

# Australian Football



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## About the Tutorial

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Australian Football is one of the most popular sports in Australia. In this sport, the players have to handle the ball through kicking, handballing, and running with the ball. The sport also demands speed, agility and physical toughness.

This tutorial will help you learn the basics of Australian Football including its rules and playing techniques.

## Audience

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This tutorial is meant for anyone who wants to play Australian Football. It is prepared keeping in mind that the reader is unaware about the basics of the sport. It is a basic guide to help a beginner understand this sport.

## Prerequisites

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Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are required to have a passion for Australian Football and an eagerness to acquire knowledge on the same.

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## Table of Contents

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About the Tutorial .....	1
Audience.....	1
Prerequisites.....	1
Copyright & Disclaimer .....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
<b>1. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – PLAYING ENVIRONMENT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – HOW TO PLAY?.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – PLAYERS &amp; POSITIONS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – HANDBALLING &amp; KICKING .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – KICKING STYLES.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – SCORING.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8. AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL – CHAMPIONSHIPS .....</b>	<b>16</b>

# 1. Australian Football – Overview

Australian Rules Football (also known as Australian Football or Aussie Rules) is a physical contact sport. It is a kind of football and has similarities to Rugby, American Football and Gaelic Football. It is one of the modern forms of football where players have to move throughout the field and they can use any part of their body to move the ball.

In this sport, two teams, each consisting of 18 players, position themselves anywhere on the field, try to handle the ball through different methods such as kicking, handballing, running with the ball and passing it through the posts, which is termed as a **goal**. In this sport, a team has to score more goals in comparison to the opponent to win the match.

## Australian Football vs. Rugby vs. American Football

Though Australian Football, American Football, and Rugby seem to be same, there are a lot of difference among them. The rules that differentiate these three similar games are as follows:

- In Australian Football, the field is oval shaped, but in Rugby and American Football, the field is rectangular.
- In Rugby, the number of players in a team is 15 whereas there are eleven players in American Football and 18 players in Australian Football.
- The number of substitutes in Australian Football is three, in Rugby 7, and in American Football, it is unlimited.
- American Football is primarily played in the USA, Australian Football in Australia, and Rugby is played worldwide.
- The American Football has the duration of one hour divided into four quarters of fifteen minutes each. In Rugby, the duration is of 80 minutes divided in two halves of 40 minutes each. In Australian Football, the duration is 80 minutes divided into four quarters of 20 minutes each.

The ball used in all the three sports is oval shaped. The ball used in Australian Football is similar to rugby but slightly smaller and more rounded at its ends as compared to rugby balls.

The ball is 720-730 millimetres in circumference and 545-555 millimetres in transverse circumference. In the Australian Football League, the balls are coloured red in day matches and yellow during night matches.



## A Brief History of Australian Football

The origin of Australian Football is still obscure. In 1857, Tom Willis, one of the founders of Australian Football, suggested for this winter sport with a set of new rules in order to keep cricketers fit. On August 7, 1858, Melbourne Football Club was formed. Slowly the sport blossomed and in 1866, an updated set of rules were put in place and competitions started among clubs.

In 1896, Victorian Football League was established and sport was played between different clubs which were Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne, St Kilda and South Melbourne. By 1997, the competition comprised of 16 clubs with the league renamed as Australian Football League.

### **Participating Countries**

Not just in Australia, the sport is also played in other countries too. The Australian Football League has official agreement with 13 other government bodies of different countries and presently at least 20 leagues exist outside Australia. The number of players outside Australia is growing day by day.

## 2. Australian Football – Playing Environment

### Australian Football – Field

The venue ground is typically oval shaped with grass surface. The dimensions of the field are typically 135 to 185 metres long between goal post to goal post and 110 to 155 metres wide between wings. Grounds may vary from being long and narrow to almost circular depending upon where it is constructed. Two goal posts are there at each end of the ground.

