

Pathways to play Australian Football

Tips on finding your way into Australian Football

No. 7

Why Play Australian Football

Australian Football is an integral part of the Australian sporting landscape. It is Australia's indigenous game and has the highest participation rate of any sport in Victoria. It is also the most watched sport on TV and has the highest spectator attendances of any sport in the country.

For young people sport provides an opportunity to improve health and fitness, mix with people of similar age and develop friendships. For young people who have arrived in Australia from overseas and those whose first language is not English sport also provides an opportunity to learn about the Australian culture and can help to improve English skills.

Australian Football clubs provide young people with an opportunity to feel connected in their local community with peers. Clubs can also provide opportunities to network with people from their local community, thus opening up social, employment and education opportunities.

Purpose

Newly arrived young people may not know how to join a club or even where to begin looking. This information sheet is designed to provide some information about how to join an Australian Football team in your local area.

How Australian Football is Structured

Most newly arrived young people are familiar with Australian Football through the AFL national competition. The AFL stands for the Australian Football League and they are responsible for administering the AFL competition as well as the game's development.

The AFL competition represents the elite end of Australian Football. It is the highest level of Australian Football competition in the world. There are 16 teams in this national competition made up of the best players.

All players from the AFL progress through their local state and club competitions (with some exceptions such as Irish Gaelic Football recruits Tadhg Kennelly (Sydney Swans) and Setanta O'hAilpin (Carlton Blues). Aside from the 16 AFL teams, local teams and competitions are governed by a State Sporting Association (SSA).

The role of the SSA is to organise competitions, support the local clubs and organise training and development programs that provide a fun, safe and fair environment. All clubs belong to a SSA and will need to pay an affiliation or registration to their SSA. This fee covers the costs for SSAs to run and administer competitions.



Football in Victoria

Australian Football is played in every state in Australia and is usually played from March until September.

Football Victoria (FV) is the Victorian body responsible for the development of football in the state. FV oversees the Victorian Country Football League, the Metropolitan Football Leagues, and the VFL (Victorian Football League) competition. FV as part of their game development responsibility conduct training programs including schools programs, female participation, NAB Auskick, Recreation Football, Indigenous and Multicultural programs and the elite junior pathway programs.

There are 13 Metropolitan Football Leagues in Victoria. Each League oversee the local clubs and competitions in their region. For example the Western Region Football League is responsible for the 36 football clubs that play in their junior and senior competitions in the Western metropolitan area.

Most Football Leagues offer junior and senior competitions. Junior competitions usually start at an Under 9 level, going progressively up to Under 18 or Under 19 level. Junior competitions and clubs are usually complemented by a NAB Auskick centre or program.

Most local football clubs will consist of junior and senior teams. Depending on the size of the club, they may range from having 1 senior team only to having multiple junior and senior teams, as well as having a NAB Auskick program.

NAB Auskick & Junior Football

NAB Auskick is a popular program for primary school aged boys and girls to start playing football. It is designed to provide sequential coaching for beginners consisting of warm up games, skill activities, skill games and a modified match program, as well as a strong culture of parent participation.

NAB Auskick is fun, safe and inexpensive. Centres charge each participant between \$40 and \$45 for a 8 to 12 week program. The program costs also include an NAB Auskick football, \$10 voucher and other merchandise.

State Regional Development Managers oversee the Program in each state, with the support of centre coordinators who deliver the program.

There are NAB Auskick centres throughout Australia. They can be located via the website, www.aflauskick.com.au or NAB Auskick hotline number, 1300 723 833.

NAB Auskick is an ideal introduction to football for boys and girls aged 5 to 12 years. The next step up from NAB Auskick is to play in a junior underage football team. Junior teams are administered by local football clubs. Most leagues offer Under 9 to Under 18 level and depending on the size of the league the age levels will progress at one or two year increments.

Finding a Club

The best way to find a local club that suits your needs is to contact your Regional Development Manager (RDM). All state associations (including FV) have a network of Development Managers aligned to elite junior teams (eg. TAC Cup clubs in Victoria), who work with local leagues, NAB Auskick centres and school groups to implement local football activities.

In Victoria, the state is divided into 7 metropolitan and 13 country regions. For a list of Regional Development Managers, visit Football Victoria's website www.footballvic.com.au and go to "Development" or call 8663 3000.

The other way to find a local club is to contact your council and ask to speak to the Recreation Officer. The Recreation Officer is in charge of sporting grounds and clubs in the local area. They will be able to give you the contact numbers for the clubs in your area.

You can also contact the "Go for Your Life" information line on 1300 73 98 99.

