)	Warm-up games and activities
2. Skill teaching (20-35 minutes)	Skill drills to introduce and revise appropriate level skills
3. Skill games (20 minutes)	Games which involve the skills that are being taught
4. Footy game (10-15 minutes)	A game of football with appropriately modified rules

TIPS FOR PLANNING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE SESSIONS

Plan sessions so as to:

- Maximise the practical work time – less talk more activity.
- Minimise the time moving between activities – have equipment on hand, issue clear instructions.
- Increase repetitions of skills nominated in each task activity set for the session, so that learners get many repeats.
- Increase the variety of activities in a session – change the drills every five to 10 minutes and have something new each session.
- Use footballs at all times – extra laps and sprints are NOT a part of junior football – improve stamina and speed while having fun playing with the football.
- Activate the players by avoiding long queues and having ample equipment.

If the session is not working as planned, change it by modifying the activity or skill drill. An effective way to modify activities to better cater for all participants is to remember the TREE acronym. The TREE acronym helps people remember ways to modify an activity or skill drill to allow all participants to improve their skill level and enjoyment.

- **T – teaching/coaching style**
 - Modify whether you coach through visual or verbal cues.
 - Use a questioning approach rather than an instructive approach.
 - Pair players up to work together.
 - Use older or more skilful children to mentor others.

- **R – rules**
 - Modify the number of children in an activity.
 - Modify the size of a goal.
 - Modify how you score.
- **E – equipment**
 - Use lighter or softer balls.
 - Use bright coloured cones to mark out boundaries.
 - Use bright bands to distinguish teams.
- **E – environment**
 - Vary the distance to a target.
 - Play on different playing surfaces such as indoors.
 - Vary size of the activity.

If you are unsure how to modify an activity, consider asking the children, or their parents, what modifications could be made.

A practical example of how the TREE acronym could be used is made clear in the example below.

Example – Karen has limited mobility which limits her movement on the field. She has poor balance and cannot run for any considerable distance. In this example, you may consider the following modifications:

- **T – teaching/coaching style**
 - Use a questioning style or let the children set their own goals for activities to allow all children to improve and be engaged.
- **R – rules**
 - Make rules where the ball has to be passed to Karen before a goal can be scored.
- **E – equipment**
 - Use cones to limit the amount of running that Karen has to do in skills and relays.
- **E – environment**
 - Restrict the size of the playing area and the numbers in a team. Consider playing a 3 versus 5 match where players are placed in ability based teams for some matches.

GOLDEN RULES FOR COACHES IN TAKING TRAINING SESSIONS

- Maximise the use of footballs (at least one between two children wherever possible).
- Avoid having long queues of children (five maximum).
- Don't "run laps" – play warm-up games.
- Coach or monitor your group. Observe skills and provide feedback on the spot. This is almost impossible if you stand in front of the group handballing or kicking to them.
- Recruit helper parents to keep a ratio of 1:5 (parent: children).
- Have FUN, play lots of skill activities and games, don't simply teach skills.
- Youngsters (aged 5-8 especially) should spend a lot of time simply running, jumping, hopping, skipping, rolling, throwing, catching, balancing, falling and NOT always concentrating on the skills of football.
- Plan sessions in advance. Failing to plan is planning to fail.
- Seek feedback from the children on what they thought of the session.

GROUP COACHING

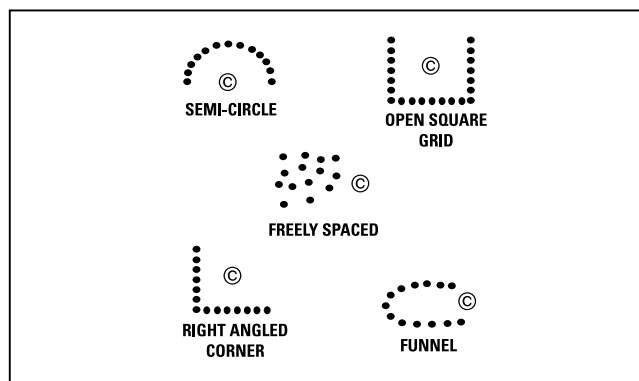
Coaches will be required to teach children in groups. In order to do this smoothly and efficiently, a coach will need to position themselves so they are seen and heard by all participants. They will also need to establish boundaries within which the program will operate.

Formations for group coaching

Coaches need to establish appropriate formations for group instruction and practice.

A good formation for coaching is one that:

- Enables the coach to see and hear all the players and vice versa.
- Is quickly and easily formed.
- Minimises distractions - away from extraneous noise and other movement, out of the wind or sun if these are a distraction.
- Is used regularly so children are familiar with it and how and where to set it up.