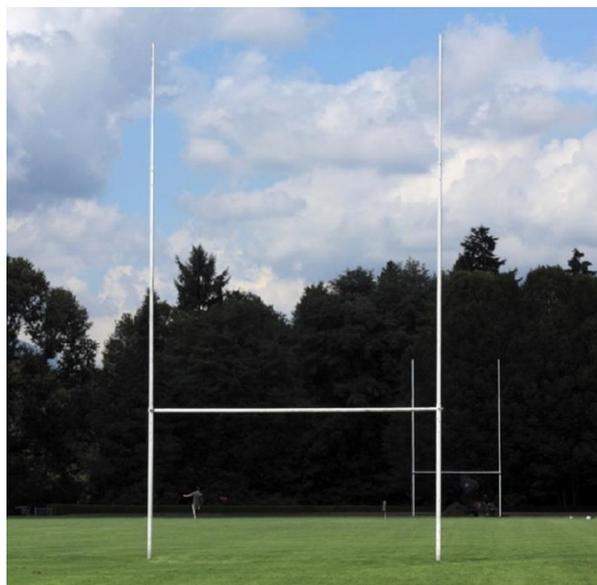
### Ground Markings

Different markings are there on the playing ground which are as follows:

- Two goal lines, one at each end are straight and 19.2m (21 yards) long.
- Two boundary lines, which are curved around the field edge and connect the goal lines.
- Two goal squares, each 6.4m×9m (7yd×10yd) surrounding the goal lines.
- The centre square, which is 50×50 m and is in the centre of the ground.
- Two concentric centre circles of 3m and 10m diameter with a line bisecting them from the wing-wing side.
- Two 50m circular arc lines drawn at each end between boundary lines at a distance of 50m from the centre goal line.

### Goal Posts in Australian Football

There are four goal posts at each end out of which two are tall posts and two are short. The short posts are placed behind the taller posts. If the ball is reaches the taller posts then six points are scored whereas in case of short posts, one point is scored.



# 3. Australian Football – How to Play?

## Starting the Match

The match is started by the umpires and toss is conducted which decides which team will start the match. At first, the umpire bounces the ball in the ground and on its way down, two players (usually two tallest players) from each team battle for getting hold of the ball, which is known as **ball-up**. If the ball ever goes out of the field boundary lines, a **boundary umpire** will stand with his back towards the infield and has to back toss the ball into the field which is known as **throw in**.

## Moving the Ball

The ball can be moved in any direction in the ground through footballing (kicking) or handballing with clenched fist but can't be thrown at any condition. Once the player has the ball, he needs to dispose it by either kicking or handballing it. Using any other methods for disposal is illegal and the opponent gets a free kick. If the ball is not in the possession of any player, it can be moved by any part of the body.

A player can also run with the ball, but it must be bounced or touched on the ground in every 15 metres (16 yards). Opposition may try to tackle the player to get the ball. Once tackled, the player has to dispose the ball in order to avoid the risk of being penalised for holding the ball for long period. The player with the ball must be tackled between the shoulders and knees, failing which provides **the team with the ball** a free kick. If the opposition player contacts the player forcefully in the back, he will be penalised for a **push in the back**.

## Marking

If a player takes the possession of the ball which has travelled more than 15 metres (16 yards) in air from another player's kick by catching it, it is claimed as a **mark**. When a mark happens, the match stops and the player prepares to kick the ball from the point where he marked. At this point of time, he can't be tackled. He may also choose to play normally instead of kicking after marking. Once the player starts to play again, normal match starts again and the player who took the mark can be tackled.

The criterion of a successful mark is that the player must have complete control over the ball at any point of time. If two people simultaneously mark the ball, then the mark is awarded to the player in front, i.e. the player standing in front position for marking. If it can't be determined who is on the front, then ball-up will result.



## Match Duration

A match has four quarters, whose durations are set by the time keeper officials. At professional level, each quarter is of 20 minutes. With the clock being stopped for instants like goal score, ball out of play etc. Umpire also signals for time-off, when a player is tackled to the ground and resumes once umpire again signals for time on.

The team change happens at the end of one quarter while the umpire change happens at the end of half time. There is a six-minute break between first and second quarter and third and fourth quarter. There is twenty minutes break between second and third quarter.

# 4. Australian Football – Players & Positions

A team consists of 18 players, whereas three substitute players are allowed on the bench. Free substitution is allowed at any time during a match through a designated interchange gate in front of either bench. In the arena, players are deployed in five lines, each line consisting of three players and based on their position, they are designated as left, right or center relative to the direction of attack.

The players based on their positions are as follows:

- **Full Forwards** – Left Forward Pocket (Left), Full Forward (Center), Right Forward Pocket (Right)
- **Half Forwards** – Left Half Forward (Left), Center Half Forward (Center), Right Half Forward (Right)
- **Center Line** – Left wing(Left), Center(Center), Right Wing (Right)
- **Half Backs** – Left Half Back(Left), Center Half Back(Center), Right Half Back(Right)
- **Full Backs** – Left Back Pocket(Left), Full Back(Center), Right Back Pocket(Right).

