

AFL Auskick rules

In any coaching program it is vital that the children actually get to play in appropriately structured games of football (matches).

The guidelines for such matches are defined in what is termed AFL Auskick rules – match rules for children 5-12 years of age. These are detailed in a separate publication of that name in the form of a fold-out brochure and accessible through state football bodies or the AFL.

The AFL Auskick rules are:

- The rules and procedures for conducting modified matches at varying age levels, particularly for primary school-aged children
- Recommended for primary schools, community clubs and leagues that have a responsibility for delivering football to this age group.

AFL Auskick rules games are heavily modified at the early age levels.

As children proceed through middle to later age levels, less modification occurs until by age 13, the standard rules are recommended. The rules are modified to ensure the emphasis is clearly placed on skill development, safety and enjoyment.

In AFL Auskick rules football:

- The spirit of the game is important: players and coaches should shake hands before and after the match.
- The umpire (possibly a coach) should instruct the players on the rules and procedures.
- Children rotate through different positions and the interchange bench.
- Boundary throw-ins are replaced by awarding a kick against the player kicking the ball out.
- Restrictions on tackling are enforced primarily to ensure that players develop possession and disposal skills free of the pressure of being pushed, bumped or tackled.
- Similarly, to require that children must either hand pass or kick the ball, the ball is not to be kicked off the ground.
- Barging (fending off or chopping past opponents) is not permitted.
- To encourage disposal skills and develop team play, players may take only one or two bounces of the football.
- Procedures are in place for misdemeanors, including the possibility of being ordered off.
- In younger age groups, pairs of players of similar size and ability are restricted to an area as this prevents ball chasing and subsequent congestion.
- Coaches are allowed on the ground to coach and encourage in games involving players aged 5-10.

The interpretation and application of the AFL Auskick rules for each age group follows.

Interpretation and application of AFL Auskick rules

Introduction

The AFL Auskick rules are designed to ensure that participation in the game falls within the developmental philosophy of the program. The AFL Auskick policy, designed by the best experts available to the AFL, is for the game of Australian Football for primary school aged children to:

- Be fun and safe.
- Be designed specifically to maximise participation, skill learning and development.
- Be based upon rules and procedures appropriate to the children involved.
- Involve appropriately accredited coaches.
- Provide a logical, sequential transition from introductory level through to competitions at club and/or school.
- Be managed by the community.

Playing ground, time and equipment

The AFL Auskick policy is committed to a reduced playing area, playing time and suitably modified equipment to take the emphasis away from endurance and allow for greater skill development. With smaller grounds the players are encouraged to concentrate on the game, because the ball is never far away.

Field sizes recommended are the optimum size and flexibility may be required to make best use of specific circumstances such as space available. In some cases smaller fields may be more appropriate.

Team composition

Smaller sided teams are also used in AFL Auskick rules. This allows individual players to have more frequent and longer contact with the ball. It also allows for grading and matching of opponents and teams.

With fewer players, play is more open, even when played on a reduced size oval. Because of the openness of the game, and the fact that fewer players are contesting the ball at once, marking and picking up skills can be better developed.

The spirit of the game is to give **all available players** a game of football. Therefore:

- Where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to equate player numbers.
- Excess players should be given to the opposition team if they are unable to field the required numbers.
- Coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate (for instance, if planning 9-a-side but only 12 players in total are available: play 6-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play two games of 6-a-side or one 9-a-side game with one 6-a-side game)

One-sided games

In the interest of their players' learning and development, coaches should make changes in one-sided games to create a reasonable contest. Usually one-sided games result in little learning or enjoyment for either team, or their individual members, and they do not achieve AFL Auskick objectives. Recommended changes include ensuring good matching of players, different rotations, etc. Both coaches should work together to manage the game in this respect.

Use of zones

Zones restrict 'pairs' of players to an area and thereby prevents ball-chasing and subsequent congestion where all players congregate around the ball. The zones start the players thinking about their positioning on the ground prior to being allowed the freedom to move wherever they wish as will be the case later. Zones also enable groupings of players of similar size and ability to play within a zone. In general play, zones are not intended to lose continuity of the game. Common sense should prevail when deciding if players run into a different zone.

