



PLAYING UP POLICY

Purpose:

To provide all members of Altona Junior Football Club with clear guidance on how the club applies the *National Community Football Policy*; Section 3.1(b)(ii) which allows an underage player to play in age groups that are two years above their age without dispensation. For example, a player who is 11 (turning 12 in the playing year) may play Under 12 or Under 14 without requiring a dispensation.

Scope:

This policy applies to all players, coaches, coaching coordinators, committee members, parents / guardians and other officials of AJFC. This policy aligns with the Guiding Principles for Team Selection and Grading¹, supports fair play for the majority of players (minimum game time 50-75%²), aligns with WFNL policies³ and having efficient administration processes for club volunteers.

Definitions:

- **Play-up:** When a player is required / or requests to play in an age group higher than their eligible age group.
- **Eligible age group:** Defined by the [WFNL](#) according to a player's date of birth.
- **Top vs bottom age:** When the eligible age group spans two calendar years, players in their 2nd year are top age and those in their 1st year are bottom age.
- **Non-Graded Teams:** Under 8, 9 & 10 Mixed, Under 10 Girls.
- **Graded Teams:** Under 12 & 14 Mixed, Under 16 Boys, Under 12, 14, 16 & 19 Girls.

Categories:

Arrangements for playing up must fall within one of the following categories.

1. **Emergencies** – A team is short of players due to injury or illness and at risk of forfeiting because they do not have the minimum number of players required for the field. Players are sourced from the next highest division or from top age player(s) in the lower age group (gold team) to avoid a forfeit. A request to play-up is on a game-by-game basis.
2. **Topping Up** – A team has not achieved the minimum number of players required for the field through the registration process. The Committee elects to approach top age player(s) from the below age group to play-up. A player may be elevated based on the

¹ Guiding Principles (in priority order): Club First / Team First, Fielding Competitive Teams, Maximise Participation, Player Development and Even Distribution.

² Junior Football Rules Program Handbook 2023

³ Junior Football Competition Regulations and the Junior Grading Policy

key considerations for *Fielding a Competitive Team* Guiding Principle. The request to play-up is for 1 full season.

3. On Request – Non-graded teams only. A parent / guardian may submit a request for their child to play-up for consideration. For example, to maintain social cohesion^{4 5} (e.g. the players primary peer group are in the higher age group). Approval is not guaranteed and for this reason players must train in their eligible age group until they receive notification of a decision. The request to play-up is for 1 full season.

Process:

Category 1 – Emergencies

1. Priority starts from the Gold (highest) team and cascades down.
2. A Coach must promptly notify the Coach Coordinator of a player shortage.
3. The Coach Coordinator will highlight the *Club First / Team First* Guiding Principle. After discussion, players from the next highest division are approached. If there is no purple team in the same age group, top age player(s) in the lower age group (gold team) are approached.

Important: When a player reaches the maximum number of allowable games (5) in a team they become permanently allocated to that team. Rotate among players to avoid this happening.

4. Players are selected and contacted by the Coach (via text or call) to confirm availability to play in an elevated team. If a player is unavailable, the next listed player is contacted and given the opportunity to play.

Although the Club First / Team First Guiding Principle will be applied in good faith, player choice will always be respected. No player will be forced to play in an elevated team or age group if they are uncomfortable to do so.

Category 2 – Topping Up

1. Priority starts from the Gold (highest) team and cascades down.
2. At grading end (e.g. late Feb), the Coach, Coach Coordinator or Registrar alerts the Committee to the player shortage.
3. If the Committee approves, the Coach Coordinator approaches the Coach in the lower age group (gold team) to discuss elevating player(s) for the full season. *Club First / Team First* Guiding Principle is highlighted.

⁴ Agnew, Pill & Drummond (2016): "Investigating the elements that encourage or inhibit the participation of children and youth in Australian Football", *Annals of Leisure Research*, Vol 19, Issue 1.

⁵ Victoria University / AFL: "Factors Relating to Women and Girls' Participation (Retention and Dropout) in Sport" (Feb 2023)

4. Coach identifies suitable players (*Fielding a Competitive Team* Guiding Principle), presents the opportunity to the player(s), obtains consent from parents and provides names to the Coach Coordinator, other Coach and Registrar.

As per Category 1, no player will be forced to play in an elevated age group or team if they are uncomfortable to do so.

Category 3 – On Request

1. Parent/guardian submits a request to the Registrar inbox outlining the reason for wanting to play-up.

Requests window:	AJFC Decision:
January or February	Within 2 weeks

2. Registrar acknowledges the request, notifies the affected Coaches and the player continues to train with their eligible age group until they receive notification of a decision.
3. Registrar reviews registration data to determine if/where gaps exist in team numbers to accommodate playing up.
 - 3.1 Which age groups have multiple requests to play-up and which teams (gold / purple) would be impacted?
 - 3.2 If single or multiple requests were approved, will the....
 - Eligible age group team have a sufficient number of players? Defined as the minimum number of players to field a team and at least 3 players for the bench (YES = Acceptable. NO = Unacceptable).
 - Higher age group team have an excess number of players? Defined as the minimum number of players to field a team and more than 4 players for the bench (YES = Unacceptable, NO = Acceptable).
4. If the registration numbers suggest playing up is potentially feasible, the request will proceed for consideration by the affected Coaches⁶.
 - 4.1 Is the player suitable to play in a higher age group based on the key considerations for *Fielding a Competitive Team* Guiding Principle (e.g. suitably sized, skilled and no safety concerns)? (YES = Acceptable. NO = Unacceptable).
 - 5.2 If single or multiple requests were approved, will the....
 - Talent pool in the eligible age group team be significantly reduced such that success would be unlikely (e.g. never win a game = poor experience). (YES = Unacceptable, NO = Acceptable). Defined subjectively considering the breadth of talent that would remain (new vs experienced players) and how this could be reasonably mitigated (e.g. lower division).
5. The Registrar and affected Coaches work together to form a recommendation for each request. Disagreement between the Registrar and affected Coaches can be escalated to the Committee for out-of-cycle resolution.

⁶ An independent Coach will be appointed to assist should there be a perceived or actual Conflict of Interest
Approved May 2026

6. Registrar notifies Parent / Guardian of the outcome (approved or denied) and cc. affected Coaches.
7. If approved, player commences training in the higher age-group team.

Important:

An approval to play-up is valid for 1 season only and does not entitle a player to play-up again in subsequent seasons.

Record Management:

The Registrar will keep a record of all requests to play-up and the outcome.

Grievances:

Any concerns about this policy should be directed to a member of the Executive Committee.

Review and Compliance:

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years by the committee to ensure its effectiveness.

Non-compliance with this policy may result in appropriate action, up to and including removal from the position of authority within the club.