

12

TALENT DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER

Chapter 12

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

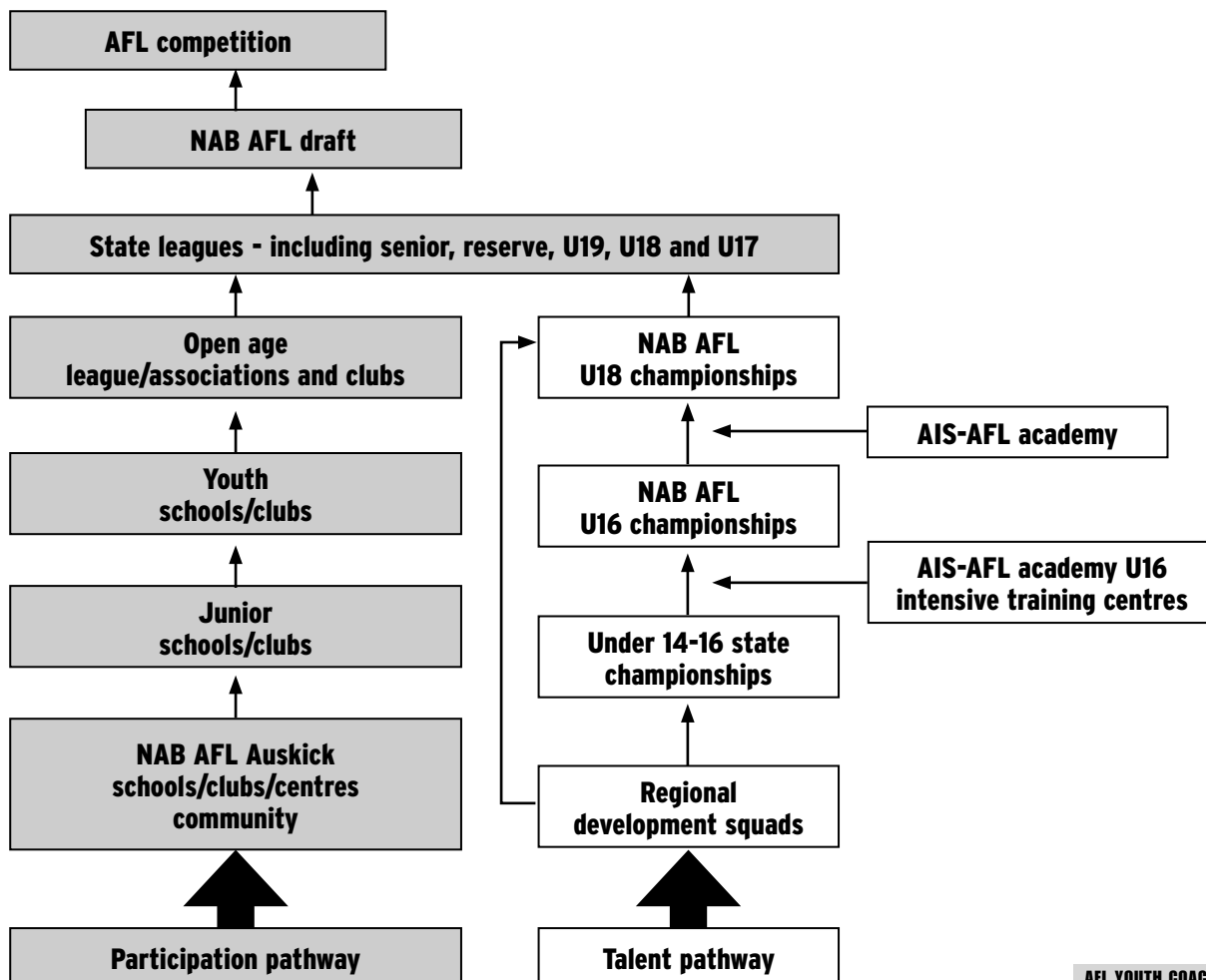
AFL PLAYER PATHWAYS

Junior and youth football are the life blood of the game. The total AFL participation pathway is illustrated below. The pathway conforms to the belief of the AFL and its state affiliates that anyone wishing to participate in Australian Football must be able to do so in a way that is appropriate to their skills, needs and aspirations. This is best achieved by providing a quality environment in which young players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of learning and ability.

At the youth level the talent pathway to becoming an AFL player begins to emerge through the avenue of regional development squads which have the dual purpose of developing individual player's abilities and preparing teams to participate in state championships at under 14 and above.

Australian Football coaches who are coaching at youth level should have a good understanding of the AFL Participation and Talent Pathways. All players with whom they are working are part of those pathways and many will be dreaming of becoming AFL players. An understanding of the workings of the pathway and the processes used to identify and develop talented players are important tools for all youth coaches. This chapter includes elements of the evaluation processes which are integral to the talent pathway and coaches may wish to use some of them, perhaps in modified forms, in their coaching programs.