Training zones for group coaching

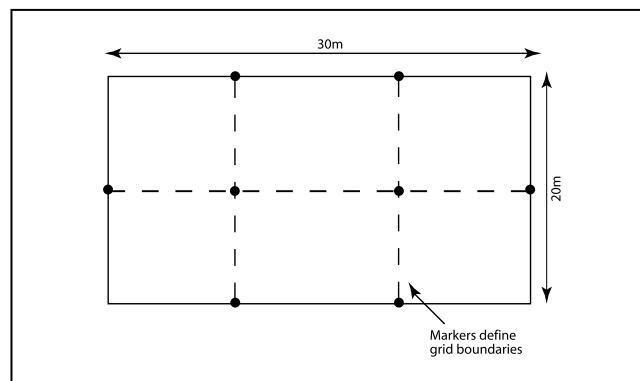
Training zones can be marked on an area of playing space as a strategy for organising group coaching. A training zone could be a grid, a circle, a doughnut, a square, a set of parallel lines and so forth. These marked areas can be used for group drill activities and skill games.

The nature of the zone used generally depends upon the coaching goal and the skills that are being developed.

A circle formation with players spaced around the circle perimeter can be used to develop ball transferring (e.g. handballing and catching) skills or can be used to rotate players from the perimeter to the centre as part of an activity or game. When the coach is stationed in the centre of the circle, he/she can control the skill activity as all players are in view.

A grid formation can have players stationed on grid boundary points or within the squares of the grid.

Marked training zones should be used to enable a coach to closely monitor the group's activities and spend more time correcting individual faults and less time maintaining control over widely scattered players. Coaches can position themselves within a circle or grid and demonstrate skills without the players having to leave their position to be able to see and hear.



MATCH-DAY COACHING

- Ensure that all players know where to attend, the time to arrive and have transport.
- Ensure players are aware of their positions on the field (a blackboard 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 and acknowledge their individual efforts.
- Focus on teaching children the game not on winning the game.
- Addresses to players before, during and after the game should be used as teaching and learning opportunities (be calm and positive and avoid any emotional gossiping, derogatory or sarcastic remarks).
- Ensure that players have the right equipment, i.e. mouth guards and boots.

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.
- Do not address the whole group for longer than 60 seconds and keep it simple.
- Stress that the game is an opportunity to practice skills.
- Encourage players to do their best.
- Use words and expressions they have heard before to enhance understanding.
- Be positive and encouraging.
- Use team 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 could review what was well done, what needs improvement, what can be learned from the opposition's play, what individuals did well, what was learnt, the extent of player satisfaction, what needs to be worked on, what the team should aim to do better next time.
- Coaches should announce team positions at the start of all breaks.

SAFETY AWARENESS

- Provide a safe environment.
- Facilities and equipment must be safe for both the users and the others involved in the competition. Adverse weather conditions must also be taken into consideration during competition and practice sessions.
- Activities must be adequately planned.
- Impaired learning ability and injury may be the result of unplanned practice sessions.
- Use appropriate progressions in the teaching of new skills, especially potentially dangerous skills.
- Players must be evaluated for injury and incapacity.
- Players with an injury or incapacity should not be expected to perform any potentially harmful activity. No players should ever be forced to take part in any activity that they do not wish to. Individual differences must be accounted for. Injured players should be withdrawn from contests and none should be allowed to put themselves back into the competition after an injury. All injuries should be referred to the trained first-aiders/sports trainers for assessment and appropriate management or referral.
- Young players should not be mismatched.
- Young athletes 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 legally accepted by the participants if they know, understand and appreciate those risks.
- Activities must be closely supervised.
- Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure the practice environment is as safe as possible.
- Coaches should know first-aid (having completed a recommended qualification) or be supported by trained first-aiders/sports trainers.
- Coaches should have an up-to-date knowledge of basic emergency procedures. Coaches should know STOP and RICER procedures for managing injuries.
- Coaches and club officials should ensure that appropriate medical assistance is available and, at the very least, that appropriately qualified first-aiders/sports trainers are on hand to 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 changerooms and training venues. Clear written rules should be developed for general conduct and behaviour in such situations.
- Coaches, supported by first-aiders/sports trainers, should keep adequate records.
- Records are useful aids to planning and are essential in all injury.
- Record cards should be kept on all players, including relevant general and medical information and progress reports. Accident reports (not diagnosis) should be made as soon as possible after an injury has occurred.



SECTION FOUR

SKILL DEVELOPMENT



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STAGES IN SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In order to play football children need to learn the skills used in the game. Teaching these skills should not be haphazard or learning might not occur. Teaching should follow a logical pattern designed to enable students to progress through various stages of skill development.

