

# JUNIOR FOOTBALL RULES

Best practice and recommended rules  
for Junior Community Football



## What are we trying to achieve?

Encouraging  
Participation ▼

Evaluation of existing practices of delivery of Junior Football against current research and best practice to determine if any recommended changes are required to ensure as a sport we continue to grow and prosper.

**This project will deliver more kids playing AFL, having more enjoyment while playing, keeping them playing for longer.**

The Background ▼

The AFL developed the Junior Match Policy (2013), which was a recommended framework outlining how football should be delivered to help foster skill and player development.

Yet over the years, the purpose, function, and objectives of the Junior Match Policy have been lost, leaving it unused or ineffectively implemented by coaches and leagues across Australia.

Lack of consistency of delivery of junior football nationally

## Key Finding of Research

The Research ▼

The recommended rules still delivered ‘real footy’ with a focus on the contest, and that modified rules helped develop skills with the participants enjoying themselves more, leading to enhanced experiences.

The core rules of;

- Zones – to prevent “kick-chasing” and congestion greater opportunity to be involved in the play
- Smaller ground size and balls – resulted in kids being more regularly involved
- Progressive introduction of tackling – helped kids develop the right technique
- Reduced number of players – resulted in kids being more regularly involved
- No scoring or ladders – allowed coaches to focus on giving all team members a chance to participate, rather than focusing on winning at all costs



According to research by Deakin University, leagues which fully adopted the recommended rules increased team and player involvement **by more than 35%**.

# Key Finding of Research

The Research ▼

Across the country there are three different league types:

## Model Leagues

- Implement all modified Rules - Highest attraction of new participants (10% higher year on year than potential adopters)
- Were the only league type to experience a growth in participation in 2019

## Potential Adopters

- Use some modified Rules - Lower attraction of new participants compared to model leagues
- Attrition rate has increased most years for Potential Adopters

## Resisters\*

- Lowest attraction of new participant

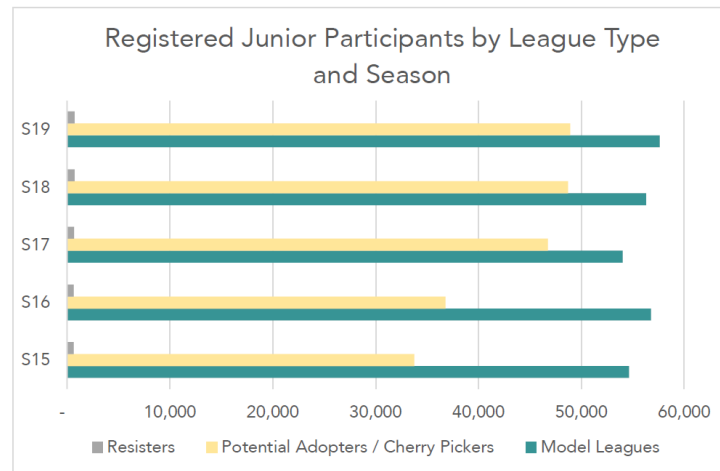


Figure 2 Registered Junior Participation by League Type and Season

# Elite Participation

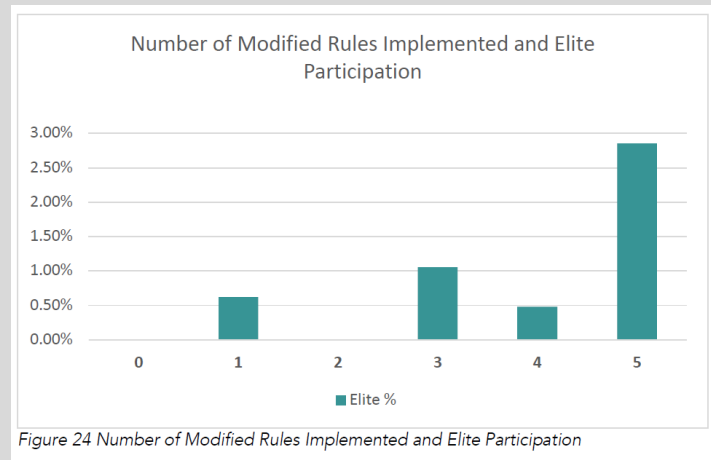
Skill Development ▼

Playing more years of football prior to reaching the age of 14 led to a greater likelihood to play at the elite level – Players who played five seasons were **three times more likely to play at the elite level** than those who played four seasons and 12 times more likely than those who participated in only three seasons (in the five year data set).