AFL Participation Pathway

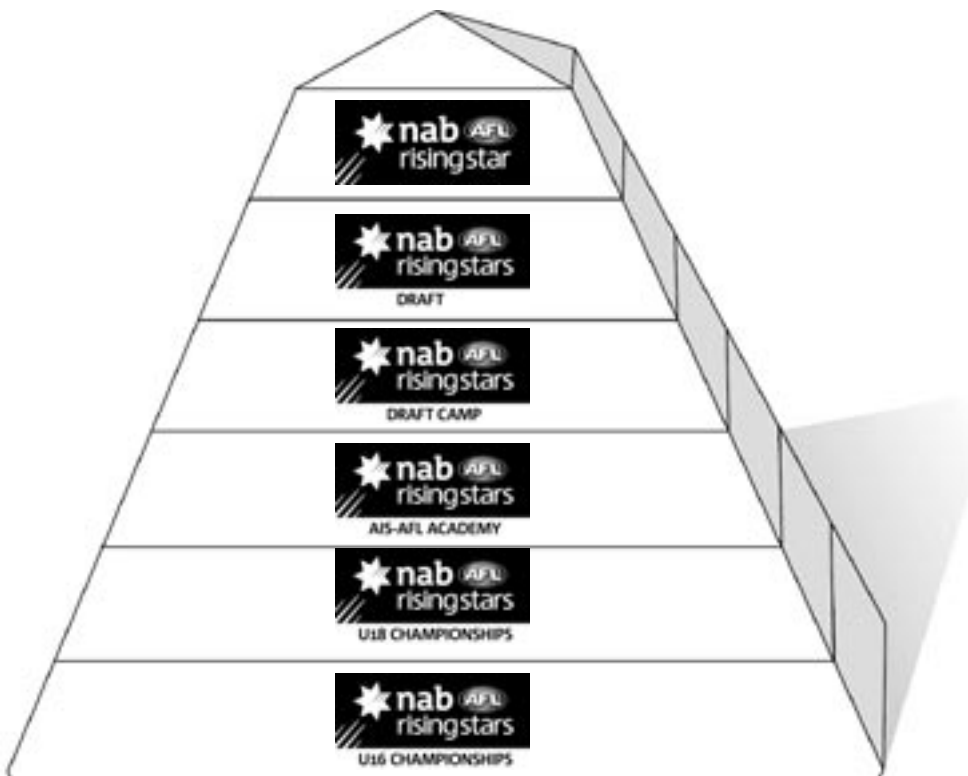




The AFL talent identification and development program is formalised in The NAB AFL Rising Stars Program. The development program operates from grass roots through to elite AFL level. It provides recognition and a clearly identifiable direction for a player's career. The program incorporates:

- NAB AFL Rising Star
- NAB AFL Draft
- NAB AFL Draft Camp
- AIS-AFL Academy
- NAB AFL U18 Championships
- NAB AFL U16 Championships

NAB AFL RISING STARS PROGRAM



NAB AFL DRAFT

The NAB AFL Draft is the only process through which a footballer can become an AFL player. It is the most equitable way of distributing the available talent to AFL clubs. Players gain access to clubs by nominating for the Draft and can only move to other clubs through the drafting process. The Draft is critical to the AFL's objective of developing an even competition because:

- It gives lesser performed clubs in any season priority choice of available players
- It gives clubs the option of exchanging draft choices, players or a combination.
- Uncontracted players can change clubs by nominating for the pre-season draft.

Clubs can also maintain a Rookie List of (generally) up to six developing players between the ages of 18 and 23, although these players are not eligible to play in the AFL Premiership competition. A separate Rookie Draft is conducted for this purpose. The following components of the NAB AFL Rising Stars Program lead directly to the Draft.

NAB AFL U16 & U18 CHAMPIONSHIPS

The NAB AFL Under 16 and Under 18 Championships are played annually between state and territory teams in two divisions, incorporating teams from South Australia, Western Australia, Victorian Country, Victorian Metropolitan, New South Wales/ACT, Northern Territory, Queensland and Tasmania.

AIS-AFL ACADEMY

The AIS-AFL Academy is a joint program of the Australian Sports Commission, through the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), and the AFL to enhance the sporting, personal, educational and vocational opportunities for Australia's best young footballers.

Each year the AIS-AFL Academy offers thirty 12-month scholarships to young athletes who have been eligible to represent their state or territory at the AFL Under 16 Championships.

Scholarship holders remain in their home states but gather together for three national camps and other training programs during the course of the year. Squad members are also given the opportunity to represent Australia at Under 17 level in the International Rules Series against Ireland.

NAB AFL DRAFT CAMP

The NAB AFL Draft Camp has become an integral part of the talent identification process for AFL clubs. The process has been refined and improved and the AFL invites approximately 70 players to the annual camp at the AIS in Canberra and a further 100 plus prospects to shorter programs in their home states for testing.

Information is the AFL club recruiting managers' greatest tool and insight gained through the Draft Camp process and the AFL Recruiting Reports is invaluable to clubs as they fine tune their views on players they are considering for the draft. Key elements of the draft camp include medical screening, physical and psychomotor testing, formal and informal interviews with AFL clubs and skills sessions.

Players are organised into seven positional groups for camp operations and testing – small midfielders; medium midfielders; medium forwards; medium defenders; tall forwards; tall defenders and ruckmen.

Some of the test protocols used for the Draft Camp, including speed, agility, vertical jumps and endurance tests, and sample results are provided here for the information of youth coaches. Coaches who wish to use formal testing with their youth players can obtain further information from AFL Regional Development Offices.