The players, who follow the ball, are known as followers. They are named as **Ruckman**, **Rover**, and **Ruck-rover**. Although players are designated based on their positions, they can move anywhere when the match is in progress. Unlike football, there is no goal keeper in Australian Football.

The Ruckman's job is to contest for the ball with a fellow Ruckman opposing him at center-bounces at the beginning of a match. Usually players with good heights are chosen as Ruckman. The Ruck rover's job is to handle the ball once it is tapped down by the Ruckman allowing an easy clearance. The Rover's job is to lurk around center-bounces and receive the ball from the Ruck rover and complete a clearance.

## Player Positions and their Purpose

- Full forwards are there to attack the goal and trap the ball in that area.
- Half forwards are there to set up scoring shots, attack the goal as well as trap the ball in that area.
- Center line players recover ball from back line as well as set up scoring shots.
- Half back is there to recover ball from the back line and clear ball forwards.
- Full back is there to hold the ball in that area and clear ball forwards.

## Interchange Protocol

In front of the interchange gate, there is an interchange area through which all players must enter and exit the ground. A player who interchanges outside this line is not permitted to return for the rest of the match. If a player leaves on stretcher from the ground, he can return back later to the match, but he has to wait for at least 20 minutes before getting back to the match.

If a player is believed to be suffering concussion, he must come off the ground and appear for concussion test, failing which he won't be allowed to return to the match. If a player is seen bleeding by umpire, he may be forced to leave the field immediately according to **Blood Rule**.

### **Umpires in Australian Football**

There are three central or field umpires, who have full control over the match. Major roles of the umpires are to start the match, award marks and free kicks to teams and enforcing the rules of the sport. The two boundary umpires judge when the ball is out of the boundary area. They also return the ball to the center once a goal is scored. The boundary umpires are responsible for detecting players who have entered the centre square illegally.

Two goal umpires record, signal as well as judge goals that are scored in the match. Two flags are waved to indicate a goal and a single flag is waved to indicate a behind. Before goal umpire indicates the score, the field umpire signals him about no infringement on the field so that the respective score can be added.

Field umpires can't change a decision once made except a further breach of rules by a player or team officials. Goal umpires can correct mistakes prior to the restart of a match. Goal umpires can take precedence over boundary umpires over the vicinity of a goal area. Goal umpires signals this to field umpires by tapping his hand on his chest.

# 5. Australian Football – Handballing & Kicking

## Handballing

It is the method of disposing the ball by hand and is one of the frequently used alternatives of kicking. In this case, a player holds the ball in one hand and punches the ball away with a clenched fist of the other hand. In kicking, catching a ball after 15 metres is considered as marking whereas in case of handballing, after catching a ball, a player again disposes of the ball without interrupting the match.

Failing to execute the handball correctly results in a free kick to the nearest opposition player. Cases which results in free kick are:

- Moving the hand, in which the player is holding the ball, excessively in the direction of the handpass.
- Using open hand instead of clenched fist to punch away the ball.
- Throwing off the ball from the carrying hand before punching it away
- Ball handling directly to a teammate.

## Kicking

Kicking is the process of striking the ball with a foot. In case of Australian football kicking is the primary method of transferring the ball. Different kicking styles are used in Australian football based on the situation and position of the goal posts or player on the marking point.

Different styles of kicking are there in the sport based on how the ball is held in hand. The most common style of kicking in modern sports is **drop punt**. Other frequently used kicking styles are **torpedo punt**, **checkside punt**, etc. We will discuss the different kicking styles in detail in the next chapter.

## 6. Australian Football – Kicking Styles

### Drop Punt

The Drop Punt is one of the most common styles of kicking in Australian football because of its perfect accuracy. In this way of kicking, the ball is dropped from the hands down almost to the ground, to be kicked so that it will rotate in a backward end over end spinning motion while travelling through the air. It is mostly used when the player is too far from the goal posts.



### Torpedo Punt

The torpedo punt is the longest type of punt kick. Here the ball is held at an angle in which it can spin through its long axis. This makes the ball cover the extra distance. It makes it difficult for the opponent team to catch the ball. If kicked correctly, it can travel up to 80 metres distance.

### Checkside Punt

It is also known as the banana punt. The checkside punt when kicked, bends away from the body towards the direction respective to the foot used. Here mostly the outside boot

is used to curve the ball towards the target which is on an angle. The ball is held at an angle before kicking in order to experience the check side.

