



Building Australian Football in Canada: Footy for Life

Long-Term Athlete Development Framework for
Australian Football League Canada (AFL Canada)

Acknowledgements

Australian football is a team sport, requiring skills and contributions of a number of players in significant and different ways. This document is the product of a dedicated team of individuals who applied their passion for the game, shared their broad experiences in many facets of sport, and displayed a commitment to excellence in developing a pathway to a long-term athlete-centred Australian football system in Canada.

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Letter from the President of AFL Canada

Australian Football League Canada (AFL Canada) is the national governing body for Australian football and, as the body responsible for the health of the game, it is our responsibility to establish a framework that ensures the best possible outcomes and pathways for young and new players to progress their learning and development of the sport.

There are more than 60,000 children each year being exposed to Australian football and established leagues, competitions, clubs or centres in eight provinces that provide opportunities for players and their families to participate every year. Since 2016, the number of coaches has increased 87% and the number of umpires has increased 23%. More people are getting involved in the sport of Australian football and that involvement is through many different ways.

Table 1: The growth of participation in Australian football			
	Number of U18 players	Number of Coaches	Number of Umpires
2016	49,013	39	49
2017	59,440	58	46
2018	70,313	98	63

Despite the growth we know that gaps remain. Up until recently our growth in participation has focused primarily on the adult athlete, recruiting players from other sport disciplines (hockey, soccer, basketball etc.) or using a player’s connection to Australia and existing prior knowledge of the sport to provide an incentive to learning to play. While we have shifted our attention towards introducing the youth to our sport, we need to connect more with these short introductions at all ages and convert them into regular participants of the sport. This can be done through long-term athlete development, providing opportunities for meaningful competition, and developing our coaches and officials/umpires across Canada.

We recognize it is largely dedicated volunteers who run these leagues for the love of the game and the enjoyment it provides. It is vital that providers of the game are familiar with, and adopt, the procedures contained in this manual to ensure participating girls and boys, women and men have a fun, safe, inclusive and positive football experience that is suitable to their needs.

We don’t want to put younger players in adult environments too early and that includes large grounds, congested play, unnecessary physicality and an overemphasis on winning when skill development is more important. We also want to focus our organizational resources to areas that will support our sport’s growth nationally, with high standards, good risk management, and consistently delivered professional programs so that we can introduce the sport of Australian football to everyone who lives within this great land.

Therefore, this resource is designed to promote measures that will maximize the enjoyment and development of all players.

It is designed to introduce and retain the next generation of young players and their families. With great thanks, we recognize the contributions of each provincial association: AFL BC, AFL Alberta, AFL Saskatchewan, AFL Manitoba, AFL Ontario, AFL Quebec, AFL Nova Scotia and AFL Newfoundland & Labrador.



Lachlan Griffiths
AFL Canada President



Introduction: The need for Long-Term Athlete Development in Footy

Australian football (Aussie Rules or Footy as it is called colloquially) is a relatively new sport to Canada. As the game has grown in Canada over the past 30 years and attracted an increasing number of athletes, there is an increased demand for coordinated high-performance training opportunities as well as entry-level skill development programs. This demand has highlighted the need for a systematic approach to developing our footy athletes. With increasing high stakes in the competitive arena, it is critical that there be a systematic, scientific process for consistently producing the best possible Canadian footy athletes and teams.

The Long-Term Athlete Development framework (LTAD) for Australian football identifies the optimal training, competition and recovery principles and practices for our athletes through sequential stages from childhood through to adulthood. AFL Canada recognizes the long-lasting value of sport and aims to provide quality sport experiences for all of its players and participants across the lifespan. Creating positive training environments and meaningful competition events will provide the best possible opportunity for development of the sport while supporting choice of its members.

Table 2: Growth of participation of Australian football in Canada				
	U18 <i>Regular club league participation</i>	Senior <i>Regular club league participation</i>	Promotional Participants <i>(Individuals playing less than three games & school participants)</i>	Total Number of Participants
2008	80	638	15,180	15,898
2012	304	777	27,086	28,167
2018	299	972	70,796	72,067
<i>NOTE: Historical data on participation in Australian football prior to 2015 is inconsistent. In order to provide the reader with a snapshot lens view on the growth of the sport in Canada, we report on the years in which data is complete and accurate.</i>				

We believe strongly that the highest levels of performance emerge from a well-designed, inclusive and developmentally appropriate system. The Footy LTAD will provide such a framework that ensures that athletes have the possibility to achieve their highest potential through systematic and logical athlete development, while simultaneously providing a field of play at an appropriate level for other participants. All players will be given a place to pursue their individually chosen level of excellence.

The LTAD framework allows coaches to provide athletes with the best possible support at each stage of their development, including transition into other levels of play or contribution to the sport of footy.

The LTAD will also inform both athletes and parents about key developmental concepts and practices at each stage in the development pathway from school to lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity.

LTAD is about achieving optimal training, competition and recovery throughout an athlete’s career, particularly in relation to the important growth and development years. The Footy LTAD pathway provides training and competition guidance that will help in the planning of programs from a local club level through to the national level, to help every participant reach their potential.

The Footy LTAD will provide a developmental pathway for our athletes and it will also target the development of younger players. The integrated system arising from the LTAD framework will ensure that footy athletes are placed in the appropriate programs, talent is identified and fostered, and athletes will not be left on their own to “fall through the gaps”. The long-term approach will support clubs and coaches to work towards developing the right training

environment for all footy participants, so that they may enjoy this as a lifetime sport and flourish under appropriate training programs with every opportunity to reach their genetic potential and optimal performance levels.

This LTAD framework will ensure that Canada continues to excel internationally as well as provide opportunities for new participants to enter the system. The building of a systematic framework will allow for ideal athlete, coach, umpire development through meaningful competition structures that are supported by effective governance.

This document examines the main issues related to long-term planning and athlete development in Australian football. LTAD will guide us in analyzing the Canadian footy sport system, highlighting its benefits and advantages, while providing a framework that addresses the needs of athletes at every age and level of participation.

What is Canada’s “Sport for Life”?¹

- It is a “Made in Canada” approach to athlete development that acknowledges the importance of individual sport culture as well as the Canadian political, social and environmental factors that influence athlete development. It recognizes best practices in elite sport and what normative data and research tells us about long-term athlete development.
- Contributes to and promotes a healthy, physically literate nation whose citizens participate in lifelong physical activity.
- Is a seven-stage framework based on the physical, technical, mental, emotional and cognitive development of sport participants. The overarching premise of LTAD is the Active for Life stage encouraging lifelong physical activity.
- Provides ten important factors that shape the sport specific LTAD framework for a logical and healthy approach to athlete development.
- Is a stage-by-stage approach that addresses an athlete’s development in the areas of technical, physical, social-emotional, psychological, and cognitive preparation.
- Acknowledges that fundamental building blocks are critical to the development of an athlete and for the enjoyment of Australian football, whether entering at an early age, participating into later years, developing as a coach, umpire or volunteer, or being a spectator.
- Encourages all sport partners to align all sport infrastructure and resources to meet the needs of sport participants across the entire sport continuum.
- Believes in quality sport and physical activity² which is achieved when the right people do the right things at the right times, which leads to positive experiences for participants. AFL Canada is committed to providing Canadians with quality sport experiences and will work to continuously improve our programs and services in order to achieve this goal.
- Is an inclusive concept that recognizes the importance of athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, sport scientists, clubs, schools and all levels of government; recognizes that building an inclusive association means empowering all groups and individuals to be part of the LTAD process particularly those who belong to traditionally marginalized groups (for example, women and girls, Indigenous people, individuals with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, and the gender and sexually diverse community.)

¹ Adapted from the Canadian Bowling Federation’s LTAD (2010)
² Sport for Life Society, “Quality Sport Checklist” (2017, December)



About Footy³

Australian football is a high intensity and fast paced invasion game with a unique mixture of various multi-dimensional movement requirements. Despite different positional characteristics, players require elements of speed, agility, aerobic and anaerobic fitness, strength and power to perform the demands of the game. A match is typically played between two teams consisting of 18 players on each team, split up into positions with six defenders, six midfielders, six forwards, and four interchange players. The game is played over 20-minute quarters plus 'time on' added for stoppages in play.

The objective of the game is to kick more total points than the other team. This is achieved by holding onto possession while creating and exploiting space in order to kick goals (6 points) or score 'behinds' or 'points' (1 point).

³Cross, Z., Pill, S., & Williams, K. (2018). Retrieved from: <http://www.sportlogia.com/no14engl/engl1.pdf> (2018, September)

VARIATIONS OF THE GAME

Australian football has many variations of the game around the world, some of these are not currently played in Canada but these are all options available to us for future player development.

KinderKick – a program designed to develop fundamental motor skills in children aged 3-5 through Australian football activities.

AusKick – a program designed to teach the basic skills of Australian football through small-sided skill-based activities for children aged 5-12.

AFL Active – is a group fitness workout built on the principles of having variety in your workout by using the unique combination of endurance, speed, strength, agility and dynamic movement.

Kick-to-Kick – Played as a pastime is a common term for Australian kick and catch games. A common format is for one person in a group to kick to a second group; whoever marks the ball kicks it back to the first group.

Footy 7s – is the indoor, non-contact, co-ed, 7-a-side variation of Australian football. With simplified rules and shorter playing time, this recreation-based version is a great starting point for many adults trying the sport for the first time.

AFL 9s – (also known as Rec Footy) is the outdoor, non-contact, co-ed, 9-a-side variation of Australian football. It features simplified rules and is tailored to recreational level players.

AFLX – (also known as Metro Footy) is the outdoor, contact, 7-a-side variation of of Australian football, played on soccer, gridiron or rugby fields. This variation can also be played with 9 or 10 players per team, depending on field size and player availability. This variation of the game is best suited to regions where full-sized Footy ovals cannot be utilized.

Samoa Rules – Adapted from the traditional game and originated in Samoa. Played on rugby fields with 15 players per side. Unlike traditional Australian football, player movement is restricted to zones similar to netball.

Lightning Football – describes variations of the game played over a shortened length, usually about half the length of a full match. Lightning football may be played under otherwise unchanged rules however some experimental rule changes have been trialed in Australia.

AFL Blind – Created for the blind and hearing-impaired communities, this new variation of the game incorporates different coloured balls, tactile prompts, and Bluetooth speakers within the balls to project sound. This variation is still being tested within Australia to determine the best adaptations for the majority of players before launching world-wide.

Wheelchair Aussie Rules – Wheelchair Aussie Rules has been developed to provide all Australian football enthusiasts with or without a disability with an Aussie Rules experience that has strong parallels with the traditional game. This variation is currently only played in Australia but can be considered in Canada for the future.

Australian football – is traditionally played outdoor, full contact, 18-a-side, however as shown above there are many different variations of the sport that fit under the umbrella of Australian football.

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL TECHNICAL SKILLS⁴

Ball Handling & General Athleticism: The most generic skill for a player is ball handling – being familiar with the shape and weight of the football, how to securely grip and hold it, and how to predict its movement on the ground and through the air. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on individual athleticism for players. Physical fitness is necessary because play sees few breaks, takes place across a field 150–180 metres long, and has few restrictions on player position on the ground. Transferable sports: Gaelic football, basketball, soccer, rugby, cross country running, athletics (track & field), gymnastics.

Possession Skills: Possession of the ball is required to score. This includes **marking** (where a player cleanly catches a kicked ball that has travelled more than 15 metres without anyone else touching it), **running bounce** (when a player, while running, bounces the ball on the ground and back in their hands), and **picking up** (either standing or running, and successfully picking up the ball for travel.) Transferable sports: Gaelic football, basketball, dodgeball, rugby, gridiron football.

Disposal Skills: To progress the football across the field of play in order to gain advantage or score the football must be disposed of legally by the controlling player. These disposal skills include **kicking** (drop punt, torpedo punt, snap, banana kick, etc.) or **handball** (player holds the ball with one hand and punches the ball away with the clenched fist of the other hand). Transferable sports: Gaelic football, soccer, gridiron football, volleyball.