NAB AFL Draft Camp test protocols

1. Speed

20m. Sprint

- 1) The start line of the sprint is marked with masking tape between the first tripods. The player should place their leading foot up to the start line. The rear foot should be placed in a natural ready position for a standing start.
- 2) The player should be instructed to attempt to cut the beam with their torso and should avoid triggering the beam with a sudden movement from the leading arm.
- 3) Players will be instructed to avoid rocking back beyond what would take place in a “normal” standing start.
- 4) The player completes a maximum effort sprint over 20m cutting the beam at 0m, 5m, 10m and 20m. The player completes three maximum efforts and the splits for these should be recorded.

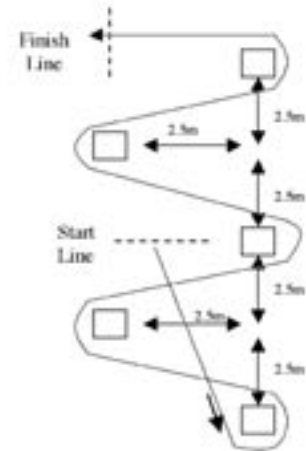
2. AGILITY RUN

Afl Agility Run

- The run is an AFL-specific agility test, used to indicate an athlete's overall agility and ability to change direction with speed.
- Two sets of electronic light gates are required, one at the start and one at the finish. The five (5) obstacles made of PVC piping (10-12 cm diameter) have a 25cm base and are approximately 1.1m high. Obstacles are weighted at the bottom of the piping (internally) to increase stability. Plastic masking tape should be placed on the floor at two corners of the obstacle so it can be accurately re-positioned if it is knocked over.

Protocol:

- 1) Players start from a stationary, upright position with a front foot on the 0m point, in line with the start gate. They weave in and out of the obstacles as per diagram below and should avoid touching or moving the cones in any way. If this occurs the test is stopped and restarted.
- 2) Players should complete a short warm-up of light running, stretching and some run throughs. After instruction, players should have a practice trial at 50% effort to familiarise themselves with the course.
- 3) Two 100% maximal effort trials are recorded and the best time (seconds reported to two decimal places) taken as the score. Allow 2-3 mins recovery between trials.
 - For set-up and operation of the light gate timing system refer to Lightgates User Manual.



3. VERTICAL JUMP

Standing Vertical Jump

- 1) The subject stands with their preferred side closest to the Vertec. The subject reaches overhead with their inside hand, extending the arm and reaching as high as possible while the feet remain flat on the ground. The zero point is adjusted to meet the middle fingertip of the outstretched hand. Record the distance from the zero point to the ground.

NB: The easiest way to record the distance from zero point to ground is to fix a tape measure to the horizontal arm of the Vertec and read off the height from the ground each time.

- 2) The subject is instructed to jump as high as possible, displacing the rotating fingers of the Vertec with their outstretched hand at the top of the jump. The jump is performed without a step, however, a counter movement of the legs (i.e. initial deep squat) and swing of the arms should be used to maximise jump height.
- 3) The best two trials, with a suitable rest in between should be recorded. Record the height of the jump from the number written on the last unmoved finger.

Running Vertical Jump

- 1) Set zero as per standing vertical jump protocol.
- 2) The subject stands at or behind a mark approximately 5m from the side of the Vertec (allowing an approach that is in a straight line). The run up may be longer than 5 metres but should not be any shorter.
- 3) Using an approach run up, the subject jumps vertically off the outside leg and reaches as high as possible with the inside hand. The action is similar to a ruck contest. The rotating fingers of the Vertec are tapped to the side with the outstretched hand at the maximum height of the jump.
- 4) The best two trials should be recorded from both the preferred and non preferred sides. Record the height of the jump from the number on the last unmoved finger.

4. ENDURANCE

20m. Shuttle Run

Protocol:

- 1) Players line up at the start line of the 20m. Shuttle run.
- 2) Players are instructed to continue until they can no longer keep up with the progressively increasing running pace determined by the beep signal from the tape. At every beep the runners foot must be on or over the red line.
- 3) The test is complete when the player can not maintain the running speed for two successive beeps. After the first miss the player is cautioned and told they must make the line by the next beep. If the player's foot is then not on, or over the line by the next beep, the test is terminated and the score given is the last level attained, not the current level they are attempting.

3km Time Trial

Groups of 15-25 players, on a synthetic athletics track, participate in each trial under strict supervision with individual times recorded.



Example results

Our example profiles the fitness results of St Kilda's Luke Ball (left) recorded at the 2001 National AFL Draft Camp at the A.I.S.

The results reflect the profile of an outstanding athlete as well as a potential AFL player who had achieved All-Australian honours at the National's Under 18 Championships earlier that year averaging 23 possessions, 5 tackles and finishing runner up in the Larke Medal (Division One Best & Fairest).

In analysing his fitness results (Table - A), his height (182.8 cm) and weight (72.46 kg) are ideal for an inside midfielder at 17 years of age. His percentile rankings for height and weight against the entire group are ideal for a player of his type (i.e. inside medium midfielder). Luke's sum of skinfolds (30.8mm) indicates he's not carrying any excess and is in perfect physical condition (99th percentile).

