



STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND TEAM GRADING POLICY

The following descriptions have been developed to ensure a clear understanding of the objectives and focus on each stage of a young player's development. It begins with the Fundamental Stage (AFL Junior), which includes all participants in the game and culminates in the Maintenance Stage (senior players). The transition stage, following a high-performance career, generally refers to retirement from the game and is dependent on the individual's circumstances and is not considered to be a core stage, nor a focus of this document. All stages should be characterised by the provision of continuous learning opportunities for all players.



THE STAGES

1. Fundamental Stage (5-11 years): Junior (including AFL Auskick)

Objective: Participation and learning of fundamental movement and game skills.

Program is well structured and fun. The emphasis is on the overall development of the participant's fundamental motor skills and physical capacities using game-related skill development activities. This is a critical period for motor skill development. Correct running, jumping and basic game skills should be taught, with a specific focus on establishing effective kicking mechanics. Participation in a range of sports is encouraged for all-round physical and game-sense development. Simple rules and ethics are introduced.

2. Sampling Stage (12-14 years): Junior/Youth

Objective: Learning all the fundamental skills of the game and developing basic physical capacities, while continuing to develop all-round sports skills.

Players learn how to train and consolidate the basic skills of the game. They are introduced to technical and tactical skills, including position-specific and basic performance techniques - e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery, goal setting, etc. This is a critical period for physical and skill development. The focus of training is on learning rather than competing and a balance between training and playing is struck. Participants should continue to play a range of sports for all-round development. This includes initial identification for regional development squads.

3. Identification Stage (15-16 years): Youth

Objective: Developing higher level skills of the game and physical capacities.

Optimise development of fitness capacities, individual, positional and team skills. Develop higher level skills and provide appropriate competition to enhance learning and the opportunity to be identified for talent pathway programs. At this stage, initial selection into state talent development programs, including the AFL Academies, is introduced.

4. Specialising Stage (17-18 years)

Objective: Developing higher-level skills of the game and physical capacities

Optimise the development of fitness capacities, individual, positional, team and competition skills. For talented players, selection into state and national development programs, including the AFL Academies, continues. This includes the provision of an optimum competition program for player development that also provides opportunities to be assessed to be drafted to the AFL e.g. TAC Cup, state leagues and national championships.

5. Investment Stage (19-22 years)

Objective: Completion of development of all higher-level skills and capacities required for optimum performance.

This is the final stage of development, where the focus of training is on completing a player's development and optimising performance. For talented players, the refinement of physical, technical, tactical, mental and ancillary capacities is completed in the professional club environment.

6. Maintenance Stage (23-30+ years)

Objective: Maintaining and maximising performance.

The players' physical, technical, tactical, mental and ancillary capacities are fully developed (individual players may still be developing and continuing to learn). The program is focused on competition, and the training is aimed at optimizing performance. Training is characterised by high intensity and relatively high volume and includes regular preventative breaks.

7. Retirement & Transition Stage (Individual)

Objective: Successful transition from the professional player role to another productive life role, including opportunities to remain in the sport. This is the end of the high-performance competition stage – players retire permanently and transition to other levels of competition or to other roles, or out of football altogether. Continued physical activity is encouraged.

COMPETITIVE BALANCE AND TEAM GRADING POLICY

Objective: to have clear guidelines around creating balanced teams to enhance player development at Mernda Junior Football Club. This policy supports the overarching document, 'AFL Stages of Development.'

Competitive Balance Under 9-11's

The MJFC will adopt a “**Competitive Balance Policy**” for these age groups.

What is Competitive Balance?

For these age groups, MJFC will construct teams with a focus on encouraging optimal participation, learning of fundamental movement and game skills and playing in a team environment. MJFC encourages all players to play with friends and schoolmates, subject to ensuring adequate numbers on all team lists.

Where there are two or more sides in the same age group the sides will be spread across the divisions of the NFNL. The Junior Football Department will assist the Coaches in selecting the appropriate division.

Grading Under 12 and above

From Under 12 onwards the Club will adopt a “**Grading Policy.**” The MJFC will do this by grading players and teams to ensure players play at the most appropriate level and teams have cohesion and competitive balance. It is also of utmost importance to MJFC that players have the opportunity to move between teams in a fair and equitable way over their time playing at the club.

The **aim** of the Grading Policy is to provide all players from Under 12 to Under 17 the opportunity to develop their football skills and play in the highest level within the NFNL.

The implementation of grading will be conducted each year by the Junior Football Department consisting of the following (the “Selection Panel”):

- Coach Co-Ordinator
- Junior Club Development Panel (min 3 Person, selected by the exec. committee)
- Coaching Development Manager
- Head Coach(es)

Note: To ensure fairness and impartiality, any person appointed to the selection panel must not be a parent or guardian of a player within the grading level being assessed.

The grading from this age group on, will be done via the **Initial Grading Process** (First time of grading). In the consecutive years, after the initial grading, teams are subject to **Grading Review Process**.

INITIAL GRADING PROCESS

Preseason Training Sessions

Individual age groups will complete preseason as training squads. MJFC will endeavour to timetable 2-3 training sessions per week to allow for maximum participation around summer sport commitments. The selection panel and/or coaches will observe and assess areas such as football skills, attitude, work ethic, attendance to training sessions along with the player's performances during the previous season. Other criteria may be used as required.

Match Practice

Match practice will be used to assess and observe the players football skills, ability to read the play, work ethic, ability to follow instructions and playing within a team.

Players will be played in a variety of positions to determine the best options for both player and team. Other criteria may be used as required.

Initial Team Selection

Returning players can register by February 1st to secure their spot in their age group. After this day the team list will be open to new players, e.g. Transfers from other clubs.

