AusTouch Program - The Introductory Step

The AusTouch program is the first stepping stone in the Touch Football player pathway, introducing kids to the basics of Touch Football in a fun and progressive program, which builds on the skills, concepts and rules over the sessions. AusTouch is designed to be suitable for kids that have had limited or no past involvement in Touch Football; it can also be used to increase the skill level of older participants or for some of our youngest Touch Football participants, those 5 – 8 year old kids.

By breaking down and simplifying the skills, rules and concepts of the sport, the AusTouch program provides a non-threatening introduction to Touch Football for new participants, as well as a development pathway towards formal competition. The AusTouch program is an instrumental tool in transitioning participants from informal school and social activity into a structured community club based sporting environment.

Competition Philosophy for Juniors

Competition is an intrinsic part of sport that involves measuring performance against an opponent, oneself or the environment. Competition provides stimulation and challenge as well as the opportunity to apply, test and further develop skills in a game situation. Properly managed, competition should be seen as a healthy and desirable part of Touch Football.

Within Australian society, competition is closely associated with success and failure. Junior Touch Football participants should be taught that “winning” and “losing” are merely results of a sporting competition. There should not be an over emphasis on winning in junior Touch Football as this can lead to dissatisfaction with the sport in general.

All junior Touch Football participants should be encouraged to achieve, do their best, and develop their full sporting potential. The pursuit of excellence is as desirable in junior Touch Football as in other forms of endeavour. A challenging competition is therefore an important element of this development process.

Therefore, the emphasis in junior Touch Football competition should be on the quality of the experience and its appropriateness to the age and ability of the participants. Participants should be given opportunities to succeed and do their best through competition. In keeping with a “sport for all” philosophy, school and community organisations should make adequate provision for appropriate levels of competition for junior participants. They should cater for all levels of ability, ensuring a satisfying experience for all participants.
Age Divisions for Junior Competitions

There is no set rule for setting age divisions within a junior competition. There are a number of factors that can influence decisions and age divisions within competitions will vary from affiliate to affiliate.

The number and age variance of junior participants plays a key role in this decision, as a larger pool of players will allow for a great number of age divisions. If an affiliate places a focus on the development pathways of their participants, they may be influenced by the age divisions offered at representative tournaments; for instance, national competitions are currently contested at the u18, u15 and u12 age levels.

Other affiliates who successfully align themselves with local schools will structure their competition to reflect school years as opposed to age divisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Divisions</th>
<th>Year Divisions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U8</td>
<td>K – Yr 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U10</td>
<td>Yr 3 - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U12</td>
<td>Yr 5 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U14</td>
<td>Yr 7 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U16</td>
<td>Yr 9 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U18</td>
<td>Yr 11 - 12</td>
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AusTouch Playing Rules

While the official playing rules are able to be utilised for competition at any age level, many affiliates sometimes alter or modify some rules to assist the learning process, to ensure that opportunities are provided to all participants or to maximise the enjoyment for participants.

TFA has put together a set of modified playing rules referred to as the AusTouch Playing Rules that may assist affiliates in providing the best experience for their youngest participants. Competition administrators are welcome to use some or all of these rules to figure out what works best for their competition.
The aim of this modified set of rules is to:

- provide equity of opportunity to participate and experience a feeling of success
- encourage optimum skill development and understanding of the game of Touch Football
- reduce the emphasis on “win-at-all-costs” and promote enjoyment
- promote a safe learning environment
- assist players in the transition from junior Touch Football to the adult game.

**Player Numbers**
6 players on the field, with up to 3 substitutes (all players to play every position)

**Equipment**
1 junior AusTouch Football, 6 marker hats, whistles

**Area**
50m x 35m (half a full size Touch Football field)

**Length of Game**
2 halves of 15 minutes each way with a break of 5 minutes at half time

**Rules**
- The attacking team maintains possession of the ball for six touches. All forward passes, dropped balls and late passes are to be counted as a touch.
- The acting half cannot run with the ball and they must pass it to another player before they can join in further play (stand and pass).
- The defending team cannot move until the first receiver has caught the ball.
- For minor infringements the referee may allow a replay of the action (eg. Rollball infringements).
- No penalties are to be awarded. Instances including violent behaviour, kicking the ball, etc will result in a restart of the set of six (attacking team) or a change of possession (defending team).