Rotation of players

Children will experience playing in a variety of positions. The rotation of players through different positions and the interchange bench enables the development of a solid foundation to all skills and adds variety and interest to a game. Rotation through the zones applies to all games played by 5-8 and 9-10-year-olds.

It is critical that coaches know positions and basic elements of positional play and be able to teach them to the children as they develop. With larger sized teams (12 and 15-a-side), Teaching positional play within zones is a learning outcome which will help children with the rules applying to ball ups and start to prepare them for unrestricted positional play in the 11-12-year-olds game. It will also make the umpires' job easier in instructing players to stay in their correct positions. (AFL Auskick coach education programs will ensure that coaches are appropriately prepared to do this effectively).

Out of bounds

The fact that there are no boundary throw-ins means that the number of opportunities to kick the ball is increased, congestion is reduced and the ball is kept in motion.

Tackling

The AFL Auskick rules aims to provide players with the best possible conditions to learn, develop and improve their kicking and handballing by reducing the congestion and pressure on the player in possession. Tackling skills are introduced sequentially towards the end (11-12-year-olds) of the AFL Auskick rules program.

Players will develop evasive skills and be less likely to incur injury. Children will have increased confidence to attempt to gain possession. In responsibility to the safety of the tackler, players are not allowed to barge or chop past an opposition player at any level. Fending off with an open hand to the body (not above the shoulders or in the back), while generally not taught in the AFL Auskick program, is allowed for 11 and 12-year-olds.

Gaining possession

At the appropriate time, the AFL Auskick policy allows for the skills of knocking and stealing the ball from the possession of an opponent. Contests to gain possession of the ball are part of the game.

Marking

The AFL Auskick policy of marks being awarded over any distance is designed to reduce congestion and to encourage players to attempt to catch the ball. It also recognises that many youngsters cannot kick the ball over 10 metres.

Bouncing

The AFL Auskick policy allows a player to have one (for the higher age group - two) bounce when in possession of the football to prevent players running excessive distances with the ball. This encourages disposal skills and team play.

Kicking off the ground

Although it might be argued that this is a skill in itself, the AFL Auskick policy disallows it, to enhance the development of possession and disposal skills by making players gain control of the ball. This will assist players to go for the ball confidently without a worry about injury to immature bones in the hands.

The coach on the ground

AFL Auskick rules allow the coach on to the ground to provide praise of all children when warranted or explain errors immediately when they occur.

It is the intent of the AFL Auskick policy to enable teaching and feedback to occur as the game continues. In the older age group (under 11/12) the coach is to remain on the sidelines and to use a runner to deliver the teaching point or message.

Order off and distance penalties

Order off rules and distance penalties are normally used to reinforce the spirit of the game. They are generally invoked for such things as bad language, poor sportsmanship, disputing umpires' decisions (order off) and hindering opposing players who have been awarded a mark or free kick (distance penalties).

Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpires' decisions is **unacceptable** and should be actively discouraged by those responsible for teaching the game (coaches and umpires).

In line with accepted teaching principles, and if coaches are doing the job of an AFL Auskick coach appropriately, it should be possible to deal with issues which arise in this area without resorting to the order off rule. This is particularly so with 5–8-year-olds. The process of ordering off a child in this age group and the level of attention it creates is a severe punishment for a young child. It is likely to alienate the child and should be avoided. It should be possible to deal effectively with issues which may arise in this area immediately through counselling by the umpire and the coach on the field.

Overstepping the mark is a coaching matter and should be dealt with on the spot by the umpire and coach. In the case of bad language, abusive language or behaviour, time wasting, etc., the umpire should attempt to deal with it on the spot and if necessary refer it to the coach, who should then counsel the player regarding appropriate behaviour. If it continues or worsens (i.e. a player is deliberately testing the umpire, the player could be substituted to another zone (including the bench) for counselling by a coach's assistant and to have 'think time'. An apology to the umpire may be appropriate prior to returning.