Checking Skills: While not in possession of the football, a player will still need to work to gain possession of the football, force an error from the opposing player, or to provide an advantage to a team-mate. These include: **tackling** (to dispossess an opponent of the ball, to stop the player from gaining ground towards goal or to stop them from carrying out what they intend), **shepherding or bumping** (shepherding is the act of legally pushing, bumping or blocking an opposing player from gaining possession of the ball or reaching the contest). Transferable sports: Ice hockey, lacrosse, gridiron football, rugby, Gaelic football.

One percenters: This is a statistic kept by Australian football and relates to a variety of actions which benefit the team, but are infrequent or defensive. They have always been seen as the "extra effort" which went unrewarded on the statistics, and they received the name "one percenter" to represent this. They may not individually affect the outcome of the game, but collectively they can, hence they are regarded as a percentage of the overall performance of the team⁵.

These are: **knock-ons** (using the hand, either clenched or open, to tap the ball to the advantage of a team-mate, without ever taking possession of the football (except out of the ruck), **spoil** (preventing an opposition player from taking clean possession of a pass from a team-mate. This is most usually done by punching the ball away from the contest), **Smothering** (act of using the arms or body to get in the way of an opponent’s kick, as it leaves the player’s boot) **non-perceter** (is the act of using the arms or body to get in the way of an opponent’s kick, as it leaves the player’s boot), and **shepherd** (see “Checking Skills”). There are other defensive efforts and supporting actions which are not statistically reported on, but coaches commonly refer to them as one percenters. These include **chase** (is the act of making a long pursuit behind an opponent who is running with and bouncing the ball, even if he never catches up and tackles his opponent), **hurrying** (an opponent is the act of putting them off balance without laying a tackle, while he is taking his kick or handpass), **bump** (is the act of using the side of the body and running into an opponent with force - under some circumstances. The bump is a type of strong shepherd, but players can also legally bump their opponents out of the way as they run to collect the ball. A bump to an opponent is legal, provided the bump does not ride high and contact an opponent’s head), and **block** (is a more subtle way to shepherd in a marking contest, and while it is often technically illegal, it will almost never be penalised). Transferable Sports: Any team strategic sport, specifically ice hockey, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, gridiron football.

⁴ For more information and detailed skills progression, see Appendix 5
⁵ Australian Football League, “Player Ratings”, Retrieved from <http://www.afl.com.au/stats/player-ratings/ratings-explained> (2018, October)

OVERALL GOALS OF LTAD

Nationally – LTAD is a framework for full sport alignment in Canada, integrating health and education with sport, physical activity, and education. The LTAD is participant/athlete-centred, coach-led, and organization supported, taking into account the demands of home, organized sport, community recreation and school.

For AFL Canada – Every individual entering the sport will have the potential for a positive individualized experience no matter what their level of participation or competition, and the individual with aspirations for the highest level of execution and promise will receive timely and appropriate development in their role(s) of choice: athlete / player, coach, umpire.

CANADIANS PLAYING IN AUSTRALIA

While there are many different versions of footy that can be played, we are very proud of our Canadians that have become extremely proficient at these technical skills, playing the game at the highest levels. Below you can read a short profile about four Canadians who have seen success playing the game in Australia.



Kendra Heil⁶

A multi-sport athlete, Heil was introduced to Australian football in Canada by her personal trainer, who promised a few free sessions if she came to training with the Hamilton Wildcats. She was excited to discover a game that combined elements of other sports.

"I had some foot skills from soccer, and I had hands from basketball and then the tackling from rugby, so I had a little bit of everything. That's why I love it. It's not just rugby, which just goes back and forth on that line of scrimmage, or soccer, which is on the ground or basketball,

which is all in your hands. Footy goes in every direction. It's up, down, back and forth, it's all the skills. You have to put it all together and it's an elite fitness level. I just love the challenge."

Playing in the 2014 International Cup was the tipping point for Heil to move to Australia. She landed at the Eastern Devils in the VFL Women's competition, where her partner was head coach. She had a shock introduction to the Australian version of football. Back-to-back ACL injuries in 2017 have sidelined her professional athletic career for the time being but she has been able to coach a U18 team, focus on rehabilitation plan, and is building an artistic career painting athletes⁷.



Andrew McGrath

McGrath was born in Mississauga, Ontario on June 2, 1998, and he moved to Melbourne, Australia at age five in 2003. He was a talented junior track and field athlete winning the Australian national under-14 high jump competition in 2011, the Victorian state heptathlon and national 200m hurdles events at under-15 level in 2012 and the under-17 400m hurdles in 2014. He was named All-Australian and co-captain of the 2016 AFL Under 18 Championships playing for Vic Metro, and was also the captain of Brighton Grammar School. McGrath plays professional Australian football

with the Essendon Football Club in the Australian Football League (AFL.) He was recruited by the Essendon Football Club with the first overall selection in the 2016 national draft⁸.



Valerie Moreau⁹

Valerie "Val" Moreau (born 24 November 1991) is a French Canadian who moved to Melbourne in October 2016 to play Australian football in the VFLW with the Eastern Devils Football Club. In 2017, she represented the Canadian Northern Lights side at the AFL International Cup and received Best & Fairest for the competition as well as being named on the World Team. She then joined the inaugural Essendon Football Club VFLW team in 2018 and was awarded co-leading goal kicker.

Prior to her Australian football career, Moreau was a collegial basketball player for Lionel Groulx Nordiques where a commemorative frame resides to celebrate a 1,000 points career. A sport enthusiast, she joined her first baseball team at the age of 5 and has been on a team roster since then, trying her hands at softball, soccer, kin-ball, karate, dodgeball and flag football.

Moreau is mostly known for her speed, work ethic and fearless attitude despite her small size.



Mike Pyke

Mike Pyke (born in Victoria, BC on March 24, 1984) is a Canadian retired dual-code football player, who was a professional Australian rules footballer with the Sydney Swans. Pyke is the first Canadian retired dual-code football player who played professionally with the AFL's Sydney Swans. Prior to his Australian football career, Pyke was a professional rugby union player, having played for French Top 14 squad US Montauban and representing the Canadian national side¹⁰.

⁶ Callum O'Connor, "VFLW: Canadian Bombers", Retrieved from <http://www.essendonfc.com.au/news/2018-05-30/vflw-canadian-bombers> (2018 October)
⁷ Kendra Heil, "A Self-Introduction - Artist, Athlete, Canadian: Kendra Heil", Retrieved from <https://www.footyalmanac.com.au/a-self-introduction-artist-athlete-canadian-kendra-heil/> (2018, August)
⁸ Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_McGrath (2018, September)

⁹ Callum O'Connor, "VFLW: Canadian Bombers", Retrieved from <http://www.essendonfc.com.au/news/2018-05-30/vflw-canadian-bombers> (2018 October).
¹⁰ Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Pyke (2018, October)



History of Australian football¹¹

The sport’s history can be traced to football matches played in Melbourne, Victoria (Australia) in 1858, inspired by English public-school football games. Seeking to develop a game more suited to adults and Australian conditions, the Melbourne Football Club published the first laws of Australian football in May 1859, making it one of the oldest of the world’s known football codes. Currently the game’s rules are governed by the AFL Commission with the advice of the AFL’s Laws of the Game Committee.

Australian football has the highest spectator attendance and television viewership of all sports in Australia. It also ranks fourth globally for league average annual attendance, behind only the NFL, Bundesliga, and Premier League Soccer. The AFL holds an annual grand final of the professional teams which is the highest attended championship event in the world with over 100,000 spectators attending.

The high level of interest shown by women in Australian football is considered unique among the world’s football codes. Since the 19th century, women make up approximately half of total attendances at Australian football matches – a far greater proportion than the estimated 10% of women that comprise British soccer crowds. This has been attributed in part to the egalitarian character of Australian football’s early years in public parks where women could mingle freely and support the game in various ways.

In terms of athletic participation, while there are occasional 19th-century references to women playing the sport, it was not until the 1910s that the first organized women’s teams and competitions appeared. Women’s state leagues emerged in the 1980s, and in 2013, the AFL announced plans to establish a nationally televised women’s competition. Outside of Australia, women’s participation is at not as high a rate as in Australia and Canada is no exception.

Records show that the first Australian football games played in Canada were in 1989. AFL Canada was established as an organization in May 1989 following the inaugural Conacher Cup tournament. Two Toronto area clubs connected, played matches, and in the competition’s aftermath, established AFL Canada. Since that time, the game of footy has caught the attention of many Canadian men and women, some with Australian heritage, but many without.



¹¹ Australian Football League, “About the AFL”, Retrieved from <http://www.afl.com.au/afl-hq/the-afl-explained/about-the-afl> (2018, October)

Current gaps and shortcomings in our sport

There are challenges facing the sport of footy in Canada which, if not dealt with, can hinder the athletes from reaching their full potential. We are a young sport to Canada and are at a crossroads in our development. The opportunities are many!

We must find ways of introducing more Canadian youth to the sport of footy. One important strategy is through a nationally coordinated school-based program that feeds into grassroots community club programs. While we have had limited success in introducing the sport in specific school districts, it has not been widespread and we have not been successful yet in converting these trials into regular participants of the sport through Junior clubs. Other strategies for introducing Canadian youth to Australian football will be explored and evaluated for its success at converting from initial introductions to long-term participation in the sport.

Challenges such as club infrastructure, funding, communication, recruitment and retention of identified talented players must be dealt with.

Coach development and education needs to be improved and integrated within the NCCP model. All coaches must be trained and recognized whether voluntary or compensated. Coaching programs need to be differentiated between junior, youth, and senior to reflect the distinct differences between the groups.

Competition structure should be revised to allow for different competitions supporting Canadian athletes at various developmental stages. Currently there is only one national competition/tournament and it has served a multitude of purposes (talent identification, coaching and umpire education, new athlete recruitment, sport promotions, sponsorship recruitment, etc.) However, as the sport grows in Canada, the purpose of the National Championships should be refined, and other competitions should be developed to fill in other purposes.

There must be clear policies on the recruitment, education and compensation of footy coaches and umpires. Without these volunteers and officials, the sport cannot exist.

Vision

It is our vision that AFL Canada:

- **Achieve National Sport Organization status:** with all the rights, privileges and funding opportunities that accompany such status, with Sport Canada by the end of 2019.
- **Aligns within Canada’s National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP):** The alignment of the AFL coaching certification programs with the NCCP program by the end of 2020 will support consistent athlete development across Canada, as well as talent identification, recruitment and retention.
- **Formalize the long-term official development framework:** to be formalized and established by the end of 2019, with the input and support of the existing highly qualified Canadian AFL umpires.
- **Develop athletic relationships within youth-centred education institutions:** in order to introduce Canadian youth to the sport through a coordinated national program at schools, universities and colleges, youth centres and summer camps. We strive to continue our relationship with the Kin Games and other multi-sport games in order to build and grow our participation base.
- **Support national high-performance athletes:** through corporate sponsorship and national athlete funding, and with access to integrated sport teams for expertise in exercise physiology, mental performance, biomechanics, performance analysis, sport nutrition, strength and conditioning, and sport medicine year-round. Identified athletes will have our full support to develop to be their best selves along side coach and officials/umpires.
- **Consistently achieve top three finish at international competitions:** for both our Men’s and Women’s National Teams from 2020 onward. We plan to improve access to year-round training programs in order to achieve this top three finish for both national teams at IC20.

- **Undertake a full competition review by 2021:** in order to ensure that we have an aligned and well-structured competitive system for all levels including high schools (U18), university/colleges (U25), senior / open age in clubs/ leagues (U55), and a masters (35+) competitive category, both provincially and nationally. Each competition will serve a developmental purpose for athletes, coaches, and officials/umpires.

HOW WE WILL GET THERE: THINKING STRATEGICALLY

The philosophy behind Long-Term Athlete Development indicates that excellence takes time and practice is necessary before a player reaches the elite level. Success is attained via thorough basic skill acquisition, combined with thorough long-term training, practicing and competing, as opposed to focusing solely on winning in the short term. There is no short cut to success in player preparation!

The LTAD framework not only provides the rational justification for enhancing our current system but also provides some of the solutions that may be applied to tackle the opportunities identified earlier. Successful talent development involves looking beyond the short-term and planning for the future.