**General Notes**
- Actions against the nature and spirit of the game should be dealt with immediately.
- Referees and coaches are encouraged to reinforce the codes of conduct/behaviour.
Referees Notes:
- Apply rules with due regard to the age level and ability of players.
- Adopt an encouraging and pleasant manner at all times to ensure an open and free-flowing game. No penalties are to be awarded.
- Stop play and use simple language to explain decisions.
- In cases where play is recalled or replayed for the team in possession, the referee should hold the ball and explain the ruling before allowing the play to recommence.

Coaches Notes:
- Coaches may coach on the field at least 5 metres behind the team.
- Coaching Level recommended – Community Coach or higher.
- Substitution of players should ensure that all players receive an equal amount of time on the field. This should be managed by an adult.

AusSquad Program - The Specialisation Step

During the teenage years, many young people who participate in sport tend to begin the transition from participating in many sports for enjoyment, to specialising in one or two sports and usually due to the progression into representative teams. Coaching clinics and talent development programs play a role at this level by assisting young people to make informed decisions about their specialisation in sport. Specialisation allows an athlete to set goals, as well as understand and take pride in their role within the team. Specialisation should only occur with children over the age of 10, when they are old enough to understand the concepts of having different positions on the field.

The AusSquad program has been created as the link between the AusTouch program and senior competition, to complete the junior pathway.

Program Concept

The AusSquad program will consist of a number of clinics in which young athletes will be taken through skills, rules and concepts of the game. The program will provide coaches with certified educational resources that they will utilise in delivering clinics. Theory modules have been designed to educate young athletes about self-improvement and their off field development.

The AusSquad program will also create a complete pathway for coaches to develop their skills and progress to an elite level.
Key Project Aim

To develop and complete the elite junior pathway and to retain talented athletes and officials.

Key Project Outcomes

- Improve technical infrastructure from the grassroots level up
- Improve the elite development of youth within TFA operated states
- Increase the quality and quantity of accredited coaches in Australia
- Increase the quality and quantity of young referees in Australia
- Develop consistent nationally recognised messages throughout the structure.

The program will improve the overall skill base of young participants (11-18 year olds) as it provides a nationally recognised skill set, delivered by accredited coaches. The completion of the player pathway and focus on individual development will also be a key in increasing the national retention rate of young Touch Football athletes.

Coaching Junior Touch Football

The overall aim of coaches is to help young people build a love of participating in sport for lifelong involvement. This section deals with the coach as an instructor.

Aim for Quality Coaching

Coaches aim to pass on to young people a sound understanding of the

- skills, tactics, strategies and rules
- etiquette and behaviour standards

The aim of this is to help them build an ability to make decisions independently and to participate within the ethos of Touch Football.

Coaches aid learning outcomes best by being flexible and not overly directive. They need to plan:

- what they will instruct
- how they will instruct
- how they will structure tasks
Planning Your Sessions

In planning both individual sessions and seasonal programs for junior, coaches need to consider:

- maximising participation and enjoyment
- ensuring that all participants have the same opportunity to experience all facets of the sport, regardless of ability
- being inclusive of all young people, whether from other cultural backgrounds, or with special needs where practically possible (e.g., a disability, or medical condition)
- setting learning goals (movement skills, values and attitudes)
- the actual learning tasks and objectives for the session
- the objectives of the season
- overall management plan (use of space and time and what equipment and facilities are needed)
- evaluate after each session so improvements can be made

Equipment

One of the benefits of Touch Football is that the game requires minimal equipment. An official game of Touch Football does not require the use of large goal posts, nets, on-field equipment such as stumps or game assistant equipment including bats, gloves and protective pads. The equipment required for a game of Touch Football is a ball and 6 cones to mark the corners and halfway points of the field.