The initial Team selection will be made after consideration to the player's performance at the training sessions and practice matches. The selection panel may also use other information that will assist selection like previous years performances.

Capacity for each team will be determined by numbers registered and to cater for any special circumstances which are deemed necessary by the committee. Parents will also be consulted if numbers are greater than 28 (Boys) or 26 (Girls) players per team to ensure there is sufficient support in having excess players.

Communication to Players

Players will be formally advised in writing or via a meeting which team they have been selected in.

If a player is unhappy with the selection process they can raise the issue in writing to the clubs Football Department.

Movement of Players

Players can be rotated between sides in the same age group for up to the first 4 rounds of each season, if required. Note this is a rule that the NFNL has promoted to ensure players have the opportunity to play at the most appropriate level within the competition.

Please refer to the NFNL Player Grading Policy.

Final Team Selection

After week four in the season all teams are finalized, and no further changes can take place. The Club appreciates that there may be extenuating circumstances, and that some players

may wish to be in a particular side. Such requests should be made in writing to the appropriate selection panel or to the clubs Football Department.

It must be remembered that the players are still young, maturing at different levels and stages and more fundamentally hopefully have many years of sport (not just football) in front of them. The decision to grade must be looked at in terms of that year and what is important to that player's individual development as a footballer.

Grading Criteria

1. Team Balance – For instance there is little point in selecting 22 players who are all midfielders. Each side needs a Ruck, backs, forwards and ball getters.
2. The previous season performance – votes, attitude, attendance at training (Advice can and may be sought from the previous season's coach);
3. The ability of the player – this is not just a consideration of skill alone but whether they are a ball getter, timid or their playing maturity.
4. What position(s) they play/or are considered for.
5. Whether the player may be better served playing down a grade to improve their skills.
6. Enabling the player to play in a position that they would not play in at the higher team.
7. Enabling the player to excel at a lower level which will enable them to enjoy their football and gain greater confidence in years to come.
8. Be of greater overall value to a team in a lower level.
9. Work ethic

Other grading criteria

In assessing the overall skills of a player within an age group, the Football Department will consider:

- a) Kicking
- b) Speed and Agility
- c) Ball Handling Skills
- d) Attacking Skills
- e) Defending Skills
- f) Perception/Cognition Skills
- g) Sportsmanship and Attitude
- h) Game sense

New Players

All new players to the club may also play at least one game in the 2nd team during the grading period regardless of reputation or perceived ability. This ensures that all players are given an opportunity to try out for the 1st team. This also ensures that new players to the club are not perceived to receive preferential treatment regardless of reputation.

Opt Out

If any player wishes not to be considered for spot in the higher division team, then they may opt out of this process. Player/Parents must email the Football Department to inform them of their decision.

The club and selection panel may sometimes arrange a parent vote before grading to assess the situation.

Player Development

Player development across all teams/ age groups remains a priority and programs will be implemented to support players in this.

Information Session

Information session for players and parents from under 12 and above will be conducted at the start of each season to clarify both the MJFC Grading Policy and Grading Process.

NFNL Representative Squad / Nomination

To ensure that the club is accurately represented at league level, NFNL Representative Nominations from U12 onwards will only be accepted from the team placed in the highest division following grading.

Exceptions to this may be considered only with Executive Committee approval.

GRADING REVIEW PROCESS

After the first initial grading process, the coaches of each age group (U13 and above), together with the Selection Panel, will review their season, and discuss any requirements. This includes discussing players to move up or come down due to the past season.

For the Grading Review Process, the main guiding principle is, that every player is given the opportunity to play a division up (e.g. strong improvement during the past season as they grow older). Either the player and/or parent shall notify their current head coach and/or the Junior Football Department, or the coach can propose to the selection panel.

Pre-Season Training and Grading Review

For age groups U13 and up, all players will train together during the initial phase of the pre-season (before Summer School Holidays). This joint training approach ensures every player is given another opportunity to be assessed in a broader context. It also allows coaches and the selection panel to collaboratively identify potential train-on players who may be suitable for placement in a higher division team.

- Both Coaches in cooperation with Coaching Coordinator and Development Manager will select Team A players and nominate train-on players (these are players who are invited to train with Team A but may not be in the final squad yet).
- All team lists and train-on players will be sent to Coaching Coordinator and Development Manager and will be shared with parents before the Christmas break.
- New players can still be added as train-ons if space allows.

Following this joint training period, coaches may choose to continue with combined sessions or split into team-specific training. In the event of any disagreement regarding training structure or player placement, the matter will be referred to the Junior Football Department for review and guidance.

Any player wishing to play up an age group must undergo the same grading review process as used during initial selections. Final decisions will be made by the selection panel in consultation with the age group coaches.

After the New Year

- The squad will be split into Team A (plus Train-On's) and Team B.
- Both teams will begin training separately.
- The Club Grading Panel will support coaches in deciding final positions. This may continue into practice matches, if needed.

Practice Matches

- The final Team A squad of 24 players will be confirmed latest after practice matches.
- Players not selected will move into Team B, which will train and compete as a full squad for the season.

NFNL Representative Nominated Players

Representative-nominated players are expected to be selected from the Highest Division Team. Where an exception is approved by the Executive Committee for a player outside this team, that player must train with the Highest Division Team. If the player declines this training requirement, their representative nomination cannot be accepted.

New Players

All new players to the club must also undergo the *Initial Grading Process* and criteria as defined above. They shall train with both teams and play at least one game for each team during the grading period regardless of reputation or perceived ability. This ensures that all players are given an opportunity to try out for the 1st team. This also ensures that new players to the club are not perceived to receive preferential treatment regardless of reputation.