

The umpire

Expectations about the roles and responsibilities of umpires should vary according to their age and experience. An experienced umpire may also be able to take on the role of an on-field coach while they officiate. On the other hand, many umpires start their umpiring at junior level and, much like the players, are still developing their skills. Often these beginner or less-experienced umpires will be involved in the AFL's mentoring or Green Shirt program, which is a visual reminder that these umpires are just starting out and should be given time to develop.

In order to perform their role, umpires need to:

- > have a good knowledge of the rules of the game for each particular age group;
- > be able to make clear explanations to players when decisions are made; and
- > provide encouragement and feedback to the players during the game.

Philosophy of umpiring AFL Junior matches

When umpiring children in this age group, it is important to understand the 6 most important things are to:

1. develop a respect for officials in children;
2. assist the development of each player's basic skills;
3. assist with shaping character;
4. build self-esteem through positive feedback;
5. develop sportsmanship; and
6. educate and try to modify inappropriate behaviour.

The umpire as coach

An experienced AFL junior umpire may be capable of providing on-field coaching. For umpires to do this, they need:

- > a thorough knowledge of the skills of the game;
- > an understanding of teaching methods;
- > an understanding of how players develop; and
- > an ability to provide clear explanations and feedback about decisions.

Positioning

Because of the size of the oval and the distances kicked by children in these age groups, positioning should not be a problem.

The umpire should be close enough (side-on to each contest is the best position) to talk to the players and not have to yell too loudly.

Some players will even be bewildered and unsure of which way to kick or that they need to move back after taking a mark. The umpire needs to reassure such children and give them time and guidance in learning what to do. In some cases, children will need to be guided into position

(e.g. on the mark) or be given clear directions on what to do next.

Psychology

When rewarded for appropriate behaviour, children are far more likely to try to repeat such behaviour.

It has been shown this powerful method of controlling, modifying and developing behaviour is most effective when the reward is given immediately after the particular behaviour.

The umpire is in a position to give immediate rewards in 2 ways:

- > by word of mouth ("terrific", "well done", "good pass" etc). If need be, and if time permits, by explaining what was good about it; and
- > by awarding a free kick, or even granting a mark. Such decisions can be based upon the situation (courage, effort, determination or simply because the child had not had prior opportunities to fully participate) rather than a strict interpretation of the rules.

It is important that coaches, parents and spectators understand the role the umpires are attempting to perform during junior matches and support them, whether they are young umpires learning the game or experienced umpires helping to direct and coach on the field.



AFL umpire development program

Aim

The aim of the AFL Umpire Development Program is to provide a supportive and quality environment, where umpires and their mentors and coaches can help them develop their skills and enjoy their officiating experience.

The AFL has a number of education and recognition programs to support this aim. At the junior level 3 key programs are offered to assist in the development of umpires. They are:

1. the AFL basic umpire course;
2. the AFL umpire mentor program or Green Shirt program; and
3. the AFL umpire accreditation program.

Overview of the programs

The AFL basic umpire course

The basic umpire course is a training program designed to teach the basics of becoming an umpire and is an introduction to the umpiring development pathway.

It is designed to be used by all entry-level umpires, irrespective of age, gender or background in the game.

This includes parents, coaches and other club volunteers, and is also offered to schools and junior clubs.

An AFL Auskick-style pack and training DVD is provided to participants.

The AFL umpire mentor program or Green Shirt program

The AFL umpire mentor program is an umpire education and development program that aims to use experienced umpires to mentor new and inexperienced ones. The key elements of the program include:

- › the developing umpire wears a green shirt to highlight his or her learner status;
- › developing umpires receive support and training from an accredited mentor over the course of the season. This support includes on-field support in the early stages of their learning and off-field support and feedback on their umpiring progress; and
- › both the new umpire and mentor receive a resource pack and training program, and at the end of that season the AFL conducts a development awards ceremony in each state to recognise their participation in the program.

AFL umpire accreditation program

An umpire's development is recognised through a series of accreditation levels. The National Umpire Accreditation Scheme consists of 3 levels of accreditation, which are sequential and provide education and training at identified stages of the participant's development. Umpires must complete the first level of accreditation during their early years as an umpire.

All programs are designed in accordance with competency-based training principles that will allow the umpire to develop umpiring skills that assist them on match day.

Level 1 – for community league: field, boundary and goal umpires. Participants will be trained in the fundamentals of umpiring.

Level 2 – for community league: field, boundary and goal umpires. Participants will learn the advanced skills of umpiring and should be competent in umpiring open-age football.

Level 3 – for state league: field umpires only. Once selected at state-league level, field umpires undertake intensive training to a Level 3 standard. It prepares them for state league matches and is a prerequisite for trialling for an AFL squad.