This is also beneficial particularly to volunteers taking on a coaching role, as the equipment required in undertaking a training session is also minimal. A suggested training kit for a coach training a Touch Football team should consist the following:

**Essential Equipment**
- 3 - 4 Touch Footballs
- 20 Cones (for field marking, skill and drill positioning and visual aid in demonstrations)
- 16 Singlets or Coloured Sashes (to divide players into teams for opposed sessions)
- 1 - 2 Whistles

**Non-Essential Equipment**
- Agility Poles (for drills involving speed and change of direction)
- Hurdles (for speed and agility training)
- Speed Ladders (for speed and improved footwork)
- Heavy Touch Footballs (for improved passing technique and distance)
Coaching Sport Skills

Key considerations in creating effective learning experiences for young people to develop sport skills include:

- **Instructing**
  - keep instructions simple and clear
  - use language best suited to the level of the participants
  - have a positive manner when working with young people

- **Increase time on task**
  - refine time spent on management so time engaged in the activity can be increased
  - keep instruction time for a specific skill to a minimum to allow more time for trying it

- **Vary content**
  - sometimes teach the whole skill, and at other times break it into parts, depending on the complexity of the skill
  - playing a modified game first can help participants understand the context of skills
  - change between individual, pair and group activities

- **Increase the challenge**
  - alter times, distances, heights etc. as skills improve
  - move sequentially from simple to more complex techniques over time
  - change from static to dynamic (e.g. standing long passes to run in and pass), increase the number of players, and introduce defenders

- **Practice**
  - practice each skill randomly through the session (e.g. 3 – 5 minute blocks of one skill at various times)
  - plan to practice under similar conditions to competition as often as possible

- **Giving feedback**
  - successful coaches give immediate feedback that is very specific and offers ideas on correction
  - feedback must always be given in a positive environment
  - feedback can be verbal or nonverbal (e.g. thumbs up)

- **Questioning**
  - consider the level of the question in terms of the breadth of response you want
  - a good sequence is (a) plan the question (b) get the attention of the young person (c) ask the question and wait (d) respond, giving feedback or probing for a more extensive response
  - good questions encourage young people to analyse why they chose a particular strategy, why they adjusted their technique, or how they would respond to a similar situation in the future
## Stages of Development for Junior Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Age Range</th>
<th>Skill Descriptors</th>
<th>Social Descriptors</th>
<th>Considerations for Touch Football</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundation</strong>&lt;br&gt;5 – 7 years</td>
<td>• Basic skill movements&lt;br&gt;• Capable of 2 or more skills&lt;br&gt;• Effort more critical than outcome&lt;br&gt;• Able to respond to simple instruction&lt;br&gt;• Limited decision making</td>
<td>• Egocentric&lt;br&gt;• Work well as individual, pairs &amp; small groups&lt;br&gt;• Responds to positive feedback&lt;br&gt;• Can follow simple instructions &amp; visual cues</td>
<td>• Short sessions&lt;br&gt;• Simple skills in a sequence&lt;br&gt;• Simple relays, and short games with small numbers&lt;br&gt;• Encourage creative play&lt;br&gt;• Limit number of skills introduced to 2 – 3 per session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundation</strong>&lt;br&gt;8 – 10 years</td>
<td>• Can apply skills in modified games&lt;br&gt;• Girls are better at balance activities&lt;br&gt;• Boys enjoy explosive power based activities&lt;br&gt;• Look to always improve basic skill techniques</td>
<td>• Work well in pairs, small groups &amp; teams&lt;br&gt;• Responds to positive &amp; constructive feedback&lt;br&gt;• Can develop strong sense of belonging&lt;br&gt;• Emphasis on fun, equality &amp; inclusion&lt;br&gt;• Can understand rules</td>
<td>• Can perform specific skills for Touch Football&lt;br&gt;• Incorporate problem solving, appropriate behaviour &amp; cooperative play&lt;br&gt;• Can develop sense of team work&lt;br&gt;• Short instruction mixed with practice, skill correction, and continued skill development&lt;br&gt;• Prompt to practice at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talent</strong>&lt;br&gt;11 – 14 years</td>
<td>• Refine skills and understanding of game strategies&lt;br&gt;• Modified rules and safety remain important</td>
<td>• Attracted to fun, belonging, competition and social opportunities&lt;br&gt;• See sport as opportunity for freedom and independence&lt;br&gt;• Skill difference due to puberty&lt;br&gt;• Basic play concepts&lt;br&gt;• Cannot depersonalise criticism&lt;br&gt;• Peer acceptance important&lt;br&gt;• Family support pivotal</td>
<td>• Can increase intensity and complexity to challenges&lt;br&gt;• Fun and appropriate fitness activities&lt;br&gt;• Coaching is important&lt;br&gt;• Continue to rotate positions&lt;br&gt;• Variety of training methods and activities&lt;br&gt;• Awareness of social, nutritional, hydration &amp; injury prevention&lt;br&gt;• Continued emphasis of skill development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Recommended Skills for Touch Football