The process of improving our current structures is continuous and informing our members involved is a challenging task. We will however establish the best way to effectively implement the change and have a proper communication pathway plan in place to ensure that the system is beneficial to all involved.

As we move forward to implementation of this framework, we will be working cooperatively with local sport partners and member groups. We have much to learn from our partners and associates. Working together and sharing knowledge will make us stronger as a sport and as an association.



The 10 key factors influencing LTAD¹²

PHYSICAL LITERACY

"Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."¹³

The elements of physical literacy include motivation and confidence (an individual's enthusiasm for including physical activity as integral part of life), physical competence (an individual's ability to develop movement skills and patterns), knowledge and understanding (an individual's ability to identify and express the essential qualities that influence movement & the health benefits of being active), and engagement in physical activities for life (an individual taking personal responsibility for physical literacy by freely choosing to be active on a regular basis.)

For our youngest participants, we must remember that their first experiences in sport should support the necessary social, cognitive and psychological components of their development. While learning new physical and technical skills, it is vital to establish a positive connection with sport.

Fundamental movement skills should be introduced during childhood through fun and games. Fundamental sport skills should follow. Without basic movement skills, a child will have difficulty participating in any sport. Basic running, jumping, striking, and movement skills provide a base for all sports, but are particularly important for footy which incorporates all of these fundamental movement skills within a competitive match.

Athletes must be adept at running in order to move the ball from one end to the other of a large playing field. They must have good skills in jumping, to successfully mark the ball, moving over other players, or to catch a ball in mid-air, which will allow their team to control of the game. The skill of accurate striking or handballing, as striking is more often called in footy, and kicking allows a player and their team to move a ball up the field towards the goalposts. Of course, agility, balance and coordination are fundamental to the sport of footy as athletes avoid tackles, moving around opposing team athletes, and navigating the field of play.

Education in basic movement skills and sport specific skills create a well-balanced physically literate child who has the ability to participate in a wide variety of sports. It is important that children develop the basic skills before the onset of their growth spurt. A person that does not achieve basic movement skills may have a lower opportunity to succeed in a variety of sports.

Many of the sports popular with young children provide an excellent introduction to skills required for footy: running and dodging, striking and catching, jumping and kicking.

SPECIALIZATION

Footy is a late specialization sport, meaning individuals should move to specialize in Footy between the ages of 14-16, or even later. Of course, this does not mean that an individual must choose to only participate in footy to the exclusion of all other sports and activities this would likely lead to burn out and potentially injuries which could sideline an individual from active participation indefinitely. Also, this does not mean that they should wait to try footy until the ages of 14-16, but rather that an individual should participate in a wide variety of sports prior to this age to achieve maximum 'physical literacy', and that generally, an individual choosing their priority sport at this level has the optimal opportunity to achieve the highest level of achievement in that chosen sport.

Australian football in Canada can also be considered to be a very late specialization sport in that the skills acquired in one sport have allowed athletes to smoothly transfer into footy, and still achieve a high level of performance. Sports with highly transferable movement skills to footy include but are not limited to soccer (transferable skill: kicking), volleyball (transferable skill: handpass), basketball (transferable skill: bounce, mark/catch), hockey (transferable skill: checking/bumping) and gridiron football / rugby (transferable skill: tackling).

Using fast-track or remedial training programs, late-entry athletes can leverage their fundamental skills to become highly skilled in footy.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE

Growth and development varies greatly between individuals. LTAD considers each athlete's developmental age rather than chronological age to ensure appropriate programs are introduced as the individual grows and matures.

Identifying those who mature early, average, and late will enable the coach to design appropriate training and competition programs that match each athlete's trainability and readiness.

Maturation refers to the qualitative system changes, both structural and functional, in the body's progress towards maturity such as the change of cartilage to bone in the skeleton.

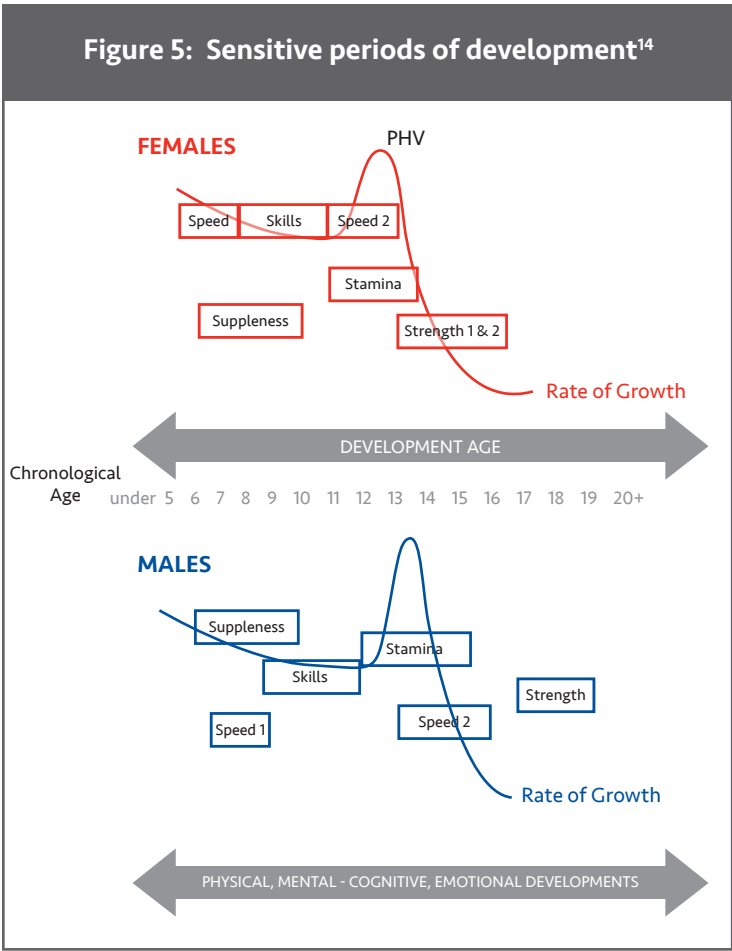
Growth refers to observable step-by-step changes in quantity and measurable changes in body size such as height, weight, and fat percentage.

Development refers to "the interrelationship between growth and maturation in relation to the passage of time. The concept of development also includes the social, emotional, intellectual, and motor realms of the child."

Chronological age refers to the number of years and days elapsed since birth. Children of the same chronological age can differ by several years in their level of biological maturation.

Developmental age refers to the degree of physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional maturity. Physical developmental age can be determined by skeletal maturity or bone age after which mental, cognitive, and emotional maturity is incorporated.

Training Age refers to the age where athletes being planned, regular, serious involvement in training.



The beginning of the growth spurt and the peak of the growth spurt are very significant in LTAD applications to training and program design. The tempo of a child's growth has significant implications for athletic training because children who mature at an early age have a major advantage during the Training to Train stage compared to average or late matures. However, after all athletes have gone through their growth spurt, it is often later matures who have greater potential to become top athletes provided they experience quality coaching throughout that period.

Until now, the majority of regular participants in Australian football in Canada have been adults who have already achieved their maximum height and growth. As the sport continues to grow and develop more for those under the age of 18, we will need to consider how to design and deliver developmentally appropriate programs for boys and girls that teach them about the game while keeping them engaged and over time.

¹² Sport for Life Society, "Canadian Sport for Life - Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) 2.1" (2016)

¹³ Sport for Life Society, "Physical Literacy", Retrieved from <http://sportforlife.ca/physical-literacy/> (Definition source: The International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014)

¹⁴ Figure reprinted from Balyi and Way (PacificSport 2005) as cited in "Canadian Sport for Life - Long-Term Athlete Development 2.1" (2016), pp. 31-32.

SENSITIVE PERIODS OF DEVELOPMENT

"A sensitive period is a broad time frame or window of opportunity when the learning of a specific skill or the development of a specific physical capacity is particularly effective. The entire period of childhood can be viewed as a sensitive period for mastering fundamental movement skills." ¹⁵

All areas of performance are always trainable, but for athletes to reach their maximum potential, sensitive periods of trainability must be identified. Sensitive periods of development can leverage trainability, focusing on how athletes respond to the training programs at different stages of their growth and development, allowing coaches to design appropriate programs to take advantage of their most significant training periods.

Trainability has been defined as the responsiveness of developing individuals to the training stimulus at different stages of growth and maturation. There exists a sensitive period of development where there is a point in development of a specific capacity when training has an optimal effect. Other factors are readiness and critical periods of trainability during growth and development of young players, where the stimulus must be timed to achieve optimum adaptation with regards to motor skills, muscular, and/or aerobic power.

As the majority of regular participants in Australian football in Canada have been adults who have passed the critical period of development, this factor has been of less importance for the developing athlete here. That being said, we will need to examine all future competitive and training programs closely to ensure that those focusing on developing the young players take into account the critical periods of development in the areas of strength, stamina, speed and suppleness (flexibility).

THE WHOLE ATHLETE: MENTAL, COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Athlete development looks not only at physical and technical development, but also the mental, cognitive and emotional development of an athlete. A holistic approach to the development of a footy athlete includes emphasis on ethics, fair play and character building throughout. Athletes will learn life skills through sport as they progress through the stages of the footy LTAD framework herein. It is not a simple task to incorporate the physical aspects of athlete development with complimentary mental, cognitive and emotional components, as there are no easily visible markers for the transitions between the stages.

A major objective of Long-Term Athlete Development is a holistic approach to athlete development. This includes emphasis on ethics, fair play and character building throughout the various stages, an objective that reflects Canadian values. All future programming from AFL Canada will be designed considering athletes’ cognitive ability to address these concepts.

PERIODIZATION

Periodization entails coordinating all aspects of training, competition and recovery into a systematic, scientific, integrated plan that will enable the athlete/team to achieve the best possible performance at the desired time.

In the LTAD context, periodization connects the stage the player is in with the requirements of that stage. Single, and double periodization formats follow the same principles with frequently introduced prophylactic breaks; that is, programmed and prioritized recovery and regeneration elements. Footy programs at every stage of player development need to adhere to logical, scientific insights for the benefit of the player.

Excellence takes time, typically a 10- to 12-year process to optimize physical, technical, tactical (including decision making) and mental preparation, as well as the supporting ancillary capacities. Within Australian football in Canada is triennial planning, referring to the three-year International Cup cycle for high performing athletes, and the annual plan, which is based upon identified periods of athletic preparation, competition and the transition into the next calendar plan.

COMPETITION: CALENDAR PLANNING

Optimal and meaningful competition planning at all stages is critical to the development of a footy athlete. Integrating training, competition and recovery with best practices and evidence-informed findings is the best way of supporting the long-term development of footy athletes.

At certain stages, developing the skills is more important than competition. At later stages, the ability to compete is the focus. (See Table 3)

While international and national calendars are usually well integrated, a systematic competition review of Australian football in Canada needs to be undertaken. This is one of the biggest challenges for team sports in Long-Term Athlete Development design and implementation. AFL Canada is committed to completing this competition review and making recommendations for any necessary changes to be made.

Table 3: General recommendations for the ratio of training to competition and competition-specific training. ¹⁶	
Stage	Recommended Ratio of training to competition and competition-specific training
Active Start	No specific ratios – all activity based on developing physical literacy and child’s passion to play and participate
FUNdamentals	All activities FUN-based including some structured competition
Learn to Train	70% training to 30% competition-specific training and actual competition
Train to Train	60% training to 40% competition-specific training and actual competition
Train to Compete	40% training to 60% competition-specific training and actual competition
Train to Win	25% training to 75% competition-specific training and actual competition
Ultimate Performance	25% training to 75% competition-specific training and actual competition
Active for Life	Based on individual’s desire

EXCELLENCE TAKES TIME

Participant development is a long-term process and elite participants will require approximately a decade or more of practice to achieve international standing. As part of this process, short-term performance goals must never be allowed to undermine Long-Term Athlete Development¹⁷.

In the last decade, much has been learned about the detection and development of talent. No longer is "10,000 hours" the rule for developing expert performance. A growth mindset and a multi-sport background are well-described requirements of excellence.