- A number of stages of skill development in children can be identified.
- Coaches need to base their teaching on what we know about the skill development in children.
- Although all children pass through the various stages, they generally do so at different rates and can display a wide range of individual differences.
- If coaches are unable to determine the appropriate level at which to pitch skill activities, they may need to run some simple testing activities to see just what skill abilities children have.
- Pre-testing is an important tool when forming groups and it helps to prevent students being asked to perform skills that are too easy or too difficult for them.
- Testing during coaching sessions helps the coach and children monitor their progress.
- Post-testing enables coaches and children to identify areas for improvement.
- Skill building isn't a lock step process and new slightly advanced skills can be introduced when a child reaches reasonable competency in a skill.

A good coach is always observing how children are performing activities and tasks and intervenes when a child is being asked to perform something that is beyond them or too easy for their level of capability. Knowing when it is time to provide a child with a fresh challenge and pitching the challenge so that it motivates the child is the art of good teaching and coaching.

A SKILL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The AFL Junior coaching model follows five stages:

1. Fundamental motor skills (a preparatory stage generally for 5 to 8-year-olds).
2. Basic skills (a foundation stage generally for 8 to 9-year-olds).
3. Advanced and extension skills (a stage of building on foundation skills generally for 10-year-olds).
4. Game skills (the stage of using the skills in a game generally for 10-12-year-olds).
5. Match skills (the stage of playing the standard adult game generally for 12-year-olds and above).

The stages progressively develop skills:

- Initially children learn to use the skills in a stationary position.
- Then they are taught to use the skills when moving.
- Then to refine their skill techniques.
- Then to apply the skills in a decision-making environment with rules.
- Finally, they learn to use their skills in a fast moving match environment where they play a position, need to be aware of their teammates and have the added pressure of an opponent.

To place each player in the appropriate stage of the model, coaches will need to develop their knowledge of:

- Each child's development stage (through observation of the child's behaviour and others' behaviour towards the child).
- His/her skill levels (through observation and testing).
- The skill development stages.
- The teaching approach to take with different age groups.
- The graded sample activities outlined later in this guide.

This will ensure that all children are learning the skills they need to improve their football prowess, regardless of their relative skill levels.

FUNDAMENTAL MOTOR SKILLS

Fundamental movement or motor skills are the building blocks of more advanced movement skills used in sports and other movement activities such as dance and gymnastics. The following fundamental motor skills are most essential for primary school children to learn and are best taught when children are between the ages of 5-8:

- Catch.
- Kick.
- Run.
- Vertical jump.
- Overhand throw.
- Ball bounce.
- Leap.
- Fall and roll.
- Dodge.
- Punt.
- Forehand strike.
- Two-handed side-arm strike.

Children normally develop motor skills in a sequential manner and start developing these skills in the earliest years of primary school. During these years, students are physically and intellectually capable of benefiting from instruction and mastery of these skills and mastery of these skills is essential for children to progress to higher levels of skill development.

Children who do not master these skills are less able and often less willing to persist with the difficult task of learning more complex motor skills.

Teaching fundamental motor skills

Children learn the fundamental motor skills when coaches:

- Aim for mastery of the skill not simply demonstration.
- Know the observable components or parts of the skill, which when performed together constitute the skill.
- Observe children performing the skill and detect which, if any, parts of the skill the child is performing incorrectly.
- Provide specific feedback about the skill performance immediately after the performance.
- Provide feedback that tells the child what parts of the skill they are performing correctly and praise them for this and what parts they need to modify or improve.
- Demonstrate the difference between what the child has done incorrectly and what they need to do.
- Show the child how to do the parts of the skill correctly, stressing the specific performance required to master the skill.
- Teach one component of the skill at a time and build up the component sequences until the entire skill is being performed.
- Keep the time between demonstrating the skill and the child practising the skill to an absolute minimum.
- Allow sufficient time and practice opportunities for the skill to be mastered.
- Plan practice, drills and games so that the child experiences success.
- Encourage improved performance and praise correct performance.
- Make the learning of the skill fun.

BASIC SKILLS

The term ‘basic skills’ refers in this context to the performance of a football skill on its own, not in combination with other skills. The focus needs to be on performance in a very simple form. These skills are normally performed in a straight line.

Importance is placed upon correct execution of the skill and on using both sides of the body. The child should be allowed as much time as required to perform each skill. There is emphasis on eliminating tackling and pushing from matches at this age group to allow plenty of time to perform the skill.

Examples of basic skills are to be found in Section 5, but the emphasis is correct technique without the pressure of opposition or time. Marking the ball in a standing position or a standing kick using correct technique would be seen as basic skills.

ADVANCED AND EXTENSION SKILLS

The term ‘advanced’ refers to the performance of a football skill which incorporates a degree of difficulty due to requirements of accuracy, speed, opposition or when in odd positions (such as lying on the ground). These skills now involve working around corners, at increasing speed and with the introduction of opposition.

Importance is still placed upon correct execution of the skill on both sides of the body, but now the player has demands placed upon performance due to additional factors.

Examples of advanced skills include marking the ball when it travels over longer distances and arrives at different body levels, kicking at increased speed and over greater distances, combining skills such as kicking, marking and handball in fluid routines or performing a skill against opposition.