Distance penalties can be applied for breaches in the 9–10 and 11–12-year-old games, but are not mandatory. The emphasis should still be on the process and, while the penalty can be used as a deterrent, the ability of the coach and umpire to teach during the game should be a priority.

Roles of AFL Auskick coaches and umpires

AFL Auskick coaches and umpires have key roles in ensuring the success of games played in the program. The competence with which they go about the task will determine how well the objectives of fun, safety, participation, learning and development are achieved. Coaches have a primary role in teaching players the skills of the game and how to play to the rules and umpires have a primary role in administering and teaching the rules. They also have other key elements of their roles referred to regularly throughout the AFL Auskick rules, with particular reference to the team, marking, positional play, order off and distance penalties and the spirit of the game. The competency with which they carry out these aspects of their roles will be crucial in determining program success.

Spirit of the game

With the rules designed to encourage participation, safety, skill and fun for all participants throughout their development, the spirit of the game is to ensure that it is played in a fair manner and spirit of true sportsmanship. Coaches and umpires should meet and shake hands prior to the game. Umpires should instruct players and coaches on rules and procedures. At the end of game, players, coaches and umpires should all shake hands and the umpires should be acknowledged and thanked by the coaches for their participation.

AFL Auskick rules – match rules for children 5-12 years of age

This section provides the rules to be used in match situations. They should be interpreted with commonsense, keeping in mind the philosophy and underpinning principles of AFL Auskick rules.

#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
1	Playing fields	Divide into three zones 6-a-side 60m x 40m (3 x 20m zones) 9-a-side 75m x 50m (3 x 25m zones) 12-a-side 90m x 60m (3 x 30m zones)	Divide into three zones 9-a-side 75m x 50m (3 x 25m zones) 12-a-side 90m x 60m (3 x 30m zones) 15-a-side 105m x 80m (3 x 35m zones)	110 x 80m
		These field sizes are the optimum size and flexibility is often needed. In particular, smaller field sizes may be required; e.g. a 6-a-side 9-year-old's match would need a field size less than 75m long.		
2	Ball size	A Synthetic Football – 5–8-year-olds	A Synthetic Football – 9–10-year-olds	A Synthetic Football – 11–12-year-olds
3	The team	6, 9 or 12-a-side preferred – no rucks and rovers. Unlimited reserves. All players must play at least half a game. Teams should play positions in each zone: 6-a-side – 2/2/2 9-a-side – 3/3/3 12-a-side – 4/4/4	9, 12 or 15-a-side – no rucks and rovers. Unlimited reserves. All players must play at least half a game. Teams should play positions in each zone: 9-a-side – 3/3/3 12-a-side – 4/4/4 15-a-side – 5/5/5	12 or 15-a-side – no rucks and rovers. Unlimited reserves. Smaller sided games may be played. All players must play at least half a game.
		The spirit of the game is to give all players a game of football. Where there is difficulty fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to equalise player numbers on each team		
4	Player rotation	Players must rotate every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions. i.e. Interchange->Backs->Centres->Forwards->Interchange.	Players must rotate every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions. i.e. Interchange->Backs->Centres->Forwards->Interchange.	For 12-a-side and 15-a-side, to stop congestion players will be instructed by the umpire to stay in their correct positions.

#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
4				<i>(continued from previous page)</i> Coach should instruct players to stay in position and enable all players to experience the different positions through effective regular rotation.
5	Playing times	5 - 6 year-olds = 10 minutes 7 - 8 year-olds = 20 minutes	4 x maximum 10 minute quarters	4 x 15 minute quarters
6	Start of play	A. Ball up between 2 centre players. B. Players should be approx. equal size. C. All players within their zones.	A. Ball up between 2 centre players. B. Players should be approx. equal size. C. Within centre zone, maximum 3 players from each team closer than 10m from ball-up.	A. Ball up between 2 centre players. B. Players should be approx. equal size. C. Maximum 3 players from each team closer than 20m from ball-up.
7	Ball-up contests	Players contesting a ball-up (ruck play) may not grab the ball and play-on; i.e. they cannot take full possession of the ball. Player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has either been touched by another player or hits the ground.		
8	After a goal	As in 6. Different players each time. Goals can only be kicked by players in forward zone.	As in 6. Different players each time.	As in 6. Different players each time.
9	Out of bounds	A. From a kick. Kick generally awarded to nearest opponent. This is also an opportunity for the umpire to give a possession to a player who may not have had as many opportunities as others. B. If in doubt as to which team kicked the ball. Ball-up 5m in (rule 7). C. Off hands or body, ball-up 5m in.	A. From a kick. Kick awarded to nearest opponent. This is also an opportunity for the umpire to give a possession to a player who may not have had as many opportunities as others. B. If in doubt as to which team kicked the ball. Ball-up 5m in (rule 7). C. Off hands or body, ball-up 5m in.	A. From a kick. Kick awarded to nearest opponent. This is also an opportunity for the umpire to give a possession to a player who may not have had as many opportunities as others. B. If in doubt as to which team kicked the ball. Ball-up 5m in (rule 7). C. Off hands or body, ball-up 5m in.