Athletes that have participated in three or four other sports before they specialize have usually not been considered when calculating the number of years or hours that went into success in that final sport. For example, the athlete who begins competing in the sport of footy at the age of 24 and is chosen to represent Canada an International Cup competition 2-3 years later, is not bypassing this concept of “excellence taking time” but rather, because this athlete came from an active multi-sport background prior to specialization in footy, and has embraced a growth mindset in their athletic training approach the total number of years of being physically active should be included as they are an integral part of that athlete’s long-term development.

¹⁵ Gallahue and Donnelly (2003) as cited in Sport for Life Society, LTAD 2.1, (2016) p. 31

¹⁶ Sport for Life Society, "Long-Term Athlete Development 2.1", (2016), p. 41.

¹⁷ Viru (1995) as cited in Sport for Life Society, (2016), p. 42.

SYSTEM ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

LTAD relates to all stakeholders in sport, recognizing that physical education, school sports, recreational activities and competitive sports are interdependent. Athletes will be exposed to sport through many sources throughout their development, making it essential that all areas of the sport system be aligned, integrated, and built on the principles of LTAD.

An integrated system will ensure that footy athletes who enter at any age or stage will be placed in the appropriate programs, talent will be identified and fostered, and athletes will not “fall through the gaps.”

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The LTAD framework is based on the best available current scientific, coaching, and sport-specific innovations, observations, and research in the areas of athlete training and human development. The LTAD model is a continuously evolving vehicle for change, reflecting all emerging facets of physical education, sport and recreation to ensure systematic and logical delivery of programs to all ages. Furthermore, LTAD promotes ongoing education and sensitization of all stakeholders in the fields of sport, recreation, physical activity and education about the interlocking relationship between physical education, school sport, community recreation, lifelong physical activity and high-performance sport.



Building a Pathway – Footy LTAD¹⁸

Figure 6: Australian football in Canada LTAD Framework 2018
This figure provides a visual representation of the long-term development of an Australian football athlete, coach, or umpire within Canada. Learning from our counterparts in other parts of the world, we have developed our framework to consider the particular nuances of Canadian culture and geography that may have less impact than in other parts of the world. Not all of these programs are available currently in all parts of Canada however there are opportunities in all areas of Canada to start, stay, and succeed in the sport of Australian football.



¹⁸ Note: Chronological age alone should not be used to determine an athlete's stage within the Footy pathway. While chronological age is a guideline, stage by stage progressions are determined by an athlete's demonstration of a set of developmentally-appropriate skills from the technical/tactical/strategic, psychological, physical, social-emotional and cognitive categories. These skills are to be intertwined to ensure holistic development of the athlete.

Table 4: Overview of AFL Canada’s Player, Coach and Umpire Pathways Details about each stage are found in the sections that follows		
Player Pathway	Coach Pathway	Umpire Pathway
First Involvement	NCCP: MED, Optional: multi-sport modules in coaching athletes with a disability	N/A
Awareness	NCCP: MED, Optional: multi-sport modules in coaching athletes with a disability	N/A
Active Start	AFL Foundation Coach - Junior NCCP MED	N/A - Coach acts as on field umpire
FUNDamentals	AFL Foundation Coach - Junior NCCP MED	N/A - Coach acts as on field umpire
Learn to Train	AFL Foundation Coach - Junior NCCP MED	AFL Introductory Umpire (Level 0) (Green shirt: umpire in transition to Level 1)
Train to Train	AFL Foundation Coach - Youth NCCP MED	AFL Developmental Umpire (Level 1) (Umpire in transition to Level 2)
Train to Compete	AFL Foundation Coach - Senior NCCP MED	AFL Developmental Umpire (Level 1) (Umpire in transition to Level 2)
Train to Win	AFL Senior Coach (Level 2) NCCP MED	AFL Advanced Level Umpire (Level 2) (Umpire in transition to Level 3)
Ultimate Performance	AFL High Performance Coach (Level 3) NCCP MED	AFL Performance Umpire (Level 3)



Awareness

Chronological Age:

- All ages

Objectives:

- To promote, grow and develop the sport of Australian football in Canada
- To connect traditionally marginalized and under-represented groups with the sport of footy by targeted promotional efforts

Summary:

- Individuals can only participate in footy if they know about the sport
- Individuals must see themselves as represented in the promotions of the sport

Key considerations for Awareness Stage

- Provide information about ongoing programming & instruction in an individual’s community
- Promotion and marketing should include images of individuals from marginalized groups as often as possible
- Promote in a variety of ways to maximize accessibility: print, radio, TV, social media
- Wherever possible, provide financial support for those that require it
- Consider translation services if marketing specifically to newcomers to Canada or those who don’t use English or French as their first language

Specifically developed in reference to building knowledge about sport and recreation opportunities for persons with disabilities, the “Awareness” stage can be extended to include individuals from traditionally marginalized populations such as girls and women, new Canadians, the economically disadvantaged, indigenous or immigrant communities, and gender and sexually diverse communities.

Opportunities for individuals from marginalized communities to participate in sport and physical activity are not always well known to the general public. The purpose of the Awareness stage is to inform the general public and prospective athletes the range of opportunities available. To this end, sport and recreation organizations need to develop awareness plans to make their offerings and resources known.

Activities and sports need to connect with participants, and potential participants can only try out activities and sports when they know about them, and about what local opportunities are available for them to give the activity a try.

In the case of individuals who acquire a disability, the period following acquisition of a disability is generally one of great change and transition. Some of their previous physical activities may no longer be open to them in the same form, and they may not be aware of the many sporting and physical activities that are available to persons with disabilities. Awareness plans and effective communication can help to ease this transition; these plans can also foster awareness among parents and people who work with persons with disabilities, such as health care professionals and teachers.

First Involvement

Chronological Age:

- All ages

Objectives:

- Introducing individuals to footy through safe, fun and inclusive promotional / instructional events
- Connecting individuals who try the sport with local clubs and leagues for ongoing instruction, participation, and competition

Summary:

- There is only one opportunity to provide a good first impression.
- Providing a positive opportunity to try footy, alongside an invitation to attend an ongoing instructional program, will build long-term participation in the sport

Key Considerations for First Involvement:

- Quick and easy, focus on big picture
- Keep It Simple: Don’t use too much sport specific jargon, keep instructional language simple & short¹⁹
- Train coaches, volunteers and umpires on inclusive language, supporting marginalized populations, and how to make individuals feel welcome in your sport activity
- Use game-based activities focusing on the big skills to keep it fun and successful
- Give the players a taste of the sport but leave them wanting more!
- Make players feel welcome as soon as they arrive
- Learn about any available modifications to the game for an individual’s particular ability/disability; Be open to further modifications at this initial stage. Let the individual guide you.
- Provide social opportunities for newcomers to learn the other players, as well as the sport they are learning
- Provide loaner equipment for newcomers to use as they learn the sport, minimizing the financial burden of participation

The First Involvement stage is to ensure that individuals have a positive first experience of an activity and therefore will engaged with it. Originally developed specifically for introducing athletes with a disability to a sport or recreational activity, the concept of First Involvement applies across the board to all individuals being introduced to footy for the first time. If an individual does not feel welcomed, they are less likely to return to try the sport. We must therefore do all that we can do to ensure that all individuals feel welcomed and a part of the club activities from the moment that they step into their first “try-it”.

As an individual comes to try out a sport, we want to make sure that we have given them a taste of the sport, and a positive taste of the sport at that, but that we leave them wanting to learn more about it. They can get their “more” by enrolling in an ongoing instructional program, or by registering in a novice or introductory league. But if their first introduction isn’t positive, it is far less likely that that individual will come again to try the sport out.

¹⁹ Shane Pill, “The Game Sense Coaching Approach for Australian Football (AFL)”, (2015)



ACTIVE START

Active Start

Chronological Age:

- Males 0-6 / Females 0-6

Objectives:

- Learn fundamental movements through fun & games (deliberate play)
- Physical activity is fun and becomes part of daily routine
- Physically active family

Match Modifications for Active Start

- Soft touch ball
- No matches for this age group
- Game-based activities only

Summary:

- Fun and part of daily life; daily physical activity
- Fitness and movement skills development
- Focus on acquiring physical literacy in the form of proper movement skills such as running, jumping, wheeling, twisting, striking, kicking, catching
- Not sedentary for more than 60 minutes except when sleeping
- Some organized physical activity
- Exploration of risk and limits in safe environments

Physical Literacy: Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.²⁰

“Active Start” for Footy:

Kinderkick: Designed for children age 3-5, this fundamental movement skills program is designed by the AFL (Australia). It provides a specific lesson plan to assist and enhance the development needs of each participating child’s physical and social well-being. The emphasis is on development and growth physically and emotionally through innovative, fun drills and sequential activities. Focus is on coordination, balance and concentration.²¹ (Currently limited availability in Canada.)

Characteristics of children during this stage:

- Balance is improving but still have difficulty completing complex balancing skills
- Able to pass a ball with correct weight transfer
- Will have difficulty catching moving objects
- Starting around the age of six, children will have the ability to catch two out of every five balls thrown at them when standing still

Implications for coaching at the Active Start Stage:

The Participants:

- Will tire quickly
- Cannot concentrate for long periods
- Tend to play on their own and do not work well as a team
- They have difficulty catching balls that have been kicked

Equipment:

- There should be plenty of equipment available in their size. One ball per participant.

The Session:

- Should not exceed 30 minutes with each specific skill practice lasting maximum five minutes.

The Overall Goal:

- Individual skills training in passing, catching, and running to assist the development of balance, agility, coordination and speed
- Each session should be focused on FUN!²²

²⁰ Sport for Life Society, “Physical Literacy”, Retrieved from <http://sportforlife.ca/physical-literacy/> (Definition source: The International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014)

²¹ AFL Queensland, “What is Kinderkick?”, Retrieved from <https://www.aflq.com.au/kinderkick/> (2018, August)

²² Visek et al (2015), “The Fun Integration Theory: Towards Sustaining Children and Adolescents Sport Participation”, Journal of Physical Activity and Health, 12, no. 3 (March 2015)



FUNDAMENTALS

FUNDamentals

Chronological Age:

- Males 6-9 / Females 6-8

Objectives:

- Develop FUNdamental movement skills – Agility, Balance, Coordination, Running, Speed, Kicking, Striking, Jumping – in a well-structured, positive and FUN environment!

Match Modifications for FUNdamentals

- Size 1 synthetic ball
- 6-a-side played on modified size field (3 X 20 m zones)
- 9-a-side played on modified size field (3 X 25 m zones)
- Non-contact
- Max. 2 X 10-minute halves

Summary:

- Fun and child-centred activity
- Purpose is a kick off to footy
- Focus on recruitment & retention of participants and volunteers to build a solid sport community structure to build growth in the sport
- Participants acquire tactical development through fun modified games where the focus is learning whilst having fun
- Introduction to simple rules of the game and ethics in fair play; educate players, parents and coaches
- Basic skills of the game should be taught
- Activities should be all inclusive with no periodization at this stage

“FUNdamentals” for Footy:

AusKick Rookie (U9) provides children with a form of organized healthy activity that focuses on physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional development and particular footy skills such as: kicking, running, jumping, striking, and catching. AusKick sessions are comprised of structured warm-up games, skill activities and modified games each session.

Characteristics of children during this stage:

- Physical characteristics:
 - Larger muscle groups are more developed than smaller ones
 - Strength develops by improvement in the neural pathways
- Mental/Cognitive:
 - Attention span is increasing gradually
 - Children are enthusiastic and often impatient
 - Imagination is blossoming
 - Language skills may be limited but are improving
- Emotional:
 - Children like to be the centre of attention
 - They feel secure with a routine and structure to training as well as consistent coaching

Implications for Coaching at FUNdamental stage:

- Emphasize development of general motor skills involving the large muscle groups. Gradually introduce more precise, coordinated movements requiring the interaction of smaller muscle groups.
- Children may take longer to acclimatize in extreme temperatures so longer warm-ups may be required. Watch closely for signs of distress caused by extremes of temperature.
- Plan coordination activities to activate neural pathways in developing strength.
- Provide short and precise instructions. Devise strategies to ensure children are listening. Children learn well by imitating and practicing correctly modelled movements.
- Do not bombard children with technical information. Keep it fun and keep it moving.
- Provide correct demonstrations of the basic sport skills. Demonstrations must be accurate.
- Allow children to play and experiment. Use their ideas to create exciting sessions. Structure to encourage individuality and creativity.
- Plan activities that guarantee success. Always move from simple to more complex, allowing children to show skills.
- Build a structure that is progressive but maintains continuity. Set and maintain high levels of expectancy but be consistent with each child.