Model Leagues produce a higher proportion of elite level male and female players. A player from a Model League is almost **five times more likely to play at the elite level** compared with a player from a Potential Adopter League

Participants who played five seasons and spent these at a Model League were **2.5 times more likely to participate at the elite level** compared with players who played five seasons in a Potential Adopters League

Players from leagues who implement the five core rules are **four times more likely to play at an elite level** than leagues who only implement four of the rules



# Junior Match Policy

The Challenges ▼



## Name – Junior Match Policy

Challenge:

- Negative connotation with the word “Policy” for non-compliant leagues
- Increasingly difficult to ‘sell’ the benefits of the JMP
- Issues with stakeholder buy-in to its objectives and benefits.



## Value proposition

Challenge:

- Lack of visibility and promotion of the JMP’s value proposition for participants and key stakeholder groups.



## Effective communication

Challenge:

- Lacking communication to key stakeholders (parents, players and clubs)
- Lack of insight around what the JMP was and what it aimed to achieve.

# Modified rules across sports

Other Sports ▼



## Net Set Go

The use of zones within the game creates skill development opportunities for all players and limits congestion on the court.



## Soccer

Junior soccer player on smaller field with reduced numbers. Benefits include: improved player decision making and reaction time skills, greater participation, develops confidence and enables creativity.



## Tennis Hot Shots

Played on smaller courts with modified equipment, including lighter racquets, lower nets and low compression balls that don't bounce too high.



## Finland Ice Hockey

Changed approach to focus on the fundamentals of the game and limit competitive games until the age of 13 or 14. Refrained from selecting or deselecting players for representative teams, which made a significant difference in overall player development.



## Small Blacks – Development Model

A progressive introduction of participants to contact and tackling in rugby in New Zealand – [see this hyperlink](#) for more details.



## Rugby League Australia

Rugby League Australia have implemented a no tackle version of the game for bottom age competitions.

# Myths of Junior Football

Main Concerns



Our research indicates the below are the main concerns for parents with kids transitioning to junior football from Auskick

- Footy is too competitive
- AFL fields are too big for kids
- Tackling is unsafe for kids
- Only the best players get the ball
- The rules are complicated
- Junior footy is congested



## Why do kids play sport?

Retaining participants

The research is clear – the number 1 reason kids play sport is to have fun with their friends. The three highest rated (and most important) factors of fun for children were:

1. Trying hard,
2. Being involved, and
3. Positive coaching.

***‘when the fun disappears, the athlete disappears’***



# Development of the Junior Football Rules

The Ambition ▼



**Skill development** of participants from Auskick to Junior football to Senior football



**Acquisition and retention** of participants in the long term



**Transition** of participants across all age groups



**Clear guidelines** for national participation that increase consistency of delivery



**Personal development** within the community

# Current alignment of Barwon Rules

Recommended Changes ▼

## Under 9s

### Number of players on the ground

Current: 15 players

Recommended: 12 players max, 9 players optimal

### Rationale

The literature on small sided games is very clear on the positive benefit that it brings including increased involvement in the game for all participants through increased touches and engagement within the game, greater levels of skill development, greater levels of decision making (and decision making under pressure), and better understanding of the transition of the game.

Pill & Elliott (2015), through their research on 'Effects of Altering the Number of Players and the Dimensions of the Playing Area on the Possession Characteristics in Youth Australian Football', found that the additional players in the 18-a-side version led on average to a decrease in the number of tagged events per player.

It was also observed that there were more scoring actions in 12-a-side game play than in the 18-a-side. The 12-a-side version provided more technical actions per player in each play period and so it is suggested that it constructs a better educational experience, and therefore game development, than the 18-a-side game recommended for Australian football from under-11.

# Current alignment of Barwon Rules

Recommended Changes ▼

## Female Football

### All rules

Align all rules between boys and girls in all age groups up to u16s

### Rationale

Female Football has been a significant growth area over a number of years. Research indicates that there is no identifiable difference to what is fun for boys compared to what is fun for girls.

Age and gender are not always good indicators of ability e.g., there are strong, agile girls and weak, poorly coordinated boys and vice versa. Queensland University's research indicates that from a bio-physical point of view, there is no reason that boys and girls should be separated before the onset of puberty – in fact, the girls should be bigger and stronger than boys of the same age group until puberty.

A group of AFL players and staff are gathered on a grassy field at sunset. The players are wearing their team's dark jerseys with white V-neck accents. One staff member in the foreground is wearing a red shirt with 'Bank' visible on the back. Another staff member is wearing a purple hoodie and a beanie, holding a clipboard. The background shows a line of trees and a bright sunset sky with lens flare.

# ANY QUESTIONS?