#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
10	Ball transition	When ball is in the transition from back zone to forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the mid-zone. Failure for this to occur will see a free kick awarded to the opposition team at the point at which the ball entered the zone.	When ball is in the transition from back zone to forward zone, it must be touched by a player in the mid-zone. Failure for this to occur will see a free kick awarded to the opposition team at the point at which the ball entered the zone.	
11	Scrimmage	No diving on ball. Umpire stops play. Free kick awarded to nearest opponent.	Umpire stops play. Send players back to positions and ball-up (rule 7).	Umpire stops play. Send players back to positions and ball-up (rule 7).
12	Possession rule	The ball is possessed by the act of controlling it by catching it, grabbing it, or placing two hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, all other players must back off to allow the player with the ball to kick or handball uncontested. Decide doubtful cases with ball ups.	The ball is possessed by the act of controlling it by catching it, grabbing it, or placing two hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, other players may only attempt to block by standing in the path of, or legally bump, the opponent with the ball. Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.	Not applicable
13	Tackling	There is to be absolutely no contact or spoiling whatsoever except accidental and light shoulder to shoulder contact while running to and at the ball. Players to be given every opportunity to deliver the ball.	Players cannot hold an opponent with their hands, knock the ball out of an opponents' possession or push a player in the side (refer to bumping).	<p>Under-11 – The hand tackle A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent who uses both hands to grip the player in the area below the top of the shoulders and on or above the knees. If when applying the tackle, hands cross over, this constitutes a wrap around tackle. Free kick awarded against tackler.</p> <p>Under-12 – The wrap around Tackle A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent wrapping both arms around the area below the top of the shoulders and on or above the knees.</p>

#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
				Under 11 and 12 No player shall be deliberately dumped / thrown to the ground by any tackler. Under any circumstances.
14	Bumping	No deliberate bumping. No deliberate contact permitted.	Before possession: A player's prime objective should be to gain possession of the ball. i.e. Eyes on the ball. A restrained side bump, provided the ball is within 5 metres, is acceptable. "Running with" the player rather than "running at" the player must be the intention. Player in possession: A restrained bump only. After being bumped the player must dispose of the ball (3 steps or 3 seconds) or a free kick is awarded. A player cannot be bumped again within 3 seconds. Simultaneous bumps, made by two opposition players on a player in possession, counts as one bump. Player safety is paramount.	A player may make contact with another player by using his or her hip or shoulder to the body (not above the shoulders or in the back) provided the ball is no more than 5 metres away from the player. (As per AFL laws).
15	Barging	No barging, fending off or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick awarded.	No barging, fending off or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick awarded.	No barging or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick awarded. Fending off, with an open hand to the body (not above the shoulders or in the back), is allowed.
16	Stealing/smothering	Not allowed.	Not allowed.	Both stealing and smothering are allowed.
17	Shepherding	Player not permitted to push, shoulder or block opponent not in possession of the ball.	Player not permitted to push, shoulder or block opponent not in possession of the ball.	Player is allowed to shepherd within 5m of the ball.

