



Pre-season Training Guidelines for Community Football

The information presented in this document is AFL Victoria's advice regarding pre-season training. It is recommended that clubs and their coaches, review these guidelines to consider how they can best prepare their players, ensure player welfare and consider their relationships with other sports/clubs who use their facilities and with their local council who are providing and maintaining football facilities.

1. Background

Pre-season training is an important part of preparing teams and individuals for the season ahead. Conditioning the body for the rigors of our game is essential for injury prevention and team performance.

Whilst AFL Clubs commence pre-season training in November/December, they are elite professional footballers who have dedicated facilities and professional coaching and conditioning staff to manage player training loads. At a community level, players have full time jobs, are often playing other sports in the off-season and generally play for the love of the game. In addition facilities are generally shared with other sports and are difficult to access during the summer months.

At a junior level, kids bodies are still developing and over-use injuries can be more prevalent in these formative years. Therefore the amount of training, particularly when they are often involved in other activities, is a key consideration in player welfare.

2. How much pre-season training is required?

Football is a running and skill based game. At senior level, a minimum of 6 weeks is generally required to achieve the appropriate level of running fitness. However training requirements obviously depend on the age and competition level. As a general guide the following is recommended at community club level:

- **Under 11s** - pre-season to consist of 1-6 sessions of 45-60 minutes per session. The training focus should be Fun, Skill, Small sided games and Game sense.
- **Under 12 – Under 14** – pre-season training to consist of 6 – 8 sessions of 60 – 75 minutes per session. The training focus should be Skill / Game sense, Small sided games, Team play games and minimum fitness based activities.

- **Under 15 – Under 16** – pre-season training to consist of 8 – 10 sessions of 75 minutes per session. The training focus should be Skill / Game sense, Team Play, Tactical and Minimum fitness activities,
- **Under 17 – Under 18** - pre-season training to consist of 10 – 12 sessions of 75 – 90 minutes per session. The training focus should be Skill / Game sense, Team Play, Tactical and Physical preparation.
- **Senior/Open Age** – pre-season training to consist of 15 – 20 sessions of 90 minutes per session. The training focus should be Skill / Game sense, Team Play, Tactical and Physical preparation.

Given clubs often break for extended periods over the festive season, there is often little benefit in commencing significant training prior to Christmas. Some light sessions, a meet and greet and discussion of individual training expectations over the break may be appropriate. Obviously the level of senior football being played will also impact on the length of the pre-season.

3. Pre-Season Training Locations

Given football facilities are often shared with other sports and those sports generally have priority during the summer season, clubs should consider locations away from their home ground to conduct much of their pre-season training. This has two benefits – firstly it protects the ground from over use and assists in preserving the condition of the surface going into the start of the season. Secondly, variety in training activities and locations can assist in player motivation and also be an effective way of cross training. Locations such as the beach, gym, local pool, indoor courts, synthetic surfaces and parks can provide excellent settings in which to undertake conditioning work during the pre-season.

Consider the following when constructing your pre-season training:

- **Cross training**

Cross training provides variety and reduces risk of overtraining injuries. Using cross training the total volume of training can be increased. Aquatic exercises (swimming, water running, water polo), cycling (stationary, spinning, road), and boxing are effective in cross training.

- **Rest and recover**

If you do not allow your body sufficient time to rest and regenerate after hard training you will not get the best out of it. Rest and recovery should be considered as important as physical training.

- **Variety**

Changing your training routine on a regular basis is known as periodisation. You can vary training focus, intensity, volume, duration, venue and time to enhance performance. Changes in volume alone allow the body to progressively adapt to the workload.

➤ **Fun**

Enjoy your football and training. Combine games and skill activities in your fitness program at every opportunity. There are numerous simple, innovative, football specific games which can be used. These have the dual benefit of improving mental (decision making/awareness) and physical skills.

4. Recommended Pre-Season Program

Age Group	Preseason Training	Inseason Sessions Per Week	Length of Sessions	Focus
U8-11	4-6 sessions	1	60 minutes	Fun Skill
U12-14	6-8 sessions	2	75 minutes	Skill Team Play Minimum Fitness
U15-16	8-10 sessions	2	75 minutes	Skill Team Play Tactical Minimum Fitness
U17-18	10-12 sessions	2	75 - 90 minutes	Skill Team Play Tactical Physical Preparation
Senior	15-20 sessions	2 - 3	90 minutes	Skill Team Play Tactical Physical Preparation