LEARN TO TRAIN

Learn to Train

Chronological / Development Age:

- Males 9-12 and Females 8-11

Objectives:

- Enhance and develop ABCs (agility, balance, coordination) and overall sport skills
- Develop core footy skills
- Integrate physical, mental, cognitive and emotional training components within well-structured program
- Develop physical literacy

Match Modifications for Learning to Train

- Size 1 synthetic ball
- 6-a-side played on modified size field (3 X 20 m zones)
- 9-a-side played on modified size field (3 X 25 m zones)
- 12-a-side played ("rep" footy only) on modified size field (60m wide x 90m long)
- Modified tackling rules introduced
- Max 4 X 10-minute quarters
- 70% training to 30% competition-specific training and actual competition

Summary:

- Emphasis is the refinement and maintenance of players' core sport skills, physical capabilities, fundamental movement skills and acquisition of sport specific skills in footy.
- An understanding and appreciation of the laws of the game as well as the elements of Fair Play (ethics) are developed.
- Clubs, Schools and Community outreach are the main delivery mechanisms at this stage.
- Participants are encouraged to participate in multiple sports.

"Learn to Train" for Footy:

AusKick Pro (U13, Club & School) focuses on holistic athlete development and specific footy skills; Basic skills should continue to be developed during this phase. Sessions are fun, social and safe and include fun skill activities (not drills) and modified shortened games.

Characteristics of children at this stage:

- Physical Characteristics:
 - Onset of puberty and beginning a period of rapid growth
 - Different parts of body growing at different rates; arm & leg length increases before the trunk
 - Girls begin growth spurt between 10-14 years and grow at very different rates
- Mental/Cognitive:
 - Attention span is gradually increasing
 - Abstract thinking becomes firmly established
 - Children establish their preferred learning style
- Emotional:
 - Egocentric thought
 - Hormonal activity increases resulting in mood swings and changes in behaviour
 - Friendships and groups become increasingly important

Implications for Coaching at Learn to Train stage:

- Athletes may temporarily lose some of their ability to "know where they are". Monitor carefully to ensure appropriate adaptations are being made. Skills already refined may need to be re-learned.
- Emphasize low stretching exercises when movement and flexibility is restricted as a result of rapid growth.
- Be aware that age-related groupings may not be appropriate. Coaches should look at developmental stage rather than chronological age to accommodate for very different sized individuals at the same age.
- Use this period for maximum improvement in skill development. Agility, balance and co-ordination are fully trainable.
- Plan for success. Introduce coping strategies in the face of strong fears of failure, including mental imagery.
- Build on success. Be aware that athletes develop at very different rates and although early developers make early progress, include all athletes. Be aware that late developers may have greater potential.



TRAIN TO TRAIN

Train to Train

Chronological / Development Age:

- Males 12-16 and Females 11-15

Objectives:

- Build an aerobic base
- Develop speed and strength towards the end of the stage
- Further develop and consolidate sport specific footy skills
- This is a window of accelerated adaptation to aerobic, speed, and strength training

Match Modifications for Training to Train

- Size 3 synthetic or leather ball
- 9-a-side played on modified size field (60m X 90m)
- 12-a-side played ("rep" footy) on modified size field (65-75m X 100-110m)
- Full tackling rules introduced (school teams follow school policy on permissible contact in sports)
- Max 4 X 15-minute quarters
- 60% training to 40% competition-specific training and actual competition

Summary:

- Emphasis is to optimise the development of players' fitness levels, and their individual, positional and team skills.
- Competitions should be of quality, meaningful well-graded competitions that match the skill levels of opposing teams.
- Advanced technical and tactical skills are introduced including decision-making in a game and basic performance-enhancing skills such as warm-up, cool-down, nutritional preparedness, hydration, recovery, etc.

"Train to Train" for Footy:

AFL Junior programs in either Club or School provide youth in this stage with fun, fast, and skillful programs supporting players' ability to execute basic footy skills and contributing to a sense of fun and skill mastery. The pace of the game engages their attention, adrenalin is stimulated in close competition, and success is experienced in skillful play, fulfilling team goals and coaches' instructions – all of which are shared with their peers. Footy provides a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Implications for coaching at "Train to Train" stage:

- Develop strong communication skills, empathy and understanding.
- Ensure two-way communication channels are always open. Allow athletes input into the decision making.
- Try to organize social events, along with physical training & competitions.
- Use this period for maximum improvement in skill development.
- Vary activities and training to avoid overuse. Make players aware of the effects of their changing body shape on sport skills.
- Consider the two windows of accelerated adaptation to strength training for females: the first occurs immediately after PHV (Peak Height Velocity: the period where maximum rate of growth occurs. It is the onset of PHV that is the best determiner of when to increase the training focus on aerobic and strength development) and the second begins with the onset of menarche. For males, there is one window and it begins 12-18 months after PHV.
- Optimize aerobic training.
- Emphasize flexibility training given the rapid growth of bones, tendons, ligaments and muscles.
- Be aware of how to deal with natural weight gains. Teach players how to compete in varied circumstances.
- Players can understand the technical requirements of the sport by the end of this stage and can make decisions about their training pathway.
- Use talent identification to help athletes focus on two sports.
- Utilize single and double periodization as the optimal framework of preparation.
- Players learn to cope with the physical and mental challenges of competition.



TRAIN TO COMPETE

Train to Compete

Chronological / Development Age:

- Males 16-19 and Females 15-18

Objectives:

- Optimize the engine and learn to compete
- Optimize fitness preparation and sport-, individual-, and position-specific skills as well as performance.
- All the objectives of Train to Train must be achieved before the objectives of Train to Compete can begin.

Match Modifications for Training to Compete

- Size 4 leather ball (women); Size 5 leather ball (men)
- 10-a-side played on modified size field (75m X 110)
- Full tackling rules (school teams follow school policy on permissible contact in sports); Match Rules of the Game are played according to AFL Junior Match Policy
- 4 X 20-minute quarters
- 40% training to 60% competition-specific training and actual competition

Summary:

- Athletes choose one sport on which to focus, train, and compete in; However, multi-sport participation is encouraged
- Players must feel as though they are an essential part of the team, developing personal self-worth, self-efficacy, and connection with the community, club and team.
- Commitment and loyalty to the team, social responsibility both on and off the field, should be in line with adult standards and acknowledged.

“Train to Compete” for Footy:

AFL Youth programs either Club or School provide youth in this stage with fun, fast, and skillful programs supporting players’ ability to execute advanced footy skills and contributing to a sense of fun and skill mastery. Competitive opportunities increase in quality and quantity, contributing to players’ sense of accomplishment and increased skill mastery.

AFL Youth Development Team, the Wolfpack, is the national junior program for individuals seeking elite competitive opportunities and skill improvement at the high-performance level. This program is not consistently in place in Canada, as it relies on travelling youth teams from other countries to be supported.

Implications for Coaching at the “Train to Compete” stage:

- There are major decisions being made by players about examinations, post-secondary education, employment, and social/emotional changes. Coaches should be aware of external pressures facing athletes.
- Peer group pressure leads to conflicting loyalties. Players may give up the sport because of peer pressure. Be sensitive in goal setting to ensure that common goals are established and met.
- Treat athletes as adults. Share goals and work co-operatively. Maintain a coach-led structure.
- Rate of improvement in motor ability and skill development will decline. Be aware that while the rate is slower, improvements are still being made.
- Maximize strength training to bring about overall improvement. Optimize neuromuscular training.
- Provide year-round, high-intensity, individual-event and position-specific training.
- Teach players’, who are now proficient at performing basic and sport specific skills, to perform these skills under a variety of competitive conditions during training.
- Provide opportunities for recreational competitive play, as well as progression towards elite levels of competition, depending on what the player is interested in pursuing.
- Place special emphasis on optimum preparation by modelling high competitions in training.
- Consider athletes from other sports who are looking for a new competitive opportunity (ice hockey, soccer, basketball, athletics (track & field), rugby, and lacrosse are just a few sports where footy athletes may be recruited).



Train to Win

Chronological / Development Age:

- Males 19-23 and Females 18-21

Objectives:

- High performance opportunities at the National Championships (annually, except in IC years)
- Participation in National High Performance program as part of National Men’s or Women’s Teams

Match Implications for Train to Win

- Size 4 leather ball (women); Size 5 leather ball (men)
- 18-a-side (women); 18-a-side (men)
- Full tackle rules; as per Rules of the Game and the Spirit of the Rules (AFL)
- Full oval field: 110-155m X 135-185m
- 20 min quarters plus time on
- 25% training to 75% competition-specific training and actual competition

Summary:

- Athletes train and compete as part of their Provincial Team
- Opportunities for elite skill development and integrated sport team experts to support talent and athlete development
- Opportunities for competitive recreational play so individuals can play to their desired level
- This is a preparatory stage for the “Ultimate Performance” stage

“Train to Win” for Footy:

Provincial Team Selection: Athletes are selected to train and compete as part of their Provincial Team leading up to and including the AFL Canada National Championships (held annually, with the exception of years in which the International Cup is held.)

National Development Teams (North Stars Men’s Development Team and Midnight Suns Women’s Development Team): National squads which provides coaching support as well as international and trans-border competition opportunities (as available) to up and coming athletes who have been identified as potential National level athletes. Development Team holds a maximum of 24 athlete positions for each gender.

Implications for Coaching at “Train to Win” stage:

- Athletes are located in many different regions across Canada, challenging our ability to provide regular ongoing coaching services; Must optimize technology and source local resources.
- Coaches must work with individual athletes to source experts in their region that match individual and team goals.

Competition at the “Train to Win” stage:

- Strategic competitions as part of the Provincial and National Development team, supported by regional and club competitions on a more regular basis, to maximize limited resources available for athletes.
- 25% training to 75% competition-specific training and actual competition.



ULTIMATE PERFORMANCE

Ultimate Performance

Chronological / Development Age:

- Males 23+/- and Females 21+/-

Objectives:

- Representation on the National Teams
- Participation in professional AFL or AFLW League

Match Implications for Ultimate Performance

- Size 4 leather ball (women); Size 5 leather ball (men)
- International Cup: 18-a-side (men & women), AFL Women's professional league: 16-a-side, AFL men's professional league: 18-a-side
- Full tackle rules; as per Rules of the Game and the Spirit of the Rules (AFL)
- Full oval field: 110-155m X 135-185m
- 20 min quarters plus time on
- 25% training to 75% competition-specific training and actual competition

Summary:

- Maximizing fitness preparation
- World class sport performance requires world-class equipment and coaching that is fine-tuned to the demands of the event and the requirements of the athletes
- Elite athlete contracts and sponsorship agreements in place

Training for "Ultimate Performance" in Footy:

National High Performance Program: Athletes are selected to train, learn, develop and ultimately compete for a position on the Canadian teams that will attend the next International Cup (held in Melbourne, Australia on a triennial basis).

Northwind National Men's Team and Northern Lights National Women's Team: National high-performance teams that will attend the next International Cup, representing Canada at the pinnacle of amateur international competition in Australian football. Each National Team is limited to 30 athletes that may attend any IC including alternate players. Athletes are supported by a Head Coach, Team Manager, and 4-6 Assistant Coaches.

Professional AFL or AFLW League participation: Individuals have the opportunity to attend Training and Recruitment Camps in Australia which lead to selection for professional league participation as part of the Australia Football League or the Australia Football League Women. (For example: CrossCoders, a global program that provides top female athletes with a once in a lifetime opportunity to become a professional in Australia's premier football league.)

Implications for Coaching at "Ultimate Performance" stage:

- Consolidating a cohesive team that is spread across a wide geographical area. Some athletes may have no teammates within driving distance, challenging their capacity to train and compete at the elite level.
- Consideration must be made to ensure training camp and athlete identification events are held equally in the east or west of Canada, or alternatively must take place in a central location in order to remove barriers to participation such as travel cost & time.
- National team performance is on a triennial, in that performance needs to peak every three years at the International Cup competition (hosted in Melbourne, Australia).
- Few international competitions of amateur athletes in footy exist, requiring a significant investment of resources to take a large team to even just one other competition before the IC. Planning long-term is crucial to the success of the national coaching staff.