Skills are ‘extended’ through such things as learning how to use the body when marking, judging the flight of the ball, marking out in front at pace, bouncing while weaving or evading opposition and using other skills in combination. In other words, a player who is quite capable of performing skills at pace can be extended by introducing other variables such as being forced onto their wrong foot or being required to get around opponents before kicking or handballing.

Extension skills are really about using advanced skills in less predictable circumstances such as unpredictable bounces, faster delivery at wider angles, and so on.

GAME SKILLS

‘Game skills’ are about applying individual skills in games. To do so effectively, individual skill performance needs to be automatic, as it is only then that players can give adequate attention to the application of technique in a game situation. ‘Games’ refers not especially to AFL matches, but rather to games that have a clear focus. Boot Ball for instance is a game that requires kicking, picking up, marking, running, handballing as well as judgment and use of space.

Through such games children can be introduced to a ‘game sense’ approach, involving such things as ‘awareness’ of ball and player movement and ‘reading the play’ skills.

They also learn that movement is required both when the player has the ball and when he or she does not have the ball; that the movements are related to where the ball is and where teammates or opponents are; that use of vision, voice and hearing is essential.

MATCH SKILLS

Match skills is the application of individual and team skills in games of football – using AFL Junior Rules. These matches have limitations on what skills are to be used and therefore enable children to use their skills in a controlled environment.

Matches by their very nature pose the most demanding environment in which children can practise their skills. That is why the rules, ball size, team size and ground set-up is all adjusted to be appropriate to the various age groups.

The matches that young children play need to involve as few complications as possible. AFL Auskick Rules sequentially introduces greater opposition and modifies rules as the children move through the age groups.

Matches involve decision-making, skill execution, confidence, team-work. Young children tend to be egocentric and all they want is to “get the ball”. For this reason, AFL Auskick Rules is played in zones. When the ball enters their zone, the limited number of children in that area are free to compete according to the rules.

Children will always want to play a match, but coaches need to understand that in terms of skill development, a match needs to provide the appropriate time and space for each child to effectively practise the skills of the game.

AFL SKILLS

The most generic skill is ball handling. This enables the player to become familiar with the shape and weight of the ball and to sense its balance. Ball handling teaches a player how to grip and hold the ball and how to predict its movement on the ground and through the air. The other key skills for football are:

POSSESSION SKILLS	DISPOSAL SKILLS	CHECKING SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Marking – arm or chest mark, hand mark, overhead mark▪ Bouncing the ball▪ Pick up▪ Evasion – running, sidestep, blind turn, dummy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Kicking – drop punt, torpedo punt, banana kick▪ Handball▪ Hitting out and palming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Smothering▪ Tackling▪ Bumping▪ Spoiling▪ Shepherding

WHEN TO INTRODUCE SKILLS

Coaches will need to make judgments about when to introduce particular skills or combinations of skills to the children.

Underpinning all decisions is a need to be conscious of safety of the children, but also having an eye on their readiness to progress to particular skills.

All children need to master the fundamental motor skills of hopping, jumping, skipping, kicking, throwing, catching and striking to be adequately prepared to develop the particular skills of Australian Football.

The following chart acts as a guide for coaches in introducing skills, but remember that the fundamental motor skills are vital to progressing to the basic skills of AFL and time needs to be devoted to them – especially in the 5 to 8-year-old group.

	5-8 YEARS	9-10 YEARS	11-12 YEARS		5-8 YEARS	9-10 YEARS	11-12 YEARS
KICKING				BOUNCING:			
Punt kick	•			Bouncing	•		
Drop punt	•			Touching ball on ground	•		
Torpedo punt	•			EVASION			
Banana kick	•			Side stepping	•		
HANDBALL				Spinning	•		
Basic	•			Weaving	•		
Overspin		•		Baulk and spin		•	
Rocket		•		Blind turn		•	
RUCK WORK				Dummy baulk		•	
Basic Jumping	•			DEFENDING			
Tapping	•			Intercepting	•		
MARKING				Spoiling		•	
Chest	•			Bumping			•
Overhead	•			Stealing			•
Hands		•		Shepherding			•
PICKING UP				Tackling			•
Stationary ball	•			Hold and Release		•	
Ball coming on	•			Wrap around			•
Ball moving away		•		Fending			•
RUNNING				Smothering			•
Forward	•			Pushing			•
Backwards	•			Blocking			•
Sideways	•						

NOTE: This is not meant to be prescriptive but used as a guide only - don't overlook the fact that some players will need to be extended.

POSITIVE COACHING

Characteristics of a good teacher/coach

Coaches need to remember that children play sport for a variety of reasons and that their enjoyment generally increases as their learning increases.