However it is Luke's anaerobic power scores and percentile rankings which indicate the profile of a super powerful athlete and potential AFL player. All Luke's vertical jump results, whether standing or running off either leg, are in the top 11th percentile ranking for the 2001 camp and when considered with combined percentile rankings (1999, 2000 & 2001 Draft Camp results– see Table B) he is in the top 5%.

Similarly, his 5m, 10m & 20m speed times put Luke in an elite group (top 3%) over the 3 years analysed.

Finally the shuttle test of endurance where he recorded a Level 14, Shuttle 2 result has Luke in the top 17% for the 2001 draft camp group (Table A) and the 11% over the 3 years analysed.

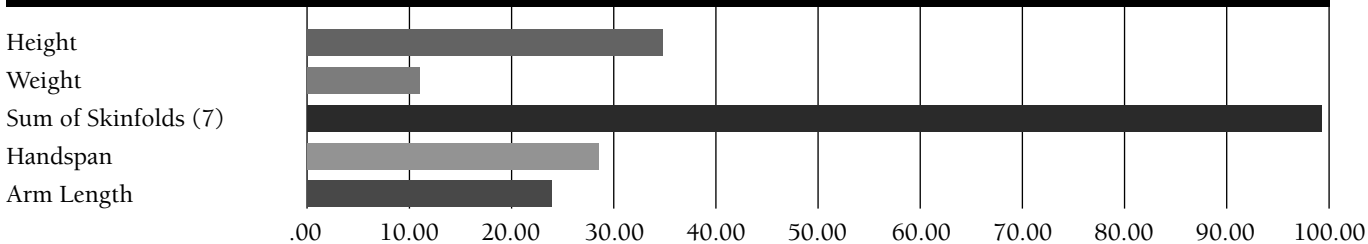
It must be understood that the fitness results are only part of the overall picture used in analysing potential AFL players.



Table A: Fitness results

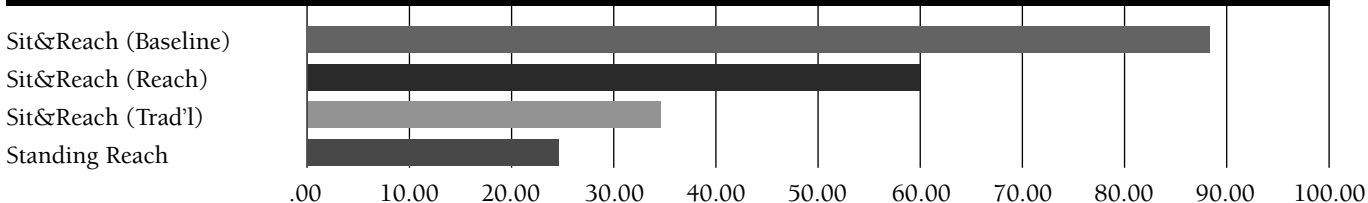
NAME: BALL, Luke					
Test Date: October 2001					
TESTS:	Height	Weight	Sum of Skinfolds	Handspan	Arm Length
UNITS:	centimetre	kilograms	millimetre	millimetre	centimetre
SCORE:	182.80	72.46	30.80	212.00	77.00
TEAM AVE:	186.50	81.40	52.20	222.00	80.00
PERCENTILE:	35.00	12.00	99.00	27.00	25.00

BODY COMPOSITION - PERCENTILE SCORES



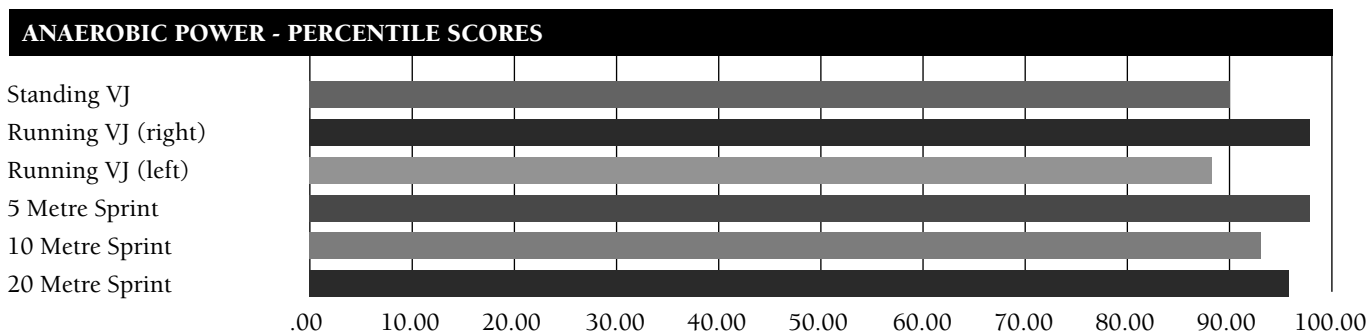
TESTS:	Sit&Reach (Baseline)	Sit&Reach (Reach)	Sit&Reach (Traditional)	Standing Reach
UNITS:	centimetre	centimetre	centimetre	centimetre
SCORE:	-23.00	14.50	37.50	237.00
TEAM AVE:	-30.00	11.00	41.00	244.00
PERCENTILE:	88.00	60.00	35.00	26.00