ACTIVE FOR LIFE

Active for Life

Chronological / Development Age:

- This may occur at any age

Objectives:

- A smooth transition from an athlete's competitive career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport.
- We encourage movement from highly competitive sport to lifelong competitive sport through age group competition such as senior recreation / Masters Leagues.
- We encourage and support individuals to move towards sport-related careers such as coaching, umpiring, sport administration, media, etc.

Match Modifications for Active for Life

- All ages and genders, any setting, as per available players and skill levels
- Size 4 leather ball (women); Size 5 leather ball (men)
- 7-, 9-, 10-, and 18-a-side with modified field size at each team size
- Consider alternate formats of the game which would allow fewer players, shorter playing time, and no-contact rules
- Full tackle rules; as per Rules of the Game and the Spirit of the Rules (AFL) for those at the highest levels
- Field sizes vary from indoor soccer field to full oval size
- Game length determined by format and level of participants

Summary:

- A smooth transition from a players' competitive career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport
- A positive experience in sport is the key to retaining athletes after they leave the competitive stream of footy.
- Preparation for player exit from competitive stream, redirecting players to recreational variations of footy, as well as to other sports or activities where necessary
- Education of mature athletes in the available options for remaining involved in competitions through other roles

"Active for Life" for Footy:

- **AFL Club Senior Leagues:** Canadian clubs have an active recreational competitive program in place that encourages weekly training and/or competitions between recreational players of footy, for both men's and women's divisions.
- **Rec Footy, AFL 9s, Footy 7s:** Recreational, non-contact formats of the game which allow individuals to continue playing the game competitively and still protecting their body against significant injuries. Indoor versions utilizing fewer players and being played in a shorter match time allows for adults with work, family, and community commitments to remain physically active and involved in sport.

Implications for Coaching at "Active for Life" stage:

- Coaches should make every effort where possible to redirect players to versions of the game and field positions where they are pre-disposed to train and perform well.
- Requires quality, tiered competition appropriate to the age/stage and physical capacities of athletes in order to ensure health and safety of players.
- Cooperation between clubs in a region to allow for quality competition levels is necessary.
- Athletes can be encouraged to continue participation in the sport through supporting roles such as umpiring, coaching, managing teams, or board governance.

General Athlete Development Matrix

This section provides an overview of each stage of athlete development as it relates to an individual’s progression in the key areas of: Technical / Strategy, Physical, Psychosocial, and Life Skills. The building of a complete athlete development matrix is a complex and detailed process which will be part of our next stage of research and resource development.

Stage	Physical	Technical / Tactical / Strategic	Psychological	Life Skills
Active Start <i>Males / Females 0-6</i>	Multi-sport activities and games; learning to pass and catch balls with accuracy; building agility, balance and coordination through active play	Learning basic rules of the game; Developing skills in passing the ball, and moving it up the field of play with help of teammates	Willing to try and learn new skills on and off the field; Excitement to play with friends and explore their personal physical abilities	Come to practice prepared to play, with tools needed to be physically active
FUNDamentals <i>Males 6-9 Females 6-8</i>	Participating in a variety of sports and physical activities; Working hard to develop skills and abilities in strength, agility, balance, and coordination	Starting to learn basic teamwork, working cooperatively to move the ball towards a target; Large muscle groups are developing; Increasing abilities in speed, agility, and coordination	Attention span is improving, allowing for better focus and discipline in practices and games; Feel secure in repetitive routines and disciplines	Developing an understanding of the AFL “Spirit of the Game”, the reasoning behind the AFL Rules; Taking responsibility for themselves means coming to practice on time with all tools and equipment needed
Learn to Train <i>Males 9-12 Females 9-11</i>	Onset of puberty and a period of rapid growth; different parts of the body are growing at different rates, arm & leg length increase before the trunk; With increased attention span & strength comes the ability to have longer practices	Ability to consistently move the ball up the field in a variety of ways has improved; Has learned both offensive and defensive strategies; Can demonstrate good technique in kicking, handpassing, and bouncing the ball; Game-based decision making is introduced and developing	Egocentric thinking; Hormonal activity increases results in mood swings and behavior changes; Friendships and peer group is increasingly important; Can set short-term goals and work towards achieving them, persevering through challenges	Improving ability to communicate personal challenges and advocate for self to overcome these; Ability to take on short term, small group leadership roles; Recognition of the impact their actions has on others; Comprehends the concept of Fair Play and ethics in sport
Train to Train <i>Males 12-16 Females 11-15</i>	Developing increased stamina and strength, through independent training and tracking, outside of team practices	Advanced technical and tactical skills are introduced including decision-making in a game, and basic performance-enhancing skills such as warm-up, cool-down, nutritional preparedness, hydration, recovery	Commitment to team and attachment to the peer group found there; Increasing resiliency in the face of obstacles and challenges; Developing long term measurable and attainable goals	Self-motivated to attend and maximize the time at each practice or game; Able to identify setbacks in training and consider multiple options for overcoming them; Able to resolve conflicts among teammates by listening to everyone, taking personal responsibility for the impact your actions have had on others, and taking actions necessary for successful resolution

Stage	Physical	Technical / Tactical / Strategic	Psychological	Life Skills
Train to Compete Males 16-19 Females 15-18	Optimize fitness preparation and sport-, individual-, and position-specific skills as well as performance; Rate of improvement in motor ability and skill development will decline; Maximize strength training to bring about overall improvement; Provide year-round, high-intensity, individual-event and position-specific training	Teach players’, who are now proficient at performing basic and sport specific skills, to perform these skills under a variety of competitive conditions during training; Provide opportunities for recreational competitive play, as well as progression towards elite levels of competition, depending on what the player is interested in pursuing	Players must feel as though they are an essential part of the team, developing personal self-worth, self-efficacy, and connection with the community, club and team; Tactical and performance decision-making skills are improving during high-stake competitions	Responsible and ethical leadership skills are demonstrated among peers both on and off the field; Dealing with setbacks and can overcome adversity; Balancing education, work, and sport goals takes discipline and commitment
Train to Win (Males 19-23 and Females 18-21)	Opportunities for elite skill development and integrated sport team experts to support talent and athlete development; Individualized training plans are in place; Working at exceeding national and/or world-class physical fitness standards	Able to consider multiple offensive and defensive approaches in competitive games; Excellent technical execution of the skills necessary for competitions; Able to move the ball up and down the field using a variety of skills, maximizing teammates strengths and tactical positions to achieve points for the team; High accuracy in the execution of kicks and handpasses, particularly in competitive situations	Set personal goals and take responsibility for meeting them, working to achieve the best athletic self; self-actualization and self-expression are important and there is a need to be self-directed and independent; Major decisions on career, education and lifestyle are now of significant importance. Interactions with the opposite sex continue to be a strong priority with lasting relationships being formed	Serves as a mentor and coach supporter for future footy players; Believes in ethical sport and fair play, building respectful relationships with umpires, coaches, staff, and volunteers both on and off the field; Represent your team and country with a high degree of integrity
Ultimate Performance Males 23+/- and Females 21+/-	Maximizing fitness preparation year-round, utilizing periodization principles to peak performance at key competitions; World class sport performance requires world-class equipment, ongoing commitment, and coaching that is fine-tuned to the demands of the event and the requirements of the athletes	Utilizing all available resources to develop tactical and strategic analysis skills to achieve success on the world-stage; Utilize single, double, triple or multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation	Optimizing mental preparation for competitions by developing clear goals for the event, minimizing impact of distractions, remaining positive and optimistic, and managing emotions; Working with an experienced Sports Psychologist can give athletes the edge they need for success in a professional arena	All of the athlete’s physical, technical, tactical (including decision-making skills), mental, personal and lifestyle capacities are fully established and the focus of training has shifted to the maximization of performance
Active for Life This may occur at any age	Minimum of 60 minutes moderate daily activity or 30 minutes of intense activity for adults	Adapting the previously learned technical, tactical and strategic skills learned for competitive traditional footy to recreational varieties of the sport is critical	Preparation and education of players to exit from the competitive stream should begin as early as the Train to Train stage so that players are aware of options for lifelong physical activity and participation in sport, smoothing the transitions	A positive experience in sport is the key to retaining athletes after they leave the competitive stream; Redirecting players to recreational varieties of footy as well as to other sports and activities where necessary

Coach Education, Game and Umpire Development

The AFL, through its Game Development Department in Australia, is the international organization responsible for the development, implementation and ongoing management of education and training programs of coaches, umpires, trainers and other medical support personnel in the sport of Australian football internationally. They are also currently developing new workshops and programs in Club Management and oversight. These courses are in line with the Australian Sports Commission education programs and sport industry vocational programs. The AFL’s accreditation programs for coaches, umpires and trainers are competency-based. More details on each can be found in the following sections.

COACH PATHWAY

The Australian Football League (Australia) is the parent organization that currently sets and determines the coaching pathway for all levels. AFL Canada must work with the National Coaching Certification Program in Canada to consolidate the international coaching standards into the Canadian coaching framework.

The coach’s role is to arrange for the best possible teaching and learning conditions in training and at matches for the individuals participating. We also know that coaches are the primary reasons why players either stay or leave footy – there is nothing more directly linked to drop-out than having an abusive or angry, bad-tempered, inadequately trained coach.

- Coaches influence the forming and development of personalities in their care;
- The primary years are the “golden years” of development of fundamental motor skills and of skill learning specific to sport. Not only is this the most rapid learning phase of young lives in this regard, but also a failure to develop such skills pre-youth is a major factor influencing teenage drop-out in sport²³.

Basic principles in Coach Education and Development in footy:

- Learning is an active process:
 - There are identifiable phases to learning of physical skills;
 - Learning processes change over time as experience increases
 - Young people can learn by letting them watch, listen and then experiment for themselves; trying an activity first and then refining the skills with help or feedback; and by watching other young people
- Learning is developmental:
 - Learning changes as young people grow and mature, with physical changes in their size and strength
 - Their experience as they progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced levels of skill
- Learning is multi-dimensional:
 - People typically learn more than one thing at a time
 - While building sport skills, an individual may also be learning team work, what are the expectations of each player, what skills they excel at

Aims of quality coaching:

- Coaches aim to pass on to young people a sound understanding of the:
 - Skills, tactics, strategies and rules
 - Etiquette and behaviour standards
- Helping players build an ability to make decisions independently and participate within the ethos of the sport.
- Coaches assist in learning outcomes best by being flexible. They need to plan:
 - What they will instruct
 - How they will instruct
 - How they will structure tasks

Responsible Coaching Movement:

Within Australia, all state and territory football bodies have a Mandatory Accreditation Policy. AFL Canada follows their lead in that coaches must complete an approved AFL Coaching Course if they are coaching children. There are no second chances, children need to be appropriately coached through these formative years.

Furthermore, AFL Canada is committed to the **Responsible Coaching Movement** (National Coaching Association of Canada) and has adopted the following policies and principles:

- **Rule of Two:** there will always be two screened and (NCCP) trained or certified coaches with a minor athlete. This means that any one-on-one interaction between a coach and an athlete must take place within earshot and view of the second coach, with the exception of medical emergencies. One of the coaches must also be of the same gender as the athlete. Should there be a circumstance where a second screened and (NCCP) trained or certified coach is not available, a screened volunteer, parent, or adult should be recruited.
- **Organizational Policies:** Code of Conduct policy and Background Screening Policy (See Appendix 4)
- **Coach Education Policy:** The NCCP “Making Ethical Decisions” module is required (at minimum) for all individuals who work with children and vulnerable adults.

AFL Coaching Accreditation

Our international governing body (AFL) has the following courses and recommendations for coaches. AFL Canada follows their recommendations. Currently coaching accreditation can only be awarded through AFL oversight. More information about AFL coaching can be found at: <https://coach.afl>

Currently AFL Canada is not included in the National Coaching Certification Program. Our goal is to be completely included and aligned with the NCCP certification programming by 2020. Once our National Sport Organization status has been achieved, alignment of AFL Coaching certification with NCCP Coaching standards will be addressed.