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Talent</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Mastery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Movement Skills** | • Running backwards  
• Side stepping  
• Side to side shuffling  
• Sprinting with the ball  
• Swerving | • Stepping a Defender  
• Agility – Forwards  
• Agility - Backwards | • Running attacking lines  
• Backwards at speed | • Stepping off both feet  
• High level agility |
| **Ball Skills – Passing & Catching** | • Gripping the ball  
• Stationary passing  
• Passing on the run  
• Catching  
• Acting Half pass (introduce) | • Spiral Pass  
• Passing Left and Right  
• Acting Half Pass  
• Draw & Pass  
• Dummy  
• Wrap Pass | • Running Pass both sides  
• Cut Out Pass | • Long cut out passes both hands  
• Long pass off ground  
• Quarterback passes  
• 4 on 3 passes |
| **Rollball** | • Stepping over the ball  
• Static rollball  
• Dynamic rollball (introduce) | • Dynamic Rollball  
• Rollball positioning (side of defender)  
• Dump-Split | • Downtime minimal  
• Rollball at speed  
• Elite Static Rollball (strike-dump) | • Left & right handed roll balls  
• Footwork into Rollball  
• Swiping  
• Splitting off the ball  
• Dominant Rollball |
| **Rucking** | • Acting Half position  
• Acting Half role  
• First Receiver role | • First Receiver Positioning  
• Rucking at Pace  
• Wrapping from half | • Rucking patterns  
• Direct rucking  
• Expansive rucking | • Transition into line attack  
• Exit patterns |
| **Attack Skills** | • Running into space  
• Effecting the touch in attack  
• Scoring a Touchdown  
• The Tap | • Scoring a Touchdown - Diving  
• Switch  
• Wrap  
• Scooping  
• Decision Making: 2-on-1 execution  
• Attacking Space | • Slide Dive - Elite  
• Switch Variations (A, B, C’s etc)  
• Wrap Variations  
• Decision Making: 3 on 2 execution  
• Attacking lines – V line, Hooking lines etc Walking in defensive player | • Phase Plays  
• Set Plays  
• Attack styles - Static vs Running  
• Sequences of set Plays  
• Decision Making: 4 on 3 execution  
• “Bounce” lines |
| **Defence Skills** | • Returning Onside  
• Moving Forward to perform touch  
• Foundation Line Defence policy (eg Squeeze policy) | • Ruck Defence  
• Shutdown Defence  
• Wrap Defence  
• Switch Defence  
• Defensive space awareness  
• Body Positioning | • Line defence policies  
• Hold (tread) defence | • Pre-touch positioning  
• Position specific roles  
• Dominating the touch  
• Holding in defence  
• Press and isolate |
| **Game Concepts & Strategies** | • Communication  
• Basic understanding of rules | • Non verbal communication  
• Subbing  
• Good understanding of rules  
• Positional differences | • Subbing rotations  
• Rule Interpretations  
• Position specific roles  
• Drop offs | • Knowledge of all rules and interpretations  
• Line defence position specific roles  
• Playing with a 5 on field |

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**Touch Football Australia**  
**National Junior Development Framework**  
**Section Three - Playing Touch Football**
Positional and Substitution Guidelines

Position and substitution are aspects of the game that should only be taught to children once they have learnt basic game playing skills. The recommended age for introducing the concepts of position and substitution, and for transitioning to more competitive formats, is ten years and above; this allows children time to understand the concepts and reasoning behind why there are different positions on the field and when they should substitute.