FLEXIBILITY - PERCENTILE SCORES

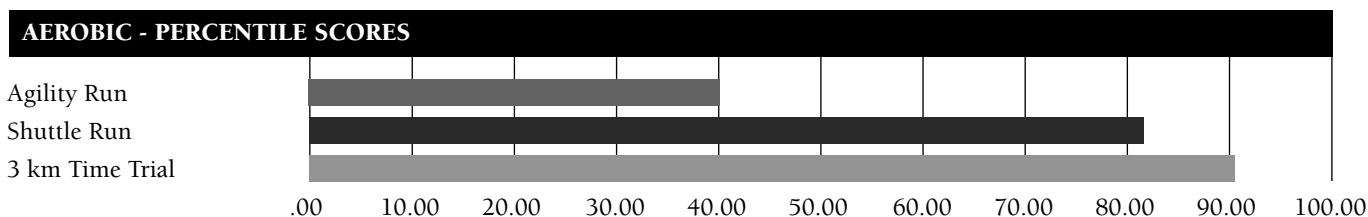


TESTS:	Standing VJ	Running VJ (right)	Running VJ (left)	5 Metre Sprint	10 Metre Sprint	20 Metre Sprint
UNITS:	centimetre	centimetre	centimetre	seconds	seconds	seconds
SCORE:	71.00	90.00	86.00	0.98	1.68	2.85
TEAM AVE:	62.00	73.00	78.00	1.05	1.77	3.00
PERCENTILE:	90.00	97.00	89.00	97.00	94.00	97.00

Table A continued



TESTS:	Agility Run	Shuttle Run	3 km Time Trial
UNITS:	seconds	levels	mins & secs
SCORE:	8.66	14.02	10.44
TEAM AVE:	8.53	12.89	11.20
PERCENTILE:	40.00	83.00	91.00



Combined Percentile Rankings

The following percentile rankings have been calculated on testing results collected from the 1999-2001 AFL National Draft Camps. Percentile rankings have historically been used at the annual Draft Camp and are calculated on results for each particular year. The pooled data has been used to estimate the test scores corresponding to the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, 90th and 95th percentiles.

Table B: Combined Percentile Rankings

Percentile	10th	25th	50th	75th	90th	95th
Height (cm)	177.7	181.3	185.5	190.8	194.9	197.1
Mass (kg)	71.0	74.8	79.7	85.5	90.1	93.5
Skinfolds (mm)	72.7	63.3	54.4	46.2	41.2	38.8
VJ (absolute)	54	57	60	64	67	70
VJ (run R relative)	59	63	69	75	81	84
VJ (run L relative)	68	71	75	80	85	87
5-m sprint (s)	1.17	1.13	1.08	1.04	1.01	1.00
10-m sprint (s)	1.92	1.87	1.83	1.77	1.74	1.72
20-m sprint (s)	3.16	3.10	3.03	2.97	2.93	2.90
Agility Run (s)	8.94	8.74	8.58	8.36	8.23	8.17
Shuttle test (decimal)	12.1	12.5	13.2	13.8	14.3	14.6
Est. VO2 max	54.0	55.7	58.2	60.1	61.7	62.7



AFL RECRUITING REPORTS

Another major element of the recruiting process is the confidential recruiting reports which are developed throughout the year by the AFL from information provided by state leagues on prospective players and made available to AFL clubs.

Fourteen key performance areas are rated by clubs twice per year on a scale from 1 up to 5. There are also sections for current strengths and weaknesses, injuries for the year and general comments.

Descriptors for each scale in each key performance area are provided to assist the club coach with this judgment.

The key performance areas are:

1. Kicking ability
2. Marking ability
3. Hand passing, Vision, Awareness
4. Clean hands
5. Ball winning ability
6. Pace
7. Endurance
8. Recovery & Agility
9. Durability
10. Leadership & Self discipline
11. Aggressiveness, Intensity & Second efforts
12. Football character
13. Competitiveness
14. Football smarts

The scales for making judgments, which will have a descriptor added, specific to the key performance area, are:

- 5 Rare
- 4 Excellent
- 3 Good
- 2 Marginal
- 1 Poor

PLAYING POSITIONS FOR RATINGS

Each player is rated against one of the following position/roles in our game.

POSITION	SIZE	HEIGHT
Defenders	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Key Defenders	Tall	> 190 cm
Mid Fielders	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Ruckman	Specialist Position	
Forwards	Small	< 180 cm
	Medium	180-190 cm
Key Forwards	Tall	> 190 cm

POSITION RATED

POSITION
(e.g. defender, midfielder)

SIZE
(e.g. small, medium, tall)

PLAYER TYPE

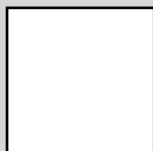
(mark INSIDE or OUTSIDE)*

- INSIDE players are in and under ball winners - predominantly handball, e.g. Scott West, Simon Black
- OUTSIDE players are the ball carriers - predominantly kick, e.g. Scott Camporeale, Nigel Lappin

KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS

Key Performance Areas

1. KICKING ABILITY



AFL BENCHMARKS
Nathan Buckley (Collingwood),
Nigel Lappin (Brisbane Lions)

Scales

5 Rare

4 Excellent

3 Good

2 Marginal

1 Poor

Descriptors

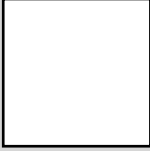
Consistently kicks with accuracy over short and long distances and under pressure. Outstanding technician with great vision and awareness. Minimum very good on non preferred side.