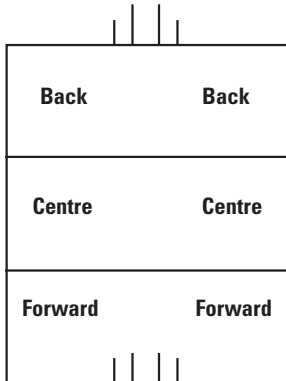
#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
18	Mark and playing on	A mark is any reasonable attempt to catch the ball directly from a kick of another player irrespective of distance travelled. Set mark after mark. No playing on allowed.	A mark is catching the ball directly from a kick of another player irrespective of distance travelled. Play on allowed.	A mark is catching the ball directly from a kick of another player. Ball must travel 10m.
19	Bouncing the ball	Player is permitted to bounce the ball only once then dispose of the ball.	Player is permitted to bounce the ball only once then dispose of the ball.	Player is permitted to bounce the ball up to two times then dispose of the ball.
20	Distance run	Whilst a player in possession of the football is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 5m, irrespective if that player is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above – one bounce only.	Whilst a player in possession of the football is moving, the player must bounce the ball within 10m, irrespective if that player is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above – one bounce only.	Whilst a player in possession of the football is moving, the player must bounce the ball at least once every 15m, irrespective if that player is running in a straight line or otherwise. As above – maximum of two bounces.
21	Kicking off the ground	Not permitted to deliberately kick the ball off the ground.	Not permitted to deliberately kick the ball off the ground.	Not permitted to deliberately kick the ball off the ground.
22	Order off rule	Not applicable to this age group. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions is unacceptable and should be actively discouraged, through a counselling process carried out by the umpire and the coach.	To be applied. Penalty time up to umpire's discretion or local rule. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions is unacceptable and should be actively discouraged by coaches and umpires.	To be applied. Penalty time up to umpire's discretion or local rule. Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions is unacceptable and should be actively discouraged by coaches and umpires.
23	Distance penalty	Not applicable to this age group. Umpiring and coaching processes to be used. Overstepping the mark is a coaching matter that should be addressed by the coach or umpire on the ground); wasting time; using abusive language/behaviour; etc. (see Order off rule)	A player can be awarded a 10m advancement towards their goals if, after a mark or free kick the AFL Auskick umpire is of the opinion that an opposing player hinders that player. This includes: overstepping the mark; wasting time; using abusive language/behaviour; etc. The teaching role of coaches and umpires should still be paramount at this age group.	A player can be awarded a 25m advancement towards their goals if, after a mark or free kick the AFL Auskick umpire is of the opinion that an opposing player hinders that player. This includes: overstepping the mark; wasting time; using abusive language/behaviour; etc.

#	Item	5-8-year-olds As at January 1	9-10-year-olds As at January 1	11-12-year-olds As at January 1
24	Staying in position	To stop congestion, umpire to instruct players to stay in zone.	To stop congestion, umpire to instruct players to stay in their zone.	To stop congestion, umpire to instruct players to stay in position. Coaches have a responsibility to teach players about positions.
25	Coaches	Coach allowed on ground to teach.	Coach allowed on ground to teach and ensure players are aware of positional play.	Coach not allowed on ground. Runners may be used to deliver messages and return directly to the coach.
26	Spirit of the game	Umpires to instruct players on rules and procedures. Players, coaches and umpires to shake hands. Umpires to be acknowledged and thanked by teams.	Umpires to instruct players on rules and procedures. Players, coaches and umpires to shake hands. Umpires to be acknowledged and thanked by teams.	Umpires to instruct players on rules and procedures. Players, coaches and umpires to shake hands. Umpires to be acknowledged and thanked by teams.
27	The game	No premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results, names of players published, skill clinics, carnival gala days. No representative teams.	No premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results, names of players published, skill clinics, carnival days. No representative teams.	No premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (no score) and names of players published. Skill clinics carnival days to be held. No representative teams.
28	Awards	Participation, effort, skill and goal achievement.	Participation, effort, skill and goal achievement.	Participation, effort, skill and goal achievement.
29	Clearances	Automatic clearances.	Automatic clearances.	Automatic clearances.
30	Tribunals	No tribunal, discipline left in hands of club.	No tribunal, discipline left in hands of club.	No tribunal, discipline left in hands of club.
31	Other rules and laws	As per AFL Laws of Football.	As per AFL Laws of Football.	As per AFL Laws of Football.
32	General	<p>Matches for this age group must be conducted as part of an AFL Auskick program or conducted within club structures. Fun, maximum participation, individual movement activities and skill development are the major priorities.</p> <p>AFL Auskick codes of conduct for coaches, officials and parents must be applied and enforced.</p>	<p>Matches may be part of the AFL Auskick program or conducted within club or competition structures. Fun, maximum participation and skill development are again over-riding priorities.</p> <p>AFL Auskick codes of conduct for coaches, officials and parents must be applied and enforced.</p>	<p>Players in this age group may participate in AFL Auskick programs, club teams or school teams. Although team play is now important, individual participation in all games, skill development and teaching are priorities.</p> <p>AFL Auskick codes of conduct for coaches, officials and parents must be applied and enforced.</p>