Once specialisation takes place, children should be given the opportunity to play in all positions and learn the individual skills of that position. As players grow older and their skills develop, so to do specialised roles of the positions. The positions on a Touch Football field and their general key roles are as follows:

Positions on the field:

![Diagram showing positions on the field]

- Wing
- Link
- Middle
- Defending Players
- Attacking Players
*It is important to note that the following list of positional skills is an ideal list and is applicable to older and more experienced participants.

**Middle**
- Has agility and mobility in defence on the line
- Is a confident and competent communicator with an ability to organise in attack
- An ability to perform the rollball cleanly when defence is shutting down
- Good understanding of running correct lines
- An ability to use good body position and technique to dominate the ruck when attacking or defending (youth)
- Has an ability to throw the long ball
- An ability to create attacking options or initiate attack
- Very high work rate
- An ability to perform the rollball with both left and right hands, as well as defend with both left and right hands
- Must be disciplined to stick to policy in both attack and defence
- An ability to change direction on the spot

**Link**
- Speed and agility with and without the ball
- High involvement in attack, working off the ball running correct lines and reading the play
- Connects with both the middles and the wings
- Has a god understanding of phase play
- Excellent understanding of line defence with agility to match
- Good level of fitness
- An ability to transition into the middle
- An ability to run from half and possess agility and power
- An ability to perform the rollball with both left and right hands, as well as defend with both left and right hands

**Wing**
- Confident and competent communication skills with an understanding of the wing position
- Ability to control game on changeovers in both attack and defence
- Excellent knowledge of line defence, knowing when to hit and when to stay out
- Is patient and knows when to involve themself in attack
- Must be one of the best defenders in the team with an ability to read the game
- Explosive speed with a good change of direction
- An ability to catch the long ball
Physical Growth, Maturation and Adaptation

The development of a child is driven by three distinct processes: growth, maturation, and adaptation. These have important implications for training and competition.

Growth is the increase in overall body size with changes in muscle, bone and fat and this affects motor skills. Growth is complicated because

- different parts of the body grow at different rates
- periods of growth start and stop at different times.

Maturation is the genetically programmed series of changes leading to maturity. These changes occur in the same sequence in everybody, but there are great individual differences in

- when puberty starts
- how long it takes (it can be 18 months to 5 years)
- how much growth occurs in the adolescent growth spurt.

Adaptation occurs as a result of external rather than genetic factors (e.g. intensive training). The growth spurt in height happens first and is followed by the growth spurt in weight and finally the growth spurt in strength.

Implication for Touch Football

The uneven spread in growth and maturation in young people of the same age makes chronological age of limited value in determining the developmental status of a young person. This creates challenges related to opportunity and training.

Opportunity

Opportunities (e.g. being selected to participate) may not be offered to some young people because of their current developmental status. Therefore sport providers must be aware that late maturing young people may be disadvantaged when competitions are based on chronological age encourage young people despite their current body shape as this may be different later on.

Young people and their parents/carers should focus on personal improvement, and not comparison with others of the same age. The result is more young people having a chance to realise their potential, and an expansion of the talent pool for future success in sport.
Training/Practice

For the most part, training and sport activity is beneficial for the best possible physical growth and development of young people. However, it is important to remember that young people differ from adults in the quality of their tissues and are not able to take the same stresses. Consequently training must be conducted differently for young people particularly if they are specialising and involved in a narrow range of activities.

Injuries do occur on occasions but are usually reversible. There are times during periods of growth when tissues are more vulnerable. For example, it takes considerable time for a bone that has lengthened to become strong, and for the muscles, tendons and ligaments to grow to the new length of the bone.