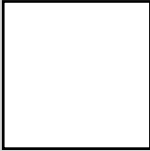
Only occasionally makes a kicking error, possibly on non preferred side or under intense opposition pressure.

Rarely misses short target and is sound over distance with both feet.

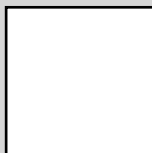
Has some flaws with technique on opposite side. At times lacks vision and awareness.

Has significant flaws and is inconsistent.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
2. MARKING ABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Jonathon Brown (Brisbane Lions), Warren Tredrea (Port Adelaide)	5 Rare	Outstanding overhead pack mark and in contests. Great low to ground and out in front. One grab player.
	4 Excellent	Very consistent overhead, plays in front, good one on one. One grab player.
	3 Good	Clean out in front and competitive overhead.
	2 Marginal	Marginal Occasionally misses uncontested marks. Often two grabs or allows ball to fall behind.
	1 Poor	Tendency to drop the head and fumbles regularly.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
3. HANDPASSING  AFL BENCHMARKS Simon Black (Brisbane Lions), Scott West (Western Bulldogs)	5 Rare	Outstanding peripheral vision, depth perception and skills on both sides, executing with speed and accuracy. Always chooses right option putting receiver into better position.
	4 Excellent	Quick and accurate on both sides and excellent decision maker.
	3 Good	Good technician and rarely makes fundamental errors.
	2 Marginal	Sound skills on both sides but sometimes chooses wrong option.
	1 Poor	Technique problems on either hand and/or makes poor decisions.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
4. CLEAN HANDS  AFL BENCHMARKS Andrew McLeod (Adelaide), Luke Power (Brisbane Lions)	5 Rare	Soft hands, doesn't fumble quickly moving ball into disposal position. Collects difficult balls off hands, in air and ground level, first grab in all conditions.
	4 Excellent	Sometimes double handles difficult balls in some situations or conditions but is always in control.
	3 Good	Occasionally fumbles balls but generally in control and maintains ball in front.
	2 Marginal	May struggle at times below the knees and allows ball to get out of control. Tends to overrun the ball.
	1 Poor	Struggles regularly in key areas collecting the ball clearly including overrunning and fumbling.

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
5. BALL WINNING ABILITY


AFL BENCHMARKS
James Hird (Essendon),
Matthew Pavlich (Fremantle)

5 Rare

Reads play consistently well and wins crucial contests and/or positions himself to win uncontested possession. Great courage in attack on ball

4 Excellent

Wins vast majority of contests and has courage in attack on the ball. Smart reader of the play.

3 Good

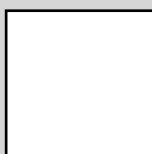
Wins the ball well in contests in most circumstances.

2 Marginal

Relies too much on running to receive and reading off hands - not strong on contested balls.

1 Poor

Fails to consistently display any of the ball winning ability attributes. Lacks presence.

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
6. PACE


AFL BENCHMARKS
Jason Akermanis (Brisbane Lions), Chris Judd (West Coast Eagles)

5 Rare

Sub 2.90sec for 20m with outstanding reaction to play which maximises his pace.

4 Excellent

Sub 2.95sec for 20m and reacts quicker than opponents.

3 Good

Sub 3.00sec for 20m.

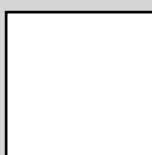
2 Marginal

Over 3.01sec for 20m. Pace and reaction time questionable.

1 Poor

Over 3.15 sec for 20m.

*Note: Adjustment of times applies depending on size of player

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
7. ENDURANCE


AFL BENCHMARKS
Shane Crawford (Hawthorn),
Ben Cousins (West Coast Eagles)

5 Rare

Beep test of 16 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 14.5 plus.

4 Excellent

Beep test of 15 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 13.5 plus.

3 Good

Beep test of 13.5 plus. Except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines 12.5 plus. Not been officially tested but regarded as very good.

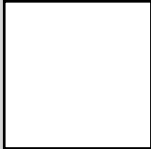
2 Marginal

Beep test of 12 plus except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines, 11 plus. Not been officially tested but regarded as okay.

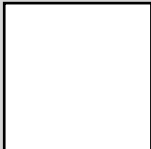
1 Poor

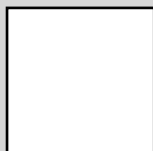
Beep test of below 12, except ruckman, tall FF, FB lines - below 11. Not been tested but doesn't appear to have good endurance.

*Note: Adjustment of times applies depending on size of player

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
8. RECOVERY & AGILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Matthew Scarlett (Geelong), Chris Johnson (Brisbane Lions)	5 Rare	Outstanding physical ability to accelerate, change direction and recover. Great balance and co-ordination.
	4 Excellent	Has excellent agility and change of direction. Is well balanced and able to get back into contest.
	3 Good	Good physical ability and recovery which enables player to keep feet.
	2 Marginal	Can change direction but does not have evasive ability or balance to handle tight situations. Often falls over.
	1 Poor	Only moves in straight line and unable to react when change of direction required. Loses feet.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
9. DURABILITY  AFL BENCHMARKS Jared Crouch (Sydney Swans), Adam Simpson (Kangaroos)	5 Rare	Never misses a game or training session and continues running and performing. Rarely suffers any injury.
	4 Excellent	Only occasionally misses any training or match through injury. Recovers quickly from soft tissue injuries and is extremely diligent in managing his recovery.
	3 Good	Recovers quickly from injuries and works well on his recovery. Misses less than 4 games per year over the last couple of seasons. Only misses through severe bone/ligament injury.
	2 Marginal	Has had a few soft tissue injuries missing training/matches. Style of play/body type can lead to injuries.
	1 Poor	Had consistent run of injuries missing matches and training including pre-season. Rarely strings games together.

Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
10. LEADERSHIP & SELF DISCIPLINE  AFL BENCHMARKS James Hird (Essendon), Nathan Buckley (Collingwood)	5 Rare	Leads through example on field and on track, instills confidence in team mates. Gives positive feedback to players, role model at club and stays in control at all times.
	4 Excellent	Only occasionally below rare standard.
	3 Good	Can positively influence groups of players in club environment.
	2 Marginal	Lacks in leadership or self discipline at times.
	1 Poor	Transgresses self discipline and does not lead. Negative influence.

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
11. AGGRESSION, INTENSITY & 2ND EFFORTS


AFL BENCHMARKS
Glen Archer (Kangaroos),
Mark Rucciuto (Adelaide)

5 Rare

Enjoys physical contact, bumps, tackles, & intimidates opposition. Bounces back after being dumped. Fearless in attack on ball and opponent at all times. 2nd efforts and recovery outstanding.

4 Excellent

Great attack on ball and strong on opposition when they are in position. Makes 2nd efforts.

3 Good

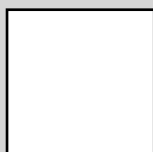
No weaknesses in level of aggression/intensity or 2nd efforts.

2 Marginal

Occasionally takes eye off ball or allows opponent to push past. 2nd efforts missing at times. Assesses risks when approaching contest.

1 Poor

Inconsistent in attack on the ball and 2nd efforts.

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
12. FOOTBALL CHARACTER


AFL BENCHMARKS
Shane Crawford (Hawthorn),
Matthew Lloyd (Essendon)

5 Rare

Has outstanding work ethic and is extremely coachable with a genuine love of the game. Plays at best against the best opposition. Great desire to improve.

4 Excellent

Plays and trains at a high level of mental and physical intensity. Enjoys training & club environment.

3 Good

Prepares well and desires to improve, never missing training.

2 Marginal

Works hard in games but could improve on the track. Might only do what has to do.

1 Poor

Has natural ability but does not prepare on the track which reflects in match work ethic.

Key Performance Areas
Scales
Descriptors
13. COMPETITIVENESS


AFL BENCHMARKS
Barry Hall (Sydney),
Aaron Hamill (St Kilda)

5 Rare

Fiercely competitive in every aspect on and off the field. Does not accept anything but victory in any competition. Hard, aggressive and spirited. Shows true grit if initially beaten.

4 Excellent

Fiercely competitive. Doesn't accept being beaten in any contest and always remains competitive.

3 Good

No weaknesses in the competitive area.

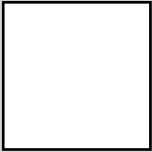
2 Marginal

Occasionally reduces level when confidence is down.

1 Poor

Not very competitive by nature.



Key Performance Areas	Scales	Descriptors
14. FOOTBALL SMARTS  AFL BENCHMARKS Brent Harvey (Kangaroos), Paul Hasleby (Fremantle)	5 Rare 4 Excellent 3 Good 2 Marginal 1 Poor	Outstanding decision-maker. Always chooses right option with or without the ball and when competing, eg. when to spoil/mark. Outstanding at the 1%ers. Has great understanding of the game. Excellent decision maker with or without the ball. Understands the game and normally chooses correct option. Occasionally makes decision making errors. Not a smart player.

EVALUATION OF YOUTH PLAYERS

Evaluating player performance is perhaps the most difficult part of the coach's job. Yet it is one part that the coach must do frequently, with accuracy, and with fairness. The rating process used by the AFL clubs can also be applied by coaches at other levels to evaluate their players and design better individual coaching programs and practices. In doing so there are a few important things which can introduce bias into the system which coaches should watch out for.

COACHES' EVALUATION GUIDE

Evaluation/rating errors occur in a systematic manner when a coach observes and evaluates a player or recruit. Correction of these errors is difficult because coaches are usually unaware they are making them and even when aware of errors, they are often unable to correct them themselves. The result is that a player may be inappropriately selected to join the team, be given a scholarship, to start a game, etc. The most common rating errors that coaches make and suggestions for controlling them are outlined below. If these suggestions are followed coaches should be able to provide more consistent, and in the long run, more accurate evaluations of their players.

COMMON ERRORS IN RATING PLAYERS

Contrast Effects

The contrast effects error is the tendency for a coach to evaluate a player relative to other players rather than on the requirements of the playing position. Similarly, players should be rated on the degree to which they fulfil pre-determined playing position requirements, not on how they compare with others.