Children want and deserve a coach who applies the principles of good teaching/coaching and is:

- Well organised.
- Energetic and enthusiastic.
- Patient and understanding.
- Encouraging and supportive.
- Fair and consistent.
- Good at delegating tasks to assistants and older, more skilled players.
- A careful observer and thoughtful planner.
- Creative and flexible.
- Knowledgeable and committed to improving their coaching.
- Caring and interested in players' wellbeing.
- Fun to be around.

A positive coach says and acts in ways that makes players feel good, important, happy and successful.

A good coach is a good teacher. The art of good teaching is to plan and organise learning situations that enable and encourage learners to progress through a series of learning experiences.

Good teaching depends on:

- Matching the learning experience (the practice activity) to the player's stage of learning.
- The clarity of the demonstration and communications used in the session.
- The ability to analyse and modify errors in performance.
- Developing a rapport (a connection) with the players.
- Using the process of encouragement and guidance during the activity.

Good teaching engages the learner's senses of hearing (listening), sight (showing) and touch (doing what has been heard and seen). So when the coach is:

- Telling children what to do, they must be settled, focused and listening carefully and the coach should be able to see them all.
- Showing children what to do, they must be in a position to see and be carefully observing what is being shown.
- Getting children to practise, they must be provided with appropriate equipment and space to enable them to demonstrate back what they have learned from listening and watching.

Modified coaching to enhance skill development

Children develop at different rates and it is important that a coach adjusts their approach to suit. The TREE acronym (page 18) is a good tool to use to remember the ways in which a coach can modify their coaching to reflect the ability of each child.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There are numerous ways a coach can communicate positively with players. Good positive communication builds confidence and commitment.

Some approaches that positive coaches use are:

- A warm greeting, using the player's name.
- A smile, a wink and/or a thumbs-up sign.
- A pat on the back and an arm slung around a child's shoulder.
- Talking and joking and playing some games with children.
- Asking advice and listening to what children say.
- Helping children to set and adjust learning goals.
- Giving individuals specific suggestions for improvement.
- Offering regular praise and encouragement.
- Staying around after training to talk to children and meet parents.

At all times a coach should demonstrate exemplary behaviour and set the tone for the group.

TEACHING THE SKILLS

Coaches should refer to the coaching points contained within the Skills Guide (Section 5) when setting out to teach the particular skills of the game.

It is important to use the S.P.I.R. method (p.44) and to introduce only two or three coaching points at a time. For instance, in teaching handball, the first coaching points 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 after striking the ball.

Master that, then add:

- Step forward onto 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 children to master each point along the way.

THE S.P.I.R. METHOD

A particularly successful teaching method for assisting children to learn new skills is the S.P.I.R. 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 children 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 (or 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.

USING S.P.I.R. EFFECTIVELY

During the Show (demonstration)

- Select appropriate learning information.
- Each skill demonstration requires a formation which allows every individual 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 Practise

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

When Instructing

- Provide feedback as this lets children know how they are going.
- Allow them to practise for a time before offering any feedback.
- Offer specific, constructive, clear and positive feedback.
- Ask them what they felt and learnt during their performance.

When providing Reward

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

S.P.I.R. – An effective teaching method

S	SHOW	Name the Skill, Demonstrate three times, Provide three coaching points (maximum)
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



SECTION FIVE

SKILLS GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION TO SKILLS GUIDE

Fundamental to coaching children 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 AFL football.

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 Teaching the Skills Section Five).

Use the S.P.I.R. method to teach the skill. An essential starting point for this is to provide the children with a good visual demonstration of the skill being taught. This may require selecting a child or other adult 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.

When teaching skills, remember to:

- Start with slow movement (players step toward each other).
- Then move slowly in a confined area (walking and handballing to each other).
- Increase to a jog (still in pairs).
- Introduce lines of players – lane work (two at each end).
- Increase the pace.
- Have a race: 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 more 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 child and work at the skill level of the latter. Such peer coaching is a valid activity for any age group, but particularly children of primary school age. Remember, children develop at different rates so this must be monitored throughout the coaching period.

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. 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.



Sam Fisher – St Kilda



Robert Murphy – Western Bulldogs



Jimmy Bartel – Geelong

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 Trent McKenzie, Daniel Rich, Trent Cotchin and Jimmy Bartel. 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.



Heath Grundy - Sydney Swans

KICKING

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. 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.
2. Guide the ball down with one hand.
3. Point your toes at your target - see the ball hit the foot.
4. 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.

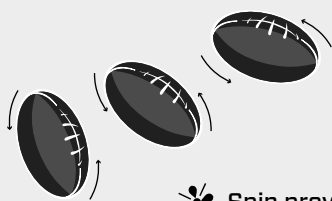
DROP PUNT

1. 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.

2. The release

The ball is guided down and kicked on the bottom point, along the lower laces of the boot. It should spin in a backwards end-over-end fashion.



* Spin provides distance and accuracy.



