Getting Young People Involved

Touch Football is played by both boys and girls from as young as five years old through their entire childhood and adolescence. Children enjoy Touch Football because it’s a fast, easy to learn, safe and fun sport to play.

Touch Football supports the development of children as individuals through the values of the sport, which are Leadership, Integrity, Professionalism, Diversity and Excellence\(^1\).

Children who participate in Touch Football have the opportunity to learn the importance of team work and team spirit; and it allows them to develop their communication and social skills. Touch Football also develops physical skills such as hand eye and motor skills, and instils the concepts of good fitness routines while maintaining enjoyment.

As Touch Football is a sport that can be participated by people well into their senior years and at the social level, the ideal that participation in sport is fundamentally fun is never lost.

Opportunity for All

All young Australians must be given the best opportunity to develop their physical potential and fitness, and to develop interests in sport. These opportunities are provided in the following ways:

- Promotion of Touch Football should be actively pursued for both boys and girls
- Access to facilities, equipment, qualified & accredited coaches & referees, sponsorship, and media coverage should be available for both boys and girls.
- Schools, clubs and various community groups are encouraged to develop and integrate strategies for children with a disability into their programs.
- Racial and religious customs must be taken into consideration so as not to deny access to programs. For example, uniform codes may need to be relaxed to allow female Muslim children to participate in long skirts, stockings, and scarves.
- At all times efforts must be made to resolve any conflict in a “fair and reasonable way” and so not to preclude any child from participating.
- Equal opportunity for involvement and maximum participation, to meet children’s needs are to be ensured regardless of gender, body shape, age, geographic location, race, cultural background, religion or ability.

Mixed Gender Participation

Touch Football is one of the few sports offering girls, boys, young women and men the opportunity to play together and against each other on the same field. The key reason for this is that Touch Football is a minimum contact sport that does not place young participants or females in physical danger when competing with physically larger participants or males; as is the case with many other sports.

At a senior level mixed participation is very common, with many mixed competitions outnumbering single gendered competitions at a social level. However this does not appear to be the case in junior competitions. While there are junior mixed competitions that do exist at the social level, most junior competitions are single gender.

While all theories into why this is the case, are purely anecdotal at this stage, it is widely believed that the key reason for the preference of single gendered competitions is the changes that adolescents experience and the associated socialisation issues that it creates.

In some instances one model may work better than the other and in other instances they may work as well as each other. Some affiliates may not have the equality of numbers to justify mixed competitions. As a general rule, affiliates are encouraged to test and trial in order to do what works best for them.

The Thrill of a Lifetime

The pathway that Touch Football provides to athletes not only prepares them for competition at the elite level, it also assists in their personal growth and development.

Junior Touch Football not only encompasses training and competition, but also the opportunity to play with friends and have fun. This relies on

- a broad-based program and the sequential development of skills across a wide range of activities
- a positive experience at all levels
- pathways for young people to continue in their sport at more advanced levels
- recognition by sport providers that sport is a service and young people are their customers.
Also, contemporary sporting experiences for young people need consideration of the ever-changing environment they are growing up in. Constantly changing are

- family structures
- work commitments of parents/carers
- the demands on young people for their time (e.g. school and homework, sport, recreation)
- consumerism and the need of young people to keep pace with their peers
- media and communication technologies (e.g. the internet and mobile phones)
- perceptions of young people (their challenge of authority, and need for independence and individuality).

These changes continue to affect the ways in which young people access sport, the experiences they gain from their sporting opportunities, and the ways they communicate about these experiences. Our challenge is to deliver Touch Football in a meaningful way for today’s young people so they develop a passion for our sport which takes them into adult life.

As most people become older they tend to become less physically active and as such, the sporting habits and values formed in the growing years are important in helping people to remain active and healthy.

Touch Football is a sport that people can enjoy at all ages in different forms. Children from as young as five can begin participating in Touch Football; adults enjoy it at a social or more competitive level; and families can also put teams together, with children, parents and grandparents enjoying a game of Touch Football in their local social competition.

Touch Football has many benefits for young people that contribute to their holistic development, and continue to provide benefit to them as adults.

Experiences within junior Touch Football are important for continued participation. To motivate young people to make a life time commitment to sport, we must

- listen to their views on what makes an enjoyable sports experience for them
- present sport to fit their needs
- at all times, give them a fair go.

Junior Touch Football also provides an holistic experience, by encouraging and educating good behaviour in the sport environment that positively influence other components of a child’s life.
Touch Football in the School Curriculum

Touch Football is one of the main sports on Australian school’s physical education curriculum because it is a sport that promotes physical activity while maintaining safety through minimal contact. It also promotes equal inclusion by both boys and girls, develops team, communication, social and leadership skills, as well as hand eye coordination.

Creating Links

Touch Football Australia recognises the benefits of sport in the school system and considers it as a high priority to build relationships and create opportunities to improve programs and develop new resources. Creating links between school children, their parents and teachers to affiliated clubs and competitions, as well as linking affiliate coaches and community volunteers back to school programs is a constant focus.