Contrast effects occur most frequently when a coach talks with or observes one or more highly qualified players for a certain position. The coach then interviews one who is only average. This can also occur when a coach talks with or observes one or more very unqualified players followed by a look at an average player. In the first case, the average player may be rejected only for looking bad compared to the two previous ones. The player may very well have done a good job for the team. The rejection may come back to haunt the coach as the player may go on to perform well for an opposing team. Conversely, in the second example, the average player may get a higher evaluation and be added to a team list simply due to the favourable comparison to much weaker players.

Controlling Contrast Effects Errors

1. Evaluate a large number of players at the same time; the error is more frequent when only a few players are observed or evaluated.
2. Base performance evaluations on specific “predetermined” job requirements for the position (ensure you have a valid position description)
3. Do not rate players in any particular order (i.e. don’t rate the best of the worst players first).
4. Rate players on the extent to which they fulfill the requirements of the position; compare players for the same position after, rather than before, an evaluation.

First Impression

First impression error refers to the tendency for a coach to make an initial favourable or unfavourable judgement about a player, and then ignore (or distort) subsequent information, so as to support the initial impression. For example, the first game of the season the new half back flanker did an outstanding job, marking strongly and setting up numerous forward moves. For the next three games the half back flanker performed at best average. The coach committed first impression error by continuing to give the half back flanker a high evaluation despite the fact that once the half back flanker knew that he/she would start in the side, the player decided to coast in on-field performance. Conversely, another half back flanker recruit initially experienced difficulties in performance for a number of personal reasons (eg. bad family relationships, academic problems, etc). After three weeks of practice, the player was doing extremely well, but the coach continued to assign mediocre ratings. The unfortunate result was that the first half back flanker continued to start, even though not giving his/her best to the team, while the second player was assigned to the bench.

Controlling First Impression Errors

1. Reserve all judgements about a player until the end of the observation period.
2. Be a note taker rather than an evaluator during the interval between making recruiting or starting line-up decisions. Ideally, coaches should record daily a player’s behaviour that they observed which may lead to a starting line-up decision. The incidents should be reviewed later by the coach when it is time to make that final decision. Read the incidents in an order other than the recorded sequence. For example, first read the incidents that occurred midweek during preparation for Saturday’s game, then read those that occurred toward the beginning of the week during practice.

Halo Effect

The halo effect refers to an inappropriate generalisation from one aspect of a player’s performance to all aspects of playing ability. For example, a centre half forward who is outstanding on only one area (eg. kicking for goal) may be rated inaccurately as outstanding in all areas of tall forward performance (eg. physical size and strength, movement, team attitude, football knowledge, etc). Conversely, if a centre half forward is rated as deficient in one area, that player may be rated incorrectly as doing poorly on all aspects of centre half forward ability. Players have both strengths and weaknesses and each need to be evaluated independently.

Controlling Halo Effect Errors

1. Do not listen to comments about a player until you have made your own evaluation.
2. If a player is to be evaluated by several coaches, each must assign their rating or make their evaluations independently. Group discussion about the player should come after everyone has had an opportunity to observe and evaluate the player. The discussion should not take place before some sort of evaluation, such as ratings, has been completed.
3. Rate the player solely on areas that are linked to playing performance. Recognise that different areas of playing performance are not always related.



Similar To Me Effect

This error is a tendency on the part of the coach to judge more favourably those players whom they perceive as similar to themselves. That is, the more closely the player resembles the coach in terms of attitudes, background (eg. school attended, previous coach, etc), the stronger the tendency of the coach to judge that player favourably. We tend to like them because it is flattering and reinforcing. This effect may be acceptable in social situations, but is an error when making appraisals about playing ability.

Controlling Similar To Me Effect Errors

1. Establish the standards of performance expected for each position before evaluating players.
2. Make certain that all standards which will be used to evaluate players are indeed related to playing performance.
3. Rate players solely in relation to the position requirements, not in terms of how similar they are to oneself.
4. Have players evaluated by several coaches with different backgrounds and attitudes.

Central Tendency

Central tendency error is committed by the coach who wants to play it safe. This error refers to coaches who consistently rate a player or recruit as average when their performance clearly warrants a substantially higher or lower rating. If the coach rates the player as average and the player subsequently performs extremely well, the coach can say, "See I told you that player wasn't bad". On the other hand, if the player does poorly, the coach can say "What did you expect? I told you that player wasn't all that good".

Negative and Positive Leniency

Negative and positive leniency errors are committed by the coach who is either too hard or too easy in rating players. In the performance appraisal process, positive leniency may raise unwarranted expectations of a player for a starting position. With negative leniency or toughness, the player may get tired of constantly having a go, because no matter how hard the player tries, the coach cannot be satisfied. In both cases, the result can be the same, the players stop putting in their best effort. It is interesting to note that players generally do not like coaches who are too lenient in their evaluations. In the latter case it is de-motivating to see a player who is lazy and unskilled get the same high evaluation, or perhaps start a game, as a player who is a hard worker and good performer.

Controlling Central Tendency & Positive and Negative Leniency Errors

1. Record observations of exactly what is observed in practice or on match videos. Compare these observations with the standards set for being a good performer in a certain position.
2. For most players, there will be good and poor areas of performance. Take notice when a player receives similar ratings across all areas (halo effect) and all of the evaluations are extreme at either end, or middle of the road. There should be a range of ratings on different areas for each player.