Adam Goodes - Sydney Swans



Matthew Pavlich – Fremantle

TORPEDO PUNT

1. 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.

2. The release

The ball is guided down with one hand at a slight angle to the ground – and it is 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.**



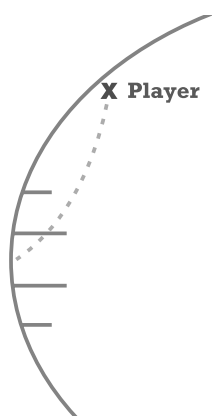
BANANA KICK

1. 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 a left-foot kick.

2. 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.**



Brent Harvey – North Melbourne



Jobe Watson - Essendon

HANDBALL

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the use of the handball became more important in Australian Football. Before then, players were generally told not to handball in the backline and only to handball to get themselves out of trouble. 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 Sam Mitchell, Simon Black and Jimmy Bartel, you can improve your game.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. The ball must rest on the platform hand and be hit with a clenched fist. Players should have their eyes on the ball.
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. Keep 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 is 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.



Nic Naitanui - West Coast

ARM OR CHEST MARK

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. Keep your eyes on the ball and line up the 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.



Kurt Tippett - Sydney Swans



Tom Rockliff - Brisbane Lions

HAND MARK

Skilled players should 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 must be on the flight of the ball.
2. The fingers should be outstretched, pointing towards the ball. The thumbs are positioned behind the ball.
3. The arms must be extended - 'long arms'.
4. The ball is firmly gripped in the fingers.
5. Ensure your body is behind the flight of the ball.

THE GRIP

- Ensure the fingers are outstretched and the thumbs are almost together. Hands in "W" position.
- Keep your eyes on the ball with the arms outstretched.



Lee Spurr - Fremantle

OVERHEAD MARK

This is the mark that fans and commentators 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. Keep your eyes on the ball. Line up your body with the flight of the ball.
2. Jump off one foot and swing the other knee up to gain maximum height.
3. Keep eyes on the ball, fingers outstretched and thumbs almost together.
4. The ball is met slightly in front of the head with arms extended - 'long arms'. It should be firmly gripped in the fingers.

GENERAL COACHING HINTS

The ball should be pulled down quickly onto 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 onto 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.



Nathan van Berlo - Adelaide

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 their smaller, running players, it is important that a ruckman has the skill to direct the ball to their teammates' best advantage. It is worth watching top-class ruckmen such as Dean Cox, Aaron Sandilands, Shane Mumford and Will Minson to see how they use their various skills. The techniques involved in ruckwork are needed to move the ball toward 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.



Jonathon Ceglar – Hawthorn;
Jackson Trengove – Port Adelaide



Cameron Wood – Carlton;
Daniel Currie – North Melbourne

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 and 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 for the ball and makes contact with the open palm.

In the hitting action, the arm should be straight with a follow-through in the desired direction across the body.



**Matthew Kreuzer – Carlton;
Jarrad Redden – Port Adelaide**

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

CENTRE BOUNCE

- Jump off one leg.
- Turn body sideways to protect yourself.
- Hit with outstretched arm at highest point of jump.

PICK-UP: MOVING BALL

There are situations 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.



Zach Tuohy – Carlton

PICK-UP: STATIONARY BALL

One-handed pick-up

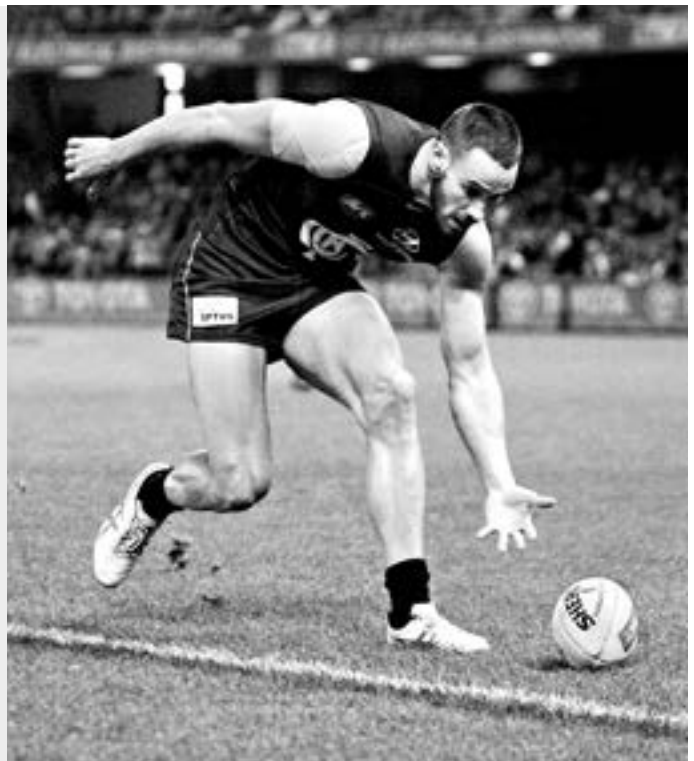
The ball is approached to one side.