Affiliates are encouraged to work closely with their state development staff to create a strategic junior development plan that encompasses school development, programs and linkages to the affiliate. Once a plan has been formulated, affiliates, with the assistance of development staff, should begin creating links with schools to implement school programs and to promote the sport and their club within the community. These links are essential as they ensure that a systematic and coordinated delivery of Touch Football is provided, which reduces wastage and inefficiencies caused by duplication and under-utilisation of resources. Close links will also provide for a smooth transition for participants between school and community sporting competitions.

Duplication

Whilst it is recognised that duplication can result in more opportunities for participants, there are also negative effects of this. When school and community sporting groups offer competition for similar age groups, duplication can lead to over training, burn out and unnecessary competing demands on children. It also leads to excessive burden on parents, coaches, officials, community organisations and schools.

Establishing mechanisms that will ensure ongoing communication and consultation between school and community organisations can reduce the duplication of junior touch activities. Some strategies to reduce duplication in the provision of junior touch include

- coordinated scheduling of school and community competitions at all levels
- junior development programs that incorporate both school and community based components
- promotion of programs to encourage participation co-ordinated by both clubs and schools
Shared Resources
Where possible, school and community groups should implement measures to share the resources used in the delivery of junior Touch Football. Shared resources could include human (coaches, referees and administrators), facilities and equipment. This would help avoid unnecessary extra costs and inconvenience for the participants, and lead to a more efficient and effective junior Touch Football delivery system.
The Touch Football Player Pathway

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<th>YOUTH/DEVELOPMENT 13 - 20 YEARS</th>
<th>ADULT 21 + YEARS</th>
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This model has been developed from the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) FTEM (Foundation, Talent, Elite and Mastery) model. For more information regarding the FTEM model, visit [ausport.gov.au/ftem](http://ausport.gov.au/ftem)
Coaching and Refereeing - Branches of the Player Pathway

Touch Football not only provides a playing pathway for young people, it also provides opportunities in areas of coaching and refereeing.

Junior Coaching Pathway
TFA has a commitment to coordinate the development of junior coaches in conjunction with state, regional and local affiliates. Only accredited Course Presenters may conduct a Community or Level One Coach course that allow for the learning styles of junior aged coaches. The cost to juniors should be kept to a minimum. Junior coach course costs should, where possible, be met or subsidized by the association.

It is recommended that the minimum age is 14 years for junior coaches. This is with a qualification from the Community Coach Course. This allows for the development of ideas, ability to understand the rules and their effect on the game and players. Assistance from a senior coach is also recommended.

The same incentives that are promoted to junior participants should be available to junior coaches. Local affiliates together with state and regional development officers should promote the junior coach development program alongside the junior player program within the local school system by way of written advice, and regular visits to promote the knowledge of how to participate in becoming a junior coach.

Junior Referees Pathway
The development of our junior referees has become an integral component to the overall success of our referee programs. TFA has a commitment to coordinate the development of junior referees in conjunction with state, regional and local affiliates. Our states have begun to implement specific junior programs to provide pathways for their young developing referees. The programs are mentoring systems that provide support and education with the aim of increasing the retention rates of junior referees.

Only accredited Course Presenters may conduct a Level One Referee course that allow for the learning styles of junior aged referees. The cost to juniors should be kept to a minimum. Junior referee course costs, should where possible, be met by the senior association.

Junior referees, are not to be permitted to officiate at senior competitions unless deemed competent as a Level 1 referee as assessed by an accredited Level 1 Referee Coach. Should they not meet the required criteria they are not to control senior matches until attaining a minimum age of 14 years and then only with a senior experienced buddy referee.
Junior referees should be encouraged to provide refereeing services at all school and other junior events (e.g. state, regional and local affiliates). However, they should not be appointed to games that are above their capabilities. It is recommended that the minimum age is 11 years for junior referees. This allows for the development of ideas, ability to understand the rules and their effect on the game and players.

It is recommended that payment for officiating on junior games not be monetary, rather subsidies to attend junior workshops, school championships, junior state cups or, referee apparel. Payment should be with the view of incentive.

Junior referee nominations should not be submitted for selection to officiate at any corporate run event (especially those that offer prize money). The greater percentage of these events may not be affiliated and therefore TFA would be deemed to be responsible for the referees once they had sanctioned the event and accepted their nomination. As TFA rules may not always be used and the players may not all be affiliated there is potential for a situation to arise that would be beyond TFA’s control.

The same incentives that are promoted to junior participants should be available to junior referees. Local affiliates together with state and regional development officers should promote the junior referee development program alongside the junior player program within the local school system by way of written advice, and regular visits to promote the knowledge of how to participate in becoming a junior referee.

**Encouraging and Educating Good Behaviour**

As Touch Football is a sport that is played by people of all ages, genders, and a variety of cultures, it is imperative that an environment is created that caters to all participants. As a part of the education that is provided to our volunteers through our technical courses and administrative support, Touch Football Australia encourages affiliates and their members to implement and uphold values of tolerance, positive gamesmanship and enjoyment for all.

The pathway that Touch Football provides to athletes not only prepares them for competition on the field, it also assists in their personal growth and development. Every player, coach, referee and administrator in every Touch Football team and competition in Australia must agree to and sign the TFA Code of Conduct to be eligible to participate. This is incorporated in the player agreement to demonstrate that Touch Football Australia strongly supports good behaviour, as well as to ensure that all members are aware of what it means to be a part of the Touch Football community.