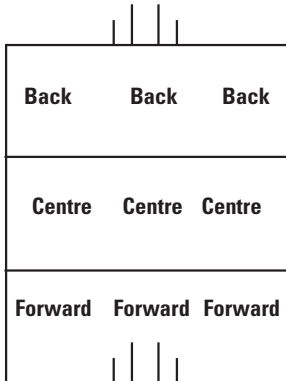
AFL Auskick rules, zones and positions SUMMARY

5-8 year olds

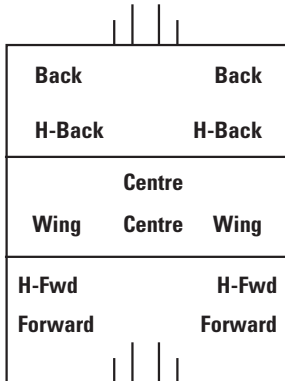
Six-a-Side



Nine-a-Side

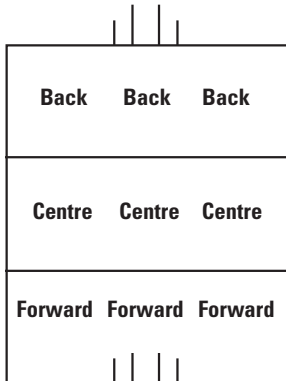


Twelve-a-Side

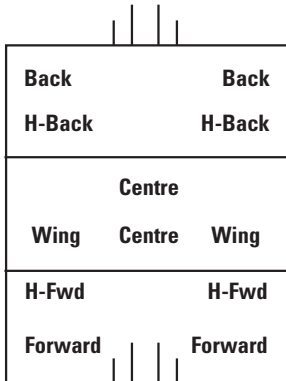


9-10 year olds

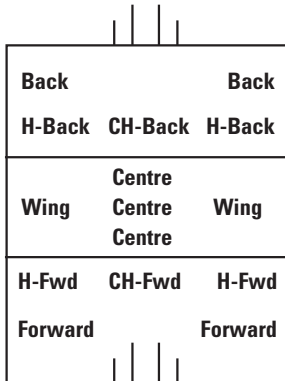
Nine-a-Side



Twelve-a-Side

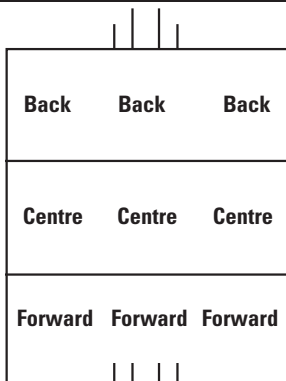


Fifteen-a-Side

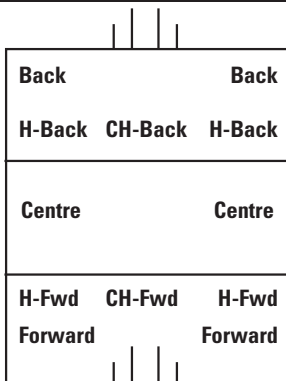


11-12 year olds

Nine-a-Side



Twelve-a-Side



Fifteen-a-Side