## Free Kicks

In Australian football, a free kick is a kind of penalty awarded by the field umpire to the opponent player if a player has broken a rule or infringed with opponent players. When a free kick is signalled, the player stands on that spot where umpire signals for free kick and retreats backward in order to kick the ball over the player standing the mark.

There are no restrictions for the player to kick the ball during free kick. He can also hand the ball to another player while running around the mark till the kick has been done. Deliberate interference while marking, physical contacts and slowing the pace by tackling are discouraged with free kicks. Sometimes players can avoid the whistle that indicates free kick, if the play is continuous.



Until the player has taken the free kick, according to the laws of the sport, no player is allowed to be within five metres surrounding the player, who is taking the free kick. If a player from the attacking team is there, umpire will blow the off until he leaves the zone. If a player from the opposition is within the zone, 50-metre penalty is applied where the original position of free kick is moved to 50 metre closer to goal-line.

There are different cases when a free kick is given:

- When the player is tackled and can't dispose of the ball legally even after having prior opportunities to do so.
- When the player is running more than 15 metres without bouncing the ball or touching it on the ground or disposing it.

- While tackling a player above shoulders or below knees or tackling someone who doesn't have the ball.
- When pushing a player on the back mostly during marking.
- Attempting to spoil a mark by pulling away opponent player's arm.
- When the ball is thrown or incorrectly disposed of, rather than handballed.
- Bumping a player during marking without any intentions for contesting for the ball.
- Kicking an opponent or fellow player in a dangerous manner causing injury.
- Entering the arena without following interchange protocols.
- When a player other than the midfielders enters the centre square before centre bounce.
- When ball is kicked and travels over the boundary line without touching anyone.
- Paid against a runner, trainer or trained official who is obstructing the match as a part of his on-ground duties.

If a rule infringement occurs against a player after he has disposed the ball but no one else has received it, umpire signals for a downfield free kick. It is awarded at the spot, where the kick or handpass of the infringed player lands to the nearest player.

# 7. Australian Football – Scoring

When the ball passes through the goalposts, a goal worth six points is scored. The ball can fly through the goal post at any height including above the height of the posts by way of the attacking team's kick. The ball may also pass the goal posts without touching the ground or it may bounce through.

A goal can't be scored from the foot of the opposition team's player. Once a goal is scored, the match again resumes with centre bounce, as it was started at the beginning.

A **behind** is scored in the following cases:

- When the ball passes between a goal post and a behind post at any height
- It hits any of the goal posts.
- A player sends the ball through the goal posts by touching it with any part of the body other than a foot
- If the ball touches any part of the defending player's body, including foot, before passing through the goal posts.



When a player deliberately scores a behind in order to avoid risks of scoring a goal, it is called as **rushed behind**. From 2009, a new rule was announced awarding a free kick against the player who scores a behind deliberately. The team with maximum score wins the match. If scores are same at the end of the match, it's declared a draw. Extra times are included in case of draws in final matches.

One thing which is little confusing to new learners about the sport is the score. The score of a team typically looks like 15.12.102(A.B.C). Here 15(A) is the number of goal scored by the team, whereas 12(B) is the number of behinds scored. Finally, 102(C) is the total score or the calculated score of the team which is a sum of 15 goals that is  $15 \times 6$  and 12 behinds that is  $12 \times 1$ .

# 8. Australian Football – Championships

The Australian Sports commission's statistics shows that between 2001 and 2010, the popularity of this sport has increased by 64%. Not just in Australia, the interest in this sport is increasing day by day across the globe.

## Australian Football League

The Australian Football League is the highest level professional competition of Australian Football. It is also the governing body of Australian Football through AFL commission and is also responsible for controlling the rules of the sport. Initially the league was founded as Victorian Football League (VFL) as a break away from Victorian Football Association (VFA).



Australian Football International Cup is an international sports competition in Australian Rules Football and is been co-ordinated by Australian Football League's game developing arm and which organizes the competitions every three years since 2002. It is the largest Australian Rules football competition around the world and is open to worldwide senior competition.

## Barassi Youth Tournament

The Barassi Youth Tournament is an International Australian Football tournament for youths who are not older than 16 years. Similar to the Australian Football International Cup, this tournament is important in developing Australian Football internationally for junior players to compete and share a cultural experience. It is held in every 2-3 years in Canberra, the national capital of Australia.

The Australian Football League currently consists of 18 teams which are spread all over five states of Australia. All matches are played in Australia and in some places of New Zealand. Every year AFL grand finale is held at Melbourne Cricket Ground. The winner team in the grand finale is termed as **premiers** and is awarded the **premier cup**.