Community / Participation Stream (CS4L: Active Start, FUNdamentals, Learn to Train)

Foundation Coach – Junior: All volunteers supporting AFL KinderKick and AusKick programs (CS4L: Active Start, FUNdamentals, Learn to Train) are recommended to take this course. Assistant coaches and head coaches should have this accreditation at a minimum. The course is conducted online through www.coach.afl, outlines the entry level learnings required to be a successful coach. (3-4 hour course online)

Foundation Coach - Youth: Minimum one person present at each AFL Youth/Junior Club or school team should have this accreditation. Coordinating/head coaches, junior and/or primary school team coaches are recommended to be accredited. Includes: planning & organizing training sessions, skill games and modified games, growth and development, safety, legal and ethical issues. (3-4 hour course online)

Foundation Coach - Senior: Coaches of adults age 17+ (open age) are recommended to hold this accreditation. Includes: planning & organizing training sessions; modified games; skills & drills for team play and tactics; fitness for footy; recovery & rehabilitation; safety, legal and ethical issues in coaching. (3-4 hour course online)

Competition / High Performance Stream (CS4L: Train to Compete, Train to Win, Ultimate Performance)

AFL Youth/Senior (Level 2): Coaches involved at a higher level (rep. teams, development squads) attending regional competitions beyond club-based matches. Prerequisite: Foundation Coach. Conducted through practical, hands-on involvement of participants. Focusing on preparing a coach to plan, prepare, conduct, review and adapt a year-long program of coaching players at Club (adult) and High School teams. Assessment is during real-world coaching situations during a match/competition. Course involves a live-in workshop with a review day at the end of the season. (Approximately 30 hours of course work is required in addition to practical assessment.)

AFL Senior (Level 3): Accreditation for coaches (in Australia) involved in AFL professional league, state leagues, and TAC cup (Australia) or other programs in the AFL Talent Pathway. This is the highest coaching accreditation offered by the AFL. Covers in greater depth those areas dealt with in Level 2 plus relevant current issues, including technology, public relations, and the role of the coach as program manager and mentor. Assessment conducted during job/coaching situations. Coaches working in or aspiring to this level must apply to be invited to a week-long, live-in program. Currently only offered in Australia.

²³ AFL, “AFL Junior Match Policy”, 2016

UMPIRE PATHWAY²⁴

Footy matches require appropriately educated and qualified umpires for the level of athlete and competition the match takes place within. Accreditation for Level 1 (Introductory) AFL umpires can be completed within Canada through a number of accredited and certified trainers. AFL Canada supports the training of new umpire volunteers annually. Level 2 can be completed either in conjunction with the US National AFL Championships or in Australia. Level 3 can only be completed in Australia. This presents a significant barrier to umpire development within Canadian borders as only a few individuals are able to travel to USA or Australia for what is primarily a part time & seasonal volunteer commitment.

There are three types of umpires with the AFL with different levels of training and accreditation needed for each:

Field Umpiring – these are the men and women in the middle making all the decisions around free kicks and managing the game. Similar to a referee in soccer or rugby, they are ultimately in charge. Perfect for anyone who likes to be in the thick of the action and knows a bit about AFL.

Boundary Umpiring – for those who like running and being on their feet, boundary umpires are responsible for judging when the ball goes out of bounds and helping the goal umpires with crucial score decisions. A great starting point for anyone who may not be familiar with AFL or looking for another alternative to field umpiring.

Goal Umpiring – the umpires who receive the most camera time making the big decision on whether it was a goal or a behind, goal umpiring is less physically demanding than field or boundary umpiring but still allows you to get right in the thick of it. Perfect for any experience or fitness level.

Currently there are different approaches to umpiring across Canada. AFL Canada plans to adopt a broad set of common Umpiring Principles that would be applied consistently across the provinces within Canada, with the objective of development of umpiring personnel with qualifications developed on a common and consistent basis. These principles draw on and are loosely based on a similar plan from the AFL in Australia.

AFL Canada will align their umpiring level classification that has been developed in Australia which now has the following levels:

- Introductory – Entry Level classification (Level 1)
- Developmental – Passed Level 1 working towards Level 2
- Advanced – Passed Level 2 and above

As Australian football in Canada grows, we strive to develop a group of people across Canada with AFL umpire qualifications for the purposes of them training, coaching and developing future umpires, on a consistent basis and to as high a level of competencies as possible. In order to build trained and certified umpires across Canada, we strive to appoint regional Umpire Coaches to represent, where possible, Western Canada (Yukon, NWT, BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan), Eastern Canada (Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Labrador), and Central Canada (Manitoba, Ontario). Ideally these would be coordinated by one National Umpires Coordinator.

As AFL Canada builds and grows its network of umpires across Canada, so too will the infrastructure that supports umpiring will necessarily grow alongside it. AFL Canada will adopt a common and consistent umpire coaching assessment form that would be applied across Canada for the purposes of coaching and assessing umpires. Furthermore, AFL Canada will adopt a common and consistent grading and classification basis for reportable / send-off offenses that would be applied across Canada in the various provincial leagues, tournaments and National level expenses and above. These form the beginning of the foundation to build our Canadian Umpire Pathway.

²⁴ Canadian umpire pathway adapted from the US AFL Umpire Pathway, Retrieved from <http://usaflua.org/accreditation/> (2018, August)



Competition Guidelines

Optimal competition calendar planning at all stages is critical to athlete development. At certain stages, athlete development takes precedence over competition. At later stages, the ability to compete well becomes the focus.

Key points to consider in planning competitions:

- Optimal sport-specific competition ratios are required for all stages of Long-Term Athlete Development.
- Level and length of the competitive season should be aligned with the changing needs of the developmental athlete progressing through Long-Term Athlete Development.
- Over-competition and under-training at the Learn to Train and Train to Train stages result in a lack of basic skills and fitness.
- The appropriate level of competition is critical to technical, tactical and mental development at all stages.
- Schedules are often set for team sports by leagues and organizations and not by the coach and athlete, making optimal training based on periodization difficult.
- Competitions in Canada must be created and scheduled strategically, with due regard for the optimal performance of an athlete and their tapering and peaking requirements.
- Optimal training-to-competition ratios for individual sports vary greatly and must be determined on a sport-specific basis.
- While international and national calendars are usually well integrated, a systematic sport-specific competition review needs to be undertaken. This is one of the biggest challenges for team sports in Long-Term Athlete Development design and implementation.

Appendix 2 demonstrates the current competitions available in a typical non-IC year

AFL Canada will undertake a full competition review by 2021, using experts in LTAD, competition, and Australian football to collaborate and make recommendations for consideration.

LTAD for Women’s Footy in Canada

In Canada, women’s footy is at a critical stage of development. The national team has been performing well at past International Cup competitions, but grassroots development is lacking. This has made recruitment and retention of female athletes challenging. In order to grow the game and maintain momentum for our national team, it is crucial that women’s footy be promoted and supported in a manner that will bring new players to the game and enable elite female players to perform and compete on the world stage.

Objectives of the LTAD for women’s footy in Canada:

- To improve the way women’s footy is organized and supported by promoting collaboration amongst all levels of footy organizations, from AFL Canada to local clubs and players.
- To ensure that the National Women’s Team (Northern Lights) remains competitive and consistently places in top three at every International Cup.
- To implement a leadership and mentorship program to identify and train current and future leaders, coaches, players, administrators and officials who will develop women’s footy in Canada.

Current state of women’s footy in Canada:

- As of the 2018 playing season, there were 210 senior women playing footy regularly in Canada while roughly 33,000 women and girls are introduced to the sport annually through a variety of school and promotional programs.²⁵
- There are limited opportunities for women to play organized footy in non-metropolitan centres in Canada.
- There is a lack of awareness of existing opportunities to play footy, and the relative “newness” of the sport, and the national team “elite” program, all contribute to a low level of participation by women nationally.
- There are organized women’s footy programs in the larger metropolitan cities and their suburbs: Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa and Montréal.
- There are few opportunities for women to play 18-a-side footy outside of National Championships, limiting our competitive athlete development.

- There is extremely limited promotion of footy in general, and women’s footy in particular, in traditional and non-traditional footy playing communities.
- There is currently no feeder system in place to enroll girls at a young age from school or youth groups and provide them with proper training and encouragement.
- At the elite level, the National Team is expected to maintain its success in international competition with little infrastructure or access to high performance training methods. With the increasing competition at the international level, Canadian players will shortly be unable to keep up and compete at an elite level, given the current training infrastructure.

The inadequate training infrastructure, coupled with the limited opportunities for women to play footy in Canada, lead to many difficulties in recruiting and retaining players who have the skills to compete at an international level.

Requirements for the Future Success of Women’s Footy in Canada

- Establish a national vision to create a welcoming and challenging environment for female players of all ages and abilities throughout Canada.
- Promotion of footy in general, along with women’s footy on its own, in Canadian and sport culture. This can only be achieved through communications that integrate coordinators and coaches at all levels (club, region, provincial, national).
- Increase the quantity and quality of coaches, administrators and umpires in Canada to provide a good technical skill basis for all levels of female players. Ensure that coaches understand the unique requirements for building positive training, competition and recovery environments for female athletes.
- Increase the number and variety of opportunities for women and girls to play footy with and against other women and girls in Canada.
- Provide sufficient financial and human resources to support women’s footy at the national level. The successes of the National Team can be leveraged to promote interest in women’s footy in Canada.
- Maintain the recently established women’s athlete representative on the AFL Canada Board to help promote timely and transparent communication between players and administrators. Build upon existing Canadian women’s footy programs to help establish best practices and programs in provinces and cities that do not currently have organized women’s programs.
- Ensure that AFL Canada’s social media and online presence is improved to increase the visibility of women’s footy in Canada by including photos, stories, information for beginners and how experienced players can become involved. Clearly illustrate the athlete pathway and opportunities that exist for female players along the way.



²⁵ AFL Canada 2018 Census Report

The Role of AFL Canada and other Sporting Bodies

In its role as the National Governing Body for footy, when we achieve this status granted by Sport Canada, the Australian Football League of Canada would take on the implementation of many of the structural and framework changes required to continue to grow the game. Policy decided at a national level would then be delivered locally and in line with local needs.

In regard to LTAD, specific roles and responsibilities AFL Canada would include the following:

- Ensuring that any relevant current and future programs and initiatives affecting the athlete’s development are consistent with the aims of the LTAD sports system for footy.
- Ensuring that existing ethics, equity, child welfare, facilities, disabilities, volunteer, and other strategies are aligned and integrated into the new system.
- Ensuring that competition rules and guidelines are designed to be consistent with LTAD principles.
- Ensuring that appropriate funding levels support the LTAD sports system and are targeted towards the young athlete’s growth and development key stages at school, club, district/league, and provincial level.

AFL Canada will bring together provincial and territorial representatives to form an LTAD Committee that will oversee the implementation of LTAD nationally. Representation will be drawn from membership to include individuals who are players (including both men, women, and those representing junior players), officials (umpires), coaches, and club management volunteers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

AFL Canada will be working with key stakeholders to successfully implement this LTAD and achieve organizational goals and objectives. Some of these stakeholders have been discussed in previous sections but more details about the foreseeable implications of our ongoing relationship follows.

Coaching / NCCP Competencies

In preparation for future NCCP accreditation, AFL Canada recommends that all coaches take the **“Make Ethical Decisions”** module at the minimum. By successfully completing the Make Ethical Decisions (MED) training, coaches will be fully equipped to handle ethical situations with confidence and surety. MED training helps coaches identify the legal, ethical, and moral implications of difficult situations that present themselves in the world of team and individual sport.

AFL Canada further recommends that coaches working with children and youth age 5-12 pursue the following NCCP training (AFL Canada recommends that the courses with * are the priority):

Coach Initiation in Sport (e-Learning Module)*:

This NCCP module was developed to introduce new or experienced coaches to the foundational skills in coaching, such as: long-term athlete development, ethics, coaching motivation, and athlete safety and wellness. The Coach Initiation in Sport module will also introduce coaches to the NCCP, a valuable tool for preparing for a coach’s first in-person NCCP workshop.