The player runs slightly past the ball then swings one arm down to scoop under the ball by getting the hand under it.

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. The player draws level with the ball, bends down and picks up the ball cleanly with two hands.



Andrew Walker – Carlton



Adam Goodes – Sydney Swans

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

1. 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.
2. 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.



Chris Judd – Carlton

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 children how to run correctly in order to improve their running speed. Running speed and acceleration are the product 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 15m when running.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. The ball is held slightly on top by the bouncing hand.
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 while running forward.

The distance at which the ball is thrown out in front is directly related to the player's speed — the faster the player is running, the further out in front it must be thrown.

WET WEATHER BOUNCE

On wet days, the ball will skid away or fail to bounce back. In this case, it should be touched on the ground, using both hands.



Alex Fasolo – Collingwood



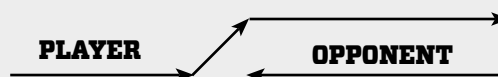
Scott Pendlebury - Collingwood

EVASION

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 sidestep. Pull the ball back 'inside' towards your team's goal and accelerate quickly away.



Sam Mitchell - Hawthorn



Brent Harvey - North Melbourne

THE DUMMY

Players such as Ryan Griffen 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 the 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 the opponent by pushing off hard as in the sidestep.
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.

SMOTHERING

A good smother can deflate the spirit of a player who is expecting to get an easy kick. It also lifts the side that has made the smother because it requires great courage to put your body on the line.

MAIN TEACHING POINTS

1. The hands are brought from hip level, close together.
'Shoot from the hips' with the fingers pointing straight ahead.
2. The arms and hands are extended at about 45 degrees over the kicking boot. Smother the ball when it is on or has just left the kicker's boot.
3. The smotherer must keep their eyes on the ball at all times.



**Lindsay Thomas, Daniel Wells - North Melbourne;
Nick Smith - Sydney Swans**



**Corey Enright - Geelong;
Tendai Mzungu - Fremantle**

TACKLING

From behind

Approach the player who has the ball from one side, to avoid a push in the back. The head should be placed on one side. The player is grabbed on the arms just above the elbows and then swung or spun off balance.

From the front

The tackler approaches the player with arms at waist level. The tackler places their head to one side of the player, with the chin tucked into the chest, then pins the arms of the other player and spins or turns the player off balance.

Your shoulder and arm make first contact with an opponent's chest.

Ensure your head is behind the opponent's back and out of any danger. Use your body weight to slow down your opponent.

GENERAL COACHING HINTS

Begin with:

- The opponent stationary and the tackler walking in.
- Extend to the tackler jogging in.
- Tackling can take place below the shoulders and above the knees.

BUMPING

A player can legally bump an opponent when the ball is within 5m.

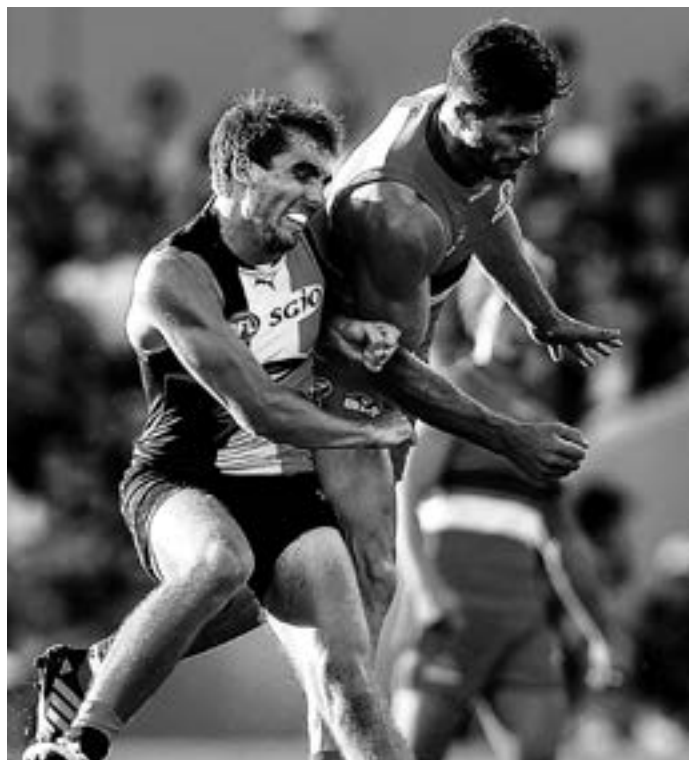
Lean towards the opponent, pushing hard from the foot furthest from the opponent.

The arm is bent, with the elbow tucked into the side.