Joining a Club

Once you have found a club in your area, contact them directly for more information and ask the following questions.

- When are the training sessions?
- Where is the training ground?
- What time does training start and finish?
- When are games played and where?
- How much is the membership fee?
- What does the membership fee cover?
- Are there extra costs for training sessions?
- Are there extra costs for uniforms?
- What equipment do I need to participate?
- Is equipment supplied?
- Can I still play even if I haven't played before?

Joining a club is an important step towards your football career. It can provide opportunities to be selected for representative teams (which can ultimately lead to playing in the AFL), gain further skill development through regular training and coaching by qualified coaches, play in regular competition against youth of similar age and ability, as well as provide a network of friends and mentors.

Why does sport cost money?

It is true that sport in Australia can be expensive. The reason financial membership is prevalent is that most clubs have overheads that they need to cover so they can keep operating.

When you join a club you most likely have to pay a membership fee. Most football clubs will charge between \$90 - \$160 per year for senior membership and less for juniors and students (usually \$50 to \$150). This is so the club can cover cost such as affiliation fees to the SSA, insurance, competition fees, rent and maintenance for grounds, power, water, gas, phone, electricity and equipment.

In most clubs the coaches, trainers, administrators and other staff are not paid. Most are volunteers who give up their time to help the club.

Some clubs will supply uniforms but you may have to purchase your own uniforms and equipment. Make sure you ask before joining so you know what costs you need to budget for. Some football clubs only require players to supply a mouthguard and football boots.

How to become an AFL Player

The AFL have an elite pathway for junior players to progress through to the elite 16-team national competition. Players first represent their regions at junior age levels and from there they can be selected to represent their state at National Championships. There is even an Australian Under 17 team that is selected to play International Rules against Ireland.

Talent scouts from the state associations and the 16 AFL clubs are kept abreast of the top players in each junior and senior leagues. In February each year, players from across the country are nominated by clubs and scouts for the AFL Draft. The AFL clubs then select up to 44 players to play for their team in the AFL competition.



Most AFL players have come through the elite pathway competition and are drafted at 18 – 20 years of age. However, it is not unusual for players to be drafted from senior state leagues or from different sports or even another country. For example, Ireland has produced a number of AFL players with limited Australian Football backgrounds. Players such as Brownlow medallist Jim Stynes (Melbourne Demons) and 2005 Premiership player Tadhg Kennelly (Sydney Swans) are examples of players that have come straight from another country and sport (Gaelic football) to become successful players in the AFL.

Useful Contacts

The AFL Multicultural Football Program is a joint initiative of Football Victoria, the AFL and the Department of Victorian Communities with the primary objective to assist migrant and refugee communities to access Australian Football.

Multicultural Development Officers (MDO) have been appointed by the AFL to work with Football Victoria and AFL clubs in CLD communities to implement multicultural football programs in clubs and schools. MDOs can provide CLD youth and communities with useful information on how to play and become involved in Australian Football.

Other Options

You may have a group of friends that just want to play in a team together and don't want to join a club. Some organisations that offer sports competitions and physical activity include YMCA, neighbourhood houses, local councils, community health centres, youth centres, schools, private providers, leisure centres, some ethnic services, some youth services and religious groups.

Australian Football provides opportunities for youth to become involved in the sport through umpiring (goal, boundary or field), coaching or simply volunteering at a local club.

Australian Football is also a great avenue to support a club. Each of the 16 AFL clubs have memberships ranging from 25,000 people to 50,000 people. Becoming a member of an AFL club gives you priority access to AFL games, AFL player appearances, club social events as well as being able to network with your local community and people that share the same passion for the team as you do. To become a member of your AFL club, contact your club directly. The AFL website has a directory of the 16 clubs, www.afl.com.au.

Have Fun

Often knowing where to start is the hardest part of participating in sport. This tip sheet gives you a few ideas on where to begin.

Football Victoria contacts for Multicultural Assistance

AFL Multicultural Project
Coordinator
Nick Hatzoglou
03 9643 1928

AFL Multicultural Development
Manager
Graeme Pratt - Northern
03 8412 0108

Micheal Nguyen – South East
03 9535 3009

Kiemi Lai - Western
03 9680 6182

Peter Romaniw – Central East
03 9426 4414

Ali Farhour – North West
03 9230 0356

For more information on the
Multicultural Football Program
visit www.afl.com.au

Other Contacts

Football Victoria
8663 3000

Your local council
[http://www.vicnet.net.au/
government/localgovt/](http://www.vicnet.net.au/government/localgovt/)

Sport and Recreation Victoria
03 9666 4200
www.sport.vic.gov.au
03 9654 3755
03 9349 3466