NCCP Fundamental Movement Skills*:

The National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Fundamental Movement Skills Workshop provides a comprehensive introduction to the fundamental movement skills and the core-competencies of the NCCP, with the help of significant hands-on activities.

Making Headway (e-Learning Module)*:

Designed to help you gain the knowledge and skills required to ensure the safety of your athletes, these NCCP Professional Development modules will make you concussion smart!

Coaching Athletes with a Disability (e-Learning Module):

This is a resource for coaches who are new to coaching athletes with a disability. As well, many coaches who are already working with athletes with a disability will find useful information and resources in the online module. Provides coaches the knowledge to deliver quality, positive sport experiences for athletes, specifically with behavioural, intellectual, physical, and sensory disabilities.

Respect in Sport

AFL Canada is committed to providing all players, coaches, and umpires with Respect in Sport and therefore recommends that all sport leaders participate in the Sport Activity Leaders Program developed and delivered by the Respect Group. These online modules are easily accessible and are designed to empower people to recognize and prevent bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination through interactive, online certification.

Umpire Accreditation

In May 2018, the AFL released the Introductory Umpiring Course designed for first year umpires, and currently available online worldwide. This is an introductory course that provides basic and general requirements for umpiring football. Canada can adopt this process from the AFL.

Development Umpire Accreditation replaces the previous Level 1 Accreditation. Competitions at or above the Provincial level would require the majority of Field Umpires be at this level. Successfully achieving this level requires:

- Completion of the Introductory Umpiring Course;
- Attending and participating in a course and coaching session with AFL Canada accredited umpire Coaches that would cover the required curriculum from AFL National Umpiring Curriculum;
- Be observed and demonstrate the applicable field umpire **Development Umpire Accreditation Competencies**.

Advanced Umpire Accreditation is the level formerly known as Level 2 Accreditation. In Australia it is the level expected of all community umpires in Open Age senior and reserves level. Competitions at or above the National level would require a minimum 1 Field Umpire at this level. Successfully achieving this level requires:

- Completion of the Introductory Umpiring Course;
- Attending and participating in a course and coaching session with AFL Canada accredited umpire Coaches that would cover the required curriculum from AFL National Umpiring Curriculum. (NOTE: Currently Canada does not have individuals with the advanced accreditation that would be able to provide the required sign off for Advanced Umpire Accreditation.)
- Be observed and demonstrate the applicable field umpire Advanced Umpire Accreditation Competencies in at least three matches.

The USAFL Umpires Association still uses Level 0, 1, 2, and 3 and so any umpiring accreditations issued by AFL Canada should reference both these old levels and the new AFL names. We will also grandfather and continue to recognize those with accreditation under the previous Level 1 & 2 system, with the equivalent levels.

Current AFL Canada provincial leagues and clubs

AFL Canada derives its strength from the provincial and regional players, coaches, umpires, and volunteers.

With great thanks, we recognize the contributions of each provincial association:
AFL BC, AFL Alberta, AFL Saskatchewan, AFL Manitoba, AFL Ontario, AFL Quebec, AFL Nova Scotia and AFL Newfoundland & Labrador.





Summary

Australian football is the largest sport in Australia and quickly growing in over 50 countries around the world. Canada has grown over the past 30 years to be a strong competitor on the world stage, and has the potential to remain a top international contender. In order to achieve this, it must overcome several challenges that currently exist and make changes to foster grassroots participation growth, align and promote talent identification and implement a framework that results in sport system alignment and integration.

The Long-Term Athlete Development Framework, Footy for Life, is the roadmap for transformation and offers a pathway for AFL Canada to achieve its goals. The implementation of this framework will allow us to unlock the potential for this game to continue to be a world leader and for increased participation at the grassroots level.

Footy for Life provides a framework and participant pathway to overcome the challenges identified. It will encourage greater participation by Canadians in Australian football and will provide them with the developmental opportunities to pursue their highest competitive potential or simply to remain active for life.

Implementation of Footy for Life requires engagement, communication and co-operation at all levels of the game. The adoption of this framework is an exciting opportunity to capture and foster the next stage in the growth of the game.

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Appendices

- 1. About the Australian Football International Cup
- 2. Typical Competition Calendar, Non-International Cup year
- 3. Match Modifications per LTAD stage
- 4. AFL Canada policies
 - a. Code of Conduct Policy (Endorsed by Board June 2018)
 - b. Member Protection and Respect Policy (Endorsed by Board January 2016)
 - c. Screening Policy (Draft policy under review)
- 5. Technical Skills Matrix



Appendix 1: About the Australian Football International Cup

The Australian Football International Cup (also known as the AFL International Cup, or IC) is an international sport competition in Australian football contested by international athletes only. It is coordinated by the Australian Football League’s game development arm and has run every three years since 2002.

The competition is the largest international Australian football event and the only one open to worldwide senior competition; although Australia, the home and world’s strongest nation in the game, does not participate as it would likely dominate the competition. The exception is the women’s OzIM Team, where only indigenous and multicultural Australians are able to enter.

Australia Football has had six International Cup competitions since 2002, with women being included in the competition since 2011. A “Community Round” has been included since 2005 including varying numbers of teams playing matches all over Australia including rural regions.

The Canadian men’s team’s highest placing has been 5th (2014). The women’s team successfully won the tournament in 2014 and came in 2nd in both 2011 and 2017. Australian football is not currently an Olympic sport but, when it is included on the Olympic roster, Canada would be well placed To be a medal contender. In order to achieve this, athletes and coaches across Canada must constantly strive to learn and improve so that they can stay on the leading edge.

Year	Competing Countries	Ranking
2002	11	9
2005	10	7
2008	16	6
2011	18	10
2014	18	5
2017	18	7

Table: Canada’s ranking in the Men’s division at the International Cup

Year	Team Name	Competing Countries	Ranking
2011	Northern Lights	5	2
2014	Northern Lights	7	1
2014	Midnight Suns	7	4
2017	Northern Lights	8	2

Table: Canada’s ranking in the Women’s division at the International Cup

Appendix 2: Typical Competition Calendar

The Club Competitor

The typical club player has an eight-month season with the focus on skill development as a means to enjoy the game and to compete in league/tournaments as a way to enjoy the full range of social and competitive aspect of Australian football.

General Preparation – Pre-season	Competition	Transition – Off-season
February - April	May - September	October - January
Indoor training sessions, if available	League play and tournaments	Other fitness activities

The Provincial/International Competitor

The provincial/international competitor trains nearly year-round and design their annual program based on key national and international events.

General Preparation – Pre-season	Specific Preparation	Pre-competition - Loading	Competition	Transition – Off-season
December - April	May	June-July	August	September-November
General fitness, skills – indoor sessions	Training camp / Provincial tournaments	Club based play in leagues or tournaments, build fitness and sharpen skills	Play international cup (or other International game in non-IC years)	Finish club play, other fitness activities in the off-season.

Appendix 3: Match Modifications per LTAD stage

LTAD Stage	Age / Gender	Match Program	Ball size / Type	Players per Team	Field Size Zone Size	Contact	Game Length
Active Start	U6 / Co-ed	KinderKick	Soft touch ball	No matches for this age group, game-based activities only			
FUNdamentals	M6-9 F6-8 Co-ed	AusKick Rookie	Size 1 Synthetic	6-a-side	40m wide by 60m long (3 20m zones)	Non-contact	Max 2 x 10m halves
				9-a-side	50m wide by 75m long (3 25m zones)		
Learn to Train	M9-12 F8-11 Co-ed	AusKick Pro School Footy	Size 1 Synthetic	6-a-side	40m wide by 60m long (3X 20m zones)	Modified tackling rules	Max 4 x 10m quarters
				9-a-side	50m wide by 75m long (3X 25m zones)		
Train to Train	M12-16 F11-15	Club/ School Footy	Size 3 Synthetic / Leather	12-a-side "Rep" footy	60m wide by 90m long	Club: Full tackle rules per laws of Australian football	15m quarters
	M12-16 F11-15			9-a-side	60m wide by 90 m long		
				12-a-side "Rep" footy	65-75m wide by 100-110 long	School: Dependent on school policy Mid-structure: consider two mids and two wings	
Train to Compete	M16-19	Club/ School Footy	Size 5 Leather	10-a-side	65-75m wide by 100-110 long	Club: Full tackle rules	
	F15-18		Size 4 Leather			School: Dependent on school policy Mid-structure: consider two mids and two wings	

LTAD Stage	Age / Gender	Match Program	Ball size / Type	Players per Team	Field Size Zone Size	Contact	Game Length
Train to Win	M19-23	Club/ University Footy (Modified)	Size 5 Leather	7-a-side	65-75m wide by 100-110m long	AFLX: Full tackle rules	10m quarters
	F18-21		Size 4 Leather				
	18-21 Co-ed		Size 4 Leather	7-a-side	Indoor soccer pitch	Indoors: Non-contact	10m quarters
				9-a-side	65-75m wide by 100-110m long	Outdoors: Non-contact	10m quarters
	M19-23		Size 5 Leather	10-a-side	65-75m wide by 100-110m long	Full tackle rules	20m quarter
	F18-21		Size 4 Leather				
	M19-23	Club/ University Footy (Full)	Size 5 Leather	18-a-side	110-155m wide by 135-185m long	Full tackle rules	20m quarters plus time on
	F18-21		Size 4 Leather	18-a-side			
Ultimate Performance	M23+	National Team Program	Size 5 Leather	18-a-side	110-155m wide by 135-185m long	Full tackle rules	20m quarters plus time on
	F21+		Size 4 Leather	18-a-side at IC & 16-a-side in AFLW			
Active for Life	All ages & gender	Any setting	Age appropriate	7-a-side	Indoor soccer field	Indoors: Non-contact	Game length determined by format and level of participants
				7-a-side	65-75m wide by 100-110 long	AFLX: Full tackle rules	
				9-a-side		Non-contact	
				10-16 -a-side	Full tackle rules		
				18-a-side	110-155m wide by 135-185m long	Full tackle rules	

Appendix 4: Current AFLC Policies

AFL Canada currently has in place the following policies which actively support the development of athletes, coaches, and umpires within our sport. A current copy of all of our policies can be found on our website at www.aflcanada.com.

Code of Conduct Policy: governs the actions of players, coaches and umpires both on and off the field of play

Member Protection and Respect National Policy: aims to provide guidance for expected behaviour of AFL Canada community members in the conduct of activities related to Australian football within Canada, and outside Canada where national teams and other representation of AFL Canada takes place.

Screening Policy: AFL Canada understands that screening personnel and volunteers is a vital part of providing a safe sporting environment for athletes.

Appendix 5: Technical Skills Matrix

This table illustrates the many sport specific skills required to be successful in Australian football, as well as the progressive acquisition of these skills. The LTAD stage in which each skill should be introduced and mastered is listed along the top axis of the table with each of the skills listed on the left-hand side. Individuals should reach mastery level of the skills chronologically within each heading. For example, an individual must learn basic handballing before they can progress to learn an “overspin” or “rocket” handball.

	Introductory	Developmental	Advanced		Introductory	Developmental	Advanced
	Awareness through FUNdamentals stages	Learn to Train and Train to Train stages	Train to Compete through Train to Win stages		Awareness through FUNdamentals stages	Learn to Train and Train to Train stages	Train to Compete through Train to Win stages
KICKING				BOUNCING		X	
Punt Kick	X			EVASION			
Drop Punt		X		Side Stepping		X	
Torpedo Punt		X		Spinning		X	
Banana Kick		X		Weaving		X	
Drop Kick			X	Baulk and Spin			X
Stab Kick			X	Blind Turn			X
HANDBALL				Dummy Balk			X
Basic	X			CHECKING			
Overspin		X		Intercepting	X		
Rocket			X	Bumping		X	
RUCK WORK		X		Stealing			X
MARKING				Spoiling		X	
Chest	X			Shepherding		X	
Overhead	X			Tackling		X	
Hands		X		Knock Away			X
RUNNING	X			Fending			X
PICKING UP				Smothering			X
Stationary Ball	X			Pushing			X
Ball Coming On		X					
Ball Moving Away			X				