Make contact with the shoulder and upper arm — preferably when an opponent is settled on one foot, and is easier to unbalance.

The bumping player should keep their feet on the ground at all times.

Only bump when an opponent does not have the ball. If the player does have the ball, apply a tackle.



**Andrew Gaff - West Coast Eagles;
Koby Stevens - Western Bulldogs**



**Dustin Fletcher - Essendon;
Nick Riewoldt - St Kilda**

SPOILING

Spoiling is an effective method of preventing an opponent from marking or gaining possession of the ball. Once again when spoiling, especially from behind, the spoiling player must not infringe by making contact with an 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 an opponent's neck as this is an infringement.

SHEPHERDING

The aim of a shepherd is for a player to block the approach of an opponent and stop the opponent making contact with a teammate. A shepherd is achieved by using the arms and body to form a barrier to protect a teammate.

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 5m away. Bend your knees and be strong, but do not hold or grab your opponent.

A shepherd can also be used when contesting an overhead mark. The player shepherding must communicate clearly with their teammate, that the teammate is clear to mark, run or kick.



**Ben Sinclair - Collingwood;
Kane Cornes & Robbie Gray - Port Adelaide**

REMEDIATION COACHING

KICKING

The following remediation strategies address the common problems children have with mastering the skill of kicking.

Common problems

- Incorrect ball guidance such as using two hands to drop or slam the ball onto the kicking leg.
- Incorrect follow-through of kicking leg by kicking the leg across the body.

Remediation suggestions

- Stress that the ball is to be guided down with the hand on the same side as the kicking leg.
- Stress that the kicking foot must follow through straight towards the target.

General remediation suggestions

One-handed ball guidance remediation suggestions

- Player holds the ball underneath in the hand on kicking leg side, walks a few steps and drops the ball onto a mark on the ground.
- Player to repeat the previous action but brings the kicking foot through to connect with the dropping ball.
- Action repeated, this time with a finger of the opposite hand on the side of the ball and the controlling hand moved from underneath to the side of the ball.
- Player holds the ball in two hands, walks through the kick guiding the ball down with one hand.

Correct follow through remediation suggestions

- Practise straight follow through without a ball.
- Practise kicking follow through between two parallel benches or two lines of markers with a progressively narrower width.

REMEDIATION COACHING

HANDBALLING

The following remediation strategies address the common problems children have with mastering the skill of handballing.

Common problems

- Handballing hurts the child's hand.
- Throwing the ball in the air with the platform hand before hitting it.
- Dropping the platform hand away before the hit.

Remediation suggestions

- Ensure that the thumb is not inside the clenched striking fist.
- Stress that the ball is struck with the surface of the fist formed by the forefinger and thumb, not the knuckles.
- Reduce any pain by using a lighter or softer plastic or synthetic football and suggest using the platform hand to help the propulsion of the ball.
- Stabilise the platform hand by resting it on a table or a player's back or the coach could hold the hand firm.
- Practise the 'catch the fist' technique where after the ball is hit, the clenched fist remains in the platform hand.

REMEDATION COACHING

THE CHEST MARK

Children tend to display similar problems when trying to master the skills of AFL football. Group or individual instruction can target common problems and help remediate skill barriers.

The following remediation strategies address the common problems children have with mastering the skill of chest or arm marking.

Common problems

- Arms too far apart leaving a gap through which the ball slips.
- Letting the ball hit the chest first and bouncing off.

Remediation suggestions

- Stress that the ball must be first taken on the arms and guided into the chest.
- Practise shaping arms for the mark without the ball.
- Check posture is correct.
- Practise correct marking style with a ball held out by a player walking or jogging past the marking player.
- Proceed to marking a thrown ball.
- Progressively increase the difficulty (e.g. marking a soft kick and then a firm kick) until the skill is mastered.

REMEDATION COACHING

THE OVERHEAD OR HAND MARK

The following remediation strategies address the common problems children have with mastering the skill of overhead or hand marking.

Common problems

- Ball bouncing off or going through the hands.
- Leaping too early or too late.
- Fear of being hit in the face by the ball.

Remediation suggestions

- Stress that the thumbs should be almost touching behind and almost halfway up the ball, fingers spread and pointed towards the ball and wrists straight, not cocked backwards.
- Practise shaping arms and hands for the mark without the ball.
- Practise correct marking style with a ball held high off the ground by the coach so that the player can run and jump to mark the ball.
- Proceed to the player throwing up and catching the ball using the correct style.
- Proceed to marking a ball thrown by another player.
- Progressively increase the difficulty (e.g. marking a soft kick and then a firm kick) until the skill is mastered.
- Improving judgment of the flight of the ball and when to jump to take the mark comes from practising overhead catching of all types of balls in flight.
- Using a lighter or softer plastic or synthetic football or a similar sized beach ball can reduce the fear of being hit.